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Rethinking the *Mahabharata*: A Study of Pratibha Ray's *Yainaseni* as a Feminist Foundational Text

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Abstract:

The *Mahabharata* has been translated into all major Indian languages including tribal languages and also into various other art forms like dance and painting. Raja Ravi Varma, India's brilliant painter, has used the epic as source material for a lot of his paintings. Also, there have been animated films and other graphic adaptations (like *Amar Chitra Katha*). Shyam Benegal's *Kalyug* was a transcreation of the *Mahabharata* which tells the story of a feud between cousins over a family inheritance, and the characters are thinly disguised modern versions of the epic characters. Therefore, the present paper tries to unfold Pratibha Ray's *Yainaseni*, another adaptation of the epic *Mahabharata*, a "feminist foundational fiction" as it re-orders, and re-narrates the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa through the voice of the female protagonist of the epic.

Keywords: adaptations, feminist foundational fiction, art, paintings, dance, epic.

Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, in their anthology on women's writing in India, while elucidating the similarities between the creation of a nation and fictional texts remarks that "nations, like traditions and works of art, are made—built, created, imagined"(52). Political independence from colonial rule and the execution and implementation of a constitution does not make a nation, likewise the mere writing and publication of a text by an author does not hold same meaning for all time to come. Every generation writes its own new history. Therefore every nation is a text that is constantly being rewritten or recreated and contributes to the never-ending process of nation-making. The concept of a "foundational fiction" comes into relevance:

> Cultural theorists have in fact suggested that the realist novel and film, both forms that emerged historically alongside the nation in India, as they did in Europe, developed the imaginative languages...in which the nation ...was shaped. In fact, the "foundational fictions" of the nation can be regarded as preparing the ground for national projects that would be considered political in the more conventional sense. Mukesh Srivastava points out that Jawaharlal Nehru's Discovery of India, perhaps the best known of the "foundational fictions" of the Indian nation, devises an unprecedented composite genre to write the story of India. History jostles with autobiography and social analysis in a narrative mode that draws on classic realism, but rewrites the imperialist logic of that form to create a legitimate space for the nation. (51)

But Jawahar Lal Nehru's *Discovery of India*, it is the paradoxically pre-modern yet post-modern epic *Mahabharata* which deserves to qualify as the foremost foundational fiction of India. The epic has suffused all aspects of Indian life as it has been sung, recited and retold in various genres and ways "poets have told it before, poets are telling it now, other poets shall tell this history on earth in the future" (Ganguli 6). It has been translated into all major Indian languages including tribal languages. Moreover, there have been translations into languages like English, Russian and French. The epic has been translated into various other art forms like dance and painting. Raja Ravi Varma, India's brilliant painter, has used the epic as source material for a lot of his paintings. The portrait of Sakuntala who pretends to have a thorn in her foot as an excuse to take a backward look at Dushyanta is one of the most famous ones. B. R. Chopra's television serial based on the epic was immensely popular. There have been animated films and other graphic adaptations (like *Amar Chitra Katha*). Shyam Benegal's *Kalyug* was a transcreation of the *Mahabharata* which tells the story of a feud between cousins over a family inheritance, and the characters are thinly disguised modern versions of the epic characters.

Pratibha Ray's *Yainaseni* is another adaptation of the epic *Mahabharata* that writes Draupadi into history in her own voice. *Yainaseni* qualifies as a "feminist foundational fiction" as it re-orders, and re-narrates the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa by the female protagonist of the epic. However, Yainaseni as a feminist foundational text is not free from contradictions. Negotiating the difficult terrain between myths of Indian womanhood and reality of her evolving fictional representation, the text struggles to give form to a new incarnation of Draupadi. The novel is a letter addressed by Draupadi to her sakha, Krishna that acts as a catharsis by pouring out the tale of her trials and sufferings to Krishna and also wishes to lay open before future generation the book of her life so that she might be understood on her own terms, and be judged only after being understood. In her own words:

> ...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 any woman of any time. God forbid that in future anyone should suffer such abuse.
>
> ....Time is passing away. My body is lacerated, my heart is shattered. Blood is dripping from my heart and it is in this blood that my story is drenched. At the time of death, whatever a man says or does is beyond his control. May the accumulated agony of so many years gush out as a libation at your feet. Let the world see. (4-5)

In her view the story of her life "is nothing other than the life-story of any human being on (sic) this mortal world." Despite the reminder of her mortal status, she feels herself singled out for having suffered more than "any woman of any time" (4). Ray's Draupadi is a woman who burns with a sense of having been silenced, suppressed, pre-owned, and abused. Despite the supreme sacrifices and suffering she had to endure, it is unfair that the road to heaven was blocked to her, that despite her chastity and devotion to her husbands she should be labelled as Kritya by future generation on account of her polyandrous marriage.

The his-story that Yajnaseni inserts her self into thereby transforming it into her-story, is not history conceived as linear time by the West but the cyclical time of Hindu cosmology. "...[This is not a letter; this is my life"(399), is how Yajnaseni describes her letter to Krishna. Considering that "life does not end in death: it begins there"(398), and as "the beginning is really the end" (399), she writes "'Finis'" (1) at the start and "'The Beginning"' (399) at the end of her narrative, implying that her letter is one incomplete story in the

recurring cycle of stories embedded in the dance of time. The ways in which *Yajnaseni* differs from the *Mahabharata* of Vyasa brings out the feminist intent of its narrator and makes her 'speak' over and above her fulminations against patriarchy. Ray's Draupadi usurps the role of God-like Vyasa as narrator and Ganesha as divine scribe, thereby performing the supremely subversive act of questioning the sacral authority of both man and God.

Notwithstanding Pratibha Ray's attempt to create a feminist foundational text in *Yainasen*i, the text nevertheless revolves around the pivot of ambivalence bordering on contradiction, both in relation to the subjectivity of Draupadi and the narratorial out spilling of her story.

Another departure of *Yainaseni* from the epic of Vyasa is in its attitude to war. *Yainaseni* collapses the war into a few pages. This condensation seems to be aimed at doing away with the gory descriptions of war and human suffering that form the staple entertainment material of epics and help in sustaining a masculine world-view in which women are usually assigned peripheral roles. Through such a narratorial execution it announces its pacifist intention, a fact that is made abundantly clear at the end of the novel when Draupadi transforms from the spiritually fatigued woman of the epic unable to reach heaven into the patriot and visionary heroine of Yainaseni proclaiming world peace. The author's avowal in the "Afterword" reinforces the final pacifist stance of her novel's protagonist: "Only this is my wish: that in the soul of this world, sorely beset by war, that final prayer of Yajnaseni should reverberate: Om shantih! shantih! shantih! (402). Not only the war, but the Bhagavad Gita is encapsulated within a few paragraphs, perhaps, so as to keep the spotlight on Draupadi/Krishnaa rather than Krishna, despite the author's avowal in the "Afterword" that it is Krishna who is the hero of the Mahabharata Krishna might be the hero of the original *Mahabharata* but it is beyond doubt that in *Yainaseni* it is Draupadi who is the protagonist.

In the epic Draupadi is depicted as emerging from the fire, fully grown. Desirous of a son who will avenge his insult by Drona, Drupada performs a yajna to obtain such a progeny. He is blessed with a handsome youth who emerges out of the flames and is named Drishtadyumna. A prophecy announces that he shall kill Drona as desired by Drupada. There is no mention that Drupada wanted a daughter as well; but nevertheless a beautiful, tawny-hued maiden with the fragrance of blue lotus emerges from the yajna, and a voice from the heavens announces that she shall be the cause of the destruction of the kshatriyas. However, in a departure from the epic, Ray's Draupadi appropriates the purpose of her brother's birth; echoing the prophecy in her own words, she explains: At my birth there was a prophecy: "This woman has taken birth to avenge your insult. She has happened to fulfill a vow. By then dharma will be preserved on this earth, kshatriyas will be destroyed. She will be the destroyer of the Kauravas" (8).

It is because Ray's text departs from the *Mahabharata* by appropriating the purpose of her brother's birth,that Draupada confusedly remarks: "Yajnaseni! It is you who will avenge your father's insult. That is why both of you have been born of the sacrificial fire" (8). In addition to the above departure, *Yajnaseni* specifies that Draupadi is to be the destroyer of the "Kauravs", not simply the "kshatriyas". Yet another point to be noted is help that Drishtadyumna is born toavenge his father by killing Drona, and serve a purpose that emerges from the foregone action of the epic. On the other hand, the reasons cited— as per the bhavishyavani—for Draupadi's birth, both in the epic and novel, namely, the destruction of the kshatriyas, does not emerge out of the ongoing action; it is more of a justification for an event about to occur. It seems to have been provided in retrospect by the narrator of the

Mahabharata. It remains shrouded in mystery. I shall leave this matter unravelled at this point, only to take it up in the Conclusion.

The next crucial comparison between the epic and novel concerns Yajnaseni's response to the proposal of a polyandrous marriage to the five Pandavas. The subject of Draupadi's polyandrous marriage is crucial in more ways than one to *Yajnaseni*. It not only preoccupies the consciousness of Ray's Draupadi, but is viewed by Pratibha Ray as something that almost defines the character of epic Draupadi and makes her unique: "Because of the words that slipped inadvertently from the lips of the mother- in-law, princess Krishna was compelled to take five husbands. There are a few such instances in the Puranas, but in the history of the civilized world it is a gooseflesh-raising event" (400).

How does the epic Draupadi respond to the suggestion that she become the five of all the Pandava brothers? She is completely silent on the issue. She remains silent while the text gives a long description of various reactions of Kunti, Arjuna, Yudhishthira, Drupada, and Vyasa. Arjuna, who won Draupadi at the swayamvar and is therefore entitled to be her husband, leaves the matter to Yudhishthira, trustful of his knowledge of dharma. Yudhisthira is keen to honour Kunti's word. Of all gurus, mother is the highest guru, so it is the son's dharma to honour her word, he reminds everyone. In addition, he cites precedents in which women such as Jatila and Varkshi had more than one husband. Jatila, a maiden of Gautam gotra, married seven sages. And Kundumuni's daughter, Varkshi, married ten sages of the same name.4 More crucially, we are told about Yudhishthira's astute observation that all the brothers desire Draupadi, a fact that is also observed by Kunti. As if this is not enough, Vyasa arrives at this opportune moment to convince a bewildered Drupada of the absolutely dharmic nature of Draupadi's polyandrous marriage, a marriage that is not only sanctioned but also ordained by the gods themselves.

Ray's Draupadi experiences waves of tumultuous emotions that are expressed in her interior monologues. She is disgusted at Yudhishthira—for his outrageous suggestion that she marry all the brothers—as she could perceive the "secret flame of lust" in his eyes (56). She is furious at Arjuna—whom she considers as her true husband as he had won her at the swayamvara—for justifying the commands of Kunti and Yudhishthira for fear of his own dharma being destroyed (57). She views it as Kunti's ploy (66) and asks Krishna in her mind whether he knew "that these Brahmins would enact such a play for sacrificing Krishnaa in their dharma-yajna?" (60-61). Krishna arrives in the manner of deux ex machina in a Greek play to justify such a decision as consonant with the laws of dharma. Upon over-hearing a conversation in which Yudhishthira confronts Krishna on his designs for sanctioning such a marriage—rather surprising, for it is he who first suggests that Draupadi become the wife of all the brothers and subsequently attempts to persuade others to his viewpoint—we are told by Yajnaseni that "within the new bride Krishnaa, Yajnaseni, bom of the sacrificial flames, rose in revolt.

The novel differs from the epic in providing the reader a glimpse into Draupadi's inner turmoil when this decision is thrust upon her. However, for all her disgust, fury, and inner anguish, like her epic counterpart, she remains silent. Draupadi's mind takes a journey from rebellion to reconciliation at the end of which, "without protest, ...[she] accepted the commands of Yudishthira and mother Kunti." (98). The text preserves its fidelity with the Mahabharata by making Draupadi accept her polyandrous marriage, but by giving a new twist to her consent. Draupadi accepts five husbands in the spirit of a "challenge for the entire female race" (98).

Draupadi uncritically accepts 'chastity', not self-actualization, as woman's ideal. The reference point for her identity is the husband, not self. Her critique ends in the 'realization' that her earlier rebellious thinking of man and woman as equals did not solve the problem of inequality between the sexes. Differences between the two sexes now seem valid to her, especially since the moment she has reconciled herself to becoming the wife of five men:

> I was about to begin conjugal life in right earnest. Now I was feeling that calling man and woman equal for the sake of argument did not settle the issue completely. Like her body, a woman's mind, too, is different from that of a man. Therefore, from age to age society has made different rules for it. If a man takes several wives, then the wives keep trying to win his heart. He may, according to his desire, choose his favourite and be attracted more to her. But what if a woman takes many husbands? Then, taking note of the likes and dislikes of all the husbands, she has to win the hearts of all. (98)

We cannot but observe that her reconciliation to the traditional point of view is based on her comparison of polyandry and polygamy, and does not emerge out of a consideration of the dynamics of a man-woman monogamous relationship. The manner in which Yajnaseni moves from rebellion to reconciliation smacks of authorial intrusion: it is not really Draupadi's voice but the behind-the-scenes commentary of the author eager to insert a commentary on contemporary feminism. This behind-the-scenes commentary blends uneasily with the stream of consciousness narration of Yajnaseni and acts as the narratorial counterpart to the contradictory pulls between tradition and modernity that lie at the heart of Yajnaseni's character.

Terming as "abuse" the treatment that was meted out to her as wife of the Pandavas, daughter-in-law of Dhritarashtra, and by fate in general, in her long letter addressed to her sakha, Yajnaseni seeks a chance to be redeemed from the charge of wantonness (for having five husbands) in the eyes of posterity, and most significantly, to be empathized with and understood on her own terms. However, despite being a woman of learning, courage, and a quasi-feminist who feels that a lifelong war would have to be waged before all forms of inequality (93), she fails to register her protest or participate in the discussion in which a decision to have her married to five men is reached. She is a woman who postures as a feminist but refuses to protest when the decision to marry five men is thrust upon her.

Yajnaseni's attempt at a feminist critique of woman's subordination to man, or rather wife to husband, and by extension, *Yajnaseni* as a feminist rewriting of the *Mahabharata* is thus seriously ideologically fractured. The contradictory pulls of her seething emotions expressed in her lengthy inner monologues can be viewed as the emotive counterpart to the irreconcilable strands of a traditional mode of thinking and contemporary feminist ideology within the narrative of *Yainaseni*. The reason for this ideological fracture in her consciousness can be traced in Ray's text itself. From the start of the narrative, a subtext of Sita's story is woven into the consciousness of Yajnaseni:

> Chaste Sita was my ideal. After reading her life story I had become her devotee, had been immersed in her love, had wept in her sorrow. But why compare myself with her? Would I be able to live like her, silently bearing the agony, burning up within? She was a great lady, the beloved of Ram, the glory of the Raghu dynasty; and I was just Panchala princess Yajnaseni—not even knowing this little, whether I had any husband at all. Why should every incident of her life be repeated in mine? (36)

This is indeed a strange state of affairs, in which Draupadi, who is supposedly herself an archetype of the self-assertive and self-aware woman, chooses as her ideal an archetype that is her antipode: that of the submissive, accepting Sita. It is even more remarkable that Ray chose to make her literary creation, *Yajnaseni*, adopt Sita as her ideal despite her view that Draupadi and Sita represent "two poles of feminine experience":

> Sita of Ramayana and Draupadi of the Mahabharata as has been suggested, are two poles of feminine experience in the world. Sita absorbs all inflicted misery and humiliation of the male ego whereas Draupadi challenges the male ego to the epitonic limits of human excellence. Sita accepts, accommodates and withdraws. Draupadi resents, rejects and Involves herself in the process of life as a protagonist. These two feminine archetypes define the limits of feminine experience in reality, especially the Indian Reality.

Draupadi as narrator possesses the ability to expand her consciousness so as to enfold within her own tale the story of the Mahabharata but continues to view herself in relation to the husbands/men in her life. It is indeed ironical that Draupadi's motivation for undertaking the gargantuan task to rewrite the events of the Mahabharata is done partly in an effort to prove her 'chastity' before a posterity which she fears views her as wanton on account of her polyandrous marriage. What Draupadi as narrator tells the reader is, 'Listen to my story of suffering, how despite being married to five men, I was so chaste.' She does not say, 'Listen to my story of heroic endurance, the story of a woman caught as a pawn in a game in an era hostile to women.' Yajnaseni's story is thus forged in the spirit of a self-imposed agni pariksha or test by fire, one that was imposed upon her heroine, Sita. This is so as her story itself is subconsciously patterned on the story of Sita, her literary role model. It is only logical that the self-narrated story of a contemporary Draupadi fulminating against the ills of patriarchy but holding onto "chaste Sita" as her role model should be rift with contradictions when her choice of model itself is one that militates against achievement of true selfhood.

Why is Yajnaseni preoccupied with the notion of female purity on account of which she was lead to choose Sita as her ideal, and on account of which her creator Pratibha Ray was motivated to pen down an entire novel to prove Draupadi's chastity despite her polyandrous marriage? The key to understanding the preoccupation with female purity lies in looking at what happened to notions of womanhood during the nationalist period. In the nationalist movement for independence from colonial rule, one of the strategies of asserting the nationalist spirit was through a reformulated Hinduism, which soon began to be thought of as the authentic Indian tradition. This reformulated Hinduism was set up as the basis on which a national identity was to be constructed. Needless to say, gender was implicated in this redefinition of nation and national identity.

For the nationalists the surest way to proclaim their 'difference' from the rulers was to posit a notion of authentic Indian womanhood based on ideas of purity and self abstinence bolstered by the scriptures. These notions were none other than those of sati and pativrata. India was lauded as 'the land of Sita and Savitri' where self-sacrifice and devotion of a pativrata towards her husband was viewed as the model for a man's devotion towards his motherland. This 'myth of womanhood' gradually hardened into a stereotype.

The tradition of Indian womanhood was thus re-invented and became embroiled in the general reproduction of the nation state. In would be not incorrect to say that this reformulated myth of womanhood was indistinguishable from the myth of 'wifehood,' as chastity was viewed as the defining feature of both. In the light of this explanation it is easy to see why the ideal of chastity for a woman preoccupies the consciousness of Yajnaseni as

well as her creator. The new incarnation of Draupadi, by her adherence to the notion of purity in the person of chaste Sita, colludes with the forces of patriarchy. In doing so, she thereby casts a shadow over her own feminist and nationalist program of re-telling history in the interests of women's enlightenment, which is one of the reasons for which she seems to have been summoned into being by her author. Ray's Yajnaseni, therefore, marches forward into the future carrying the burden of a mythological stereotype of wifely devotion, Sita, instead of fully tapping into the subversive potential of her own epic counterpart.

Yudhishthira, in a game of dice with Shakuni, gambles away all his prized possessions. He foolishly stakes his wife Draupadi and loses her as well. At this point Duryodhana asks his servant Pratikami to fetch Draupadi from her chambers. On being briefed by Pratikami as to why she is wanted in the assembly, Draupadi retorts to Pratikami: "Go to my husband and ask him whether you first staked and lost yourself or me?" On the second visit by Pratikami she tells him that it appears destruction is at hand as dharma has been ignored. When the lustful Dushasana finally drags her into court, she puts to shame the elders Drona, Bhisma, Vidur, and Dhritarashtra by reminding them that they have transgressed the dharma of the Kurus. They have lost all their courage and therefore sit silently with averted eyes. It is at this point that Draupadi poses the question: "According to dharma, have I been won or not?" The question she poses to Pratikami has mistakenly come down in history as Draupadi's famous question of jurisprudence thrown at the Kuru assembly, whereas it is a question posed in the privacy of her chambers. The query she poses in the Kuru assembly is more concerned with ethical conduct.

However, she does ask a question relating to jurisprudence in the assembly as well. Responding to Bhisma's comment that Shakuni won the game of dice with Yudhishthira through his expertise, Draupadi wonders as to how inexpert Yudhishthira was incited into playing the same. She suspects he has been coerced and lured into staking her; consequently Yudhishthira's staking of her is open to challenge. These three questions, two relating to jurisprudence and one relating to ethics, have to be taken together. Taken together they depict a woman of discriminating intellect and courage. This is in marked contrast to silence when her polyandrous marriage to the Pandavas is suggested. But there is more to come. She reminds the Kuru assembly that they too have sons and daughters-in-law, and makes a historic statement on the ways of dharma: "That assembly bereft of elders is not an assembly, those bereft of dharma cannot be called elders, that is not dharma wherein is found no truth that is not truth which is tainted with deceit."

Only Vidur and Vikarna come to Draupadi's rescue. They cite tenets of jurisprudence in an effort to support her. Bhima expresses rage at Yudhishthira for his passivity and inability to reply to Draupadi's poser. The rest of her husbands remain apathetic to her plight. Calling her a bandhaki, prostitute, as she is the wife of five men, Kama justifies her ill treatment. When Dushasana begins to disrobe her, Draupadi calls on Krishna to save her.

Having witnessed the cowardly inertia of Yudhishthira, the feeble-sounding replies of Bhisma and the taunts of Shakuni and Kama, and finally subjected to Dushasana's attempt to divest her of her clothing, seething with rage and helplessness Yajnaseni utters a remarkable long speech, parts of which are quoted below. Draupadi likens this speech to the "vomiting out...[of] poison" (242) after which she experiences exhaustion and surrenders to Krishna. In this speech she compares her plight to that of her heroine, Sita, finds the wicked Kauravas to be meaner and pettier than the "demon Ravan" (241), and considers Yudhishthira to be no longer worthy of comparison with Rama:

> Since the beginning of time till today never has such a hellish, horrible thing nor will it ever happen till the end of eternity...To rescue Sita, an army of bears and monkeys laid down their lives. But today, in the presence of elders, in the midst of the assembly, before everyone, the hellish scene of Draupadi's indescribable outrage went on being played, yet everyone remained silent, inert!...Alas! At one time comparing Dharmaraj Yudhishthira's personality to that of Ram I used to feel immensely glorified. For protecting the honour of chaste Sita how much sorrow and pain did Ram not undergo? He bore the profound anguish of raising the question of the test by fire to prove in public her chastity. While my husband having staked me and having handed me over to others is sitting there. A mute spectator, he is watching me being insulted... [H]ere, wicked people, driven by perverted lust, are insulting the bride of the Bharat dynasty and stripping her body naked in the assembly-hall! Such a gross outrage on womanhood will never be wiped out in history. The descendants of this country will blame the Kuru king for this. This lawless, gross injustice and tyranny of the Kuru clan will demean the entire male sex for all time. It will outrage all the chaste women of the Bharat dynasty and the entire female sex on earth." For this insult there is no forgiveness, for this sin there is no expiation. (241- 242)

Yajnaseni's attempt at a feminist critique acquires shape only after this speech of hers. Yudhishthira is finally taken to task. Her other husbands, the Kaurava elders and their sons and relatives, and the "entire male sex" is castigated for its outrage against womanhood. Here Yajnaseni extends herself from a "bride of the Bharat dynasty" to a symbol of outraged womanhood itself. It is this facet of Draupadi that has had immense appeal through the ages and has been appropriated by contemporary feminists to yield multiple meanings. It all depends on what aspect of this episode is brought into focus. The focus on her being disrobed and her sense of helplessness and rage makes us view Draupadi—and woman by extension—as a victim and men as victimizers.

However, if we focus on Draupadi's rational challenge to the Kuru elders, her husband Yudhishthira, and by extension, the sex of men, Draupadi emerges as a woman of learning, intelligence and courage. This facet of Draupadi supposedly derives from one of her former births as the learned Vedavati. According to the Brahmavaivarta Purana. she is the reincarnation of the 'shadow-Sita' who was Vedavati reborn after molestation at Ravana's hands, and would become the Lakshmi of the fourteen Mahendras in Svarga, of whom five incarnated as the Pandavas. Vedavati was so named because the Vedas were supposed to be ever present on the tip of her tongue.

Epic Draupadi's question to Pratikami—whether Yudhishthira had a right to stake her after staking and losing himself—mainly relates to jurisprudence and is specific to her situation. No doubt it challenges the authority of Yudhishthira over her person, but the query is concerned mainly with the wrongness of a husband staking his wife after he had lost himself To my mind, for all its wisdom, it does not challenge the idea of woman as man's property, a cornerstone of patriarchy, although it contains the seeds for the dawning of this insight. It is only after the visit of Pratikami and prior to Dushasana's arrival that Yajnaseni's feminist critique comes through fully when she—does not say but at least—wonders: ...I was thinking: was woman merely man's movable or immovable property? Was I part of Yudhisthir's movable or immovable property, male and female slaves, horses and elephants? Being a woman did I not have right even over myself, my own soul? (235)

It is only at this point that Draupadi sounds like a twentieth or twenty first century feminist. After experiencing the insult to her womanhood, Ray's Draupadi arrives at an understanding that such a liberty with her person could be taken precisely because her body/soul were conceived as disposable objects or "property" by men, and they were conceived of as such precisely because she was a woman. Yajnaseni's insight also serves to challenge the often-quoted injunction of *Manu Smriti* enshrined by orthodox Hinduism, that a woman has no right to independence and should remain subjected to her father in childhood, her husband after her marriage, and her son in her old age.

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