CELEBRATING PETIT RECITS:

A POSTMODERINST PERSPECTIVE ON

THE REWRITING OF THE VEDIC FEMALE SELF

IN CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE INDIAN

FICTION

BY

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NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Celebrating Petit Recits: A Postmodernist Perspective on the Rewriting of the Vedic Female Self in Contemporary Anglophone Indian Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfilment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Celebrating Petit Recits: A Postmodernist Perspective on the Rewriting of the *Vedic* Female Self in Contemporary Anglophone Indian Fiction

This thesis is a postmodernist reading of the ancient Indian Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, and its three contemporary feminist rewritings based on the female character of Draupadi. It is delimited to Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1984), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008), and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*(2012). The main argument of this study is that the selected novels as petit recits subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and reclaim the *Vedic* concept of female self that underscores the strong culture of assertive female identities, and the cult of the feminine in the form of Hindu goddesses as glaring manifestations of the *nari-shakti*. Keeping the Vedic concept of feminism in view, this thesis also argues that the selected corpora of women's writings reflects on the female character of Draupadi as an abject self and articulates a feminine voice of dissent against the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by using the postmodernist strategy of rewriting. The concept of abjection and its traits have been utilized to map out the subversion and transgressive traits of Draupadi in the selected feminist rewritings. As far as the theoretical constructs of this study are concerned, this thesis takes Jean Francois Lyotard's concept of petit recits, Helene Cixous's framework of ecriture feminine, Alicia Suskin Ostriker's notion of revisionist mythmaking and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and its three traits to foreground rewriting as a postmodern literary strategy. This research is exploratory in nature therefore, the research approach followed in this thesis is qualitative, and the research method employed is textual analysis. It concludes that the selected feminist rewritings as petit recits subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* using abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy.

Key Words: postmodernism, petit recits, *Vedic*, female self, abject, ecriture feminine, revisionist mythmaking, and rewriting.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my best friend, Abdul Jabbar Basit, who has been an incessant and unwavering support throughout the project.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This study takes a postmodernist stance and brings in multifaceted postmodern theories of Jean Francois Lyotard[1], Helene Cixous[2], Alicia Suskin Ostriker[3] and Julia Kristeva[4]. The selected feminist petit recits[5] of contemporary Indian women authors defy Ved Vyasa[6]'s *Mahabharata*[7] by subverting the phallogocentric[8] metanarrative[9] deeply-rooted in the epic. Lyotard's concept of petit récit, Kristeva's idea of female abjection[10] and Cixous's framework of L'écriture feminine[11], as theoretical constructs, highlight the subversive female agency of Draupadi[12] in the selected novels. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*—as postmodern Indian fiction— reinterpret the dominant patriarchal discourse prevalent within the classical epic. These feminist rewritings of *Mahabharata* subvert the hegemonic patriarchal brahamanical[13] discourse reclaiming the *Vedic*[14] concept of female self. The Vedic concept of female self is the female subjectivity of Draupadi that has its roots in the *Vedas*. Silencing of Indian

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[1] Jean Francois Lyotard was a French philosopher whose magnum opus work is *The Postmodern Condition*.

[2] Helene Cixous is a French feminist writer who is best known for her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* where she propagates her framework of L'ecriture feminine.

[3] Alicia Suskin Ostriker is a Jewish feminist best known for her work *Stealing Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* that focuses on the concept of revisionist mythmaking.

[4] Julia Kristeva is a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst and feminist.

[5] Lyotard uses the term '***petit récit***' that translates as 'little narratives'.

[6] Ved Vyasa (व्यास) is the writer of *Mahabharata*.

[7] *Mahabharata* (महाभारतम्) is one of the two major Sanskrit epics written in Dwarpa Yuga chronicling the struggle of Kuravas and Pandavas for the throne of Hastinapur.

[8] In critical theory and deconstructionism, phallogocentricism is a neologism coined by Jacques Derrida to refer to the privileging of the masculine (phallus) in the construction of meaning.

[9] A metanarrative is a building block of a culture which shapes and defines any culture.

[10] Kristeva defines abjection as perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule or law, but turns aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them.

[11] L'écriture feminine is a term coined by Helene Cixous in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* that mean "feminine writing".

[12] Draupadi is the tragic heroine, one of the common wife of the Pandavas in the Sanskrit epic, *Mahabharata*.

[13] Brahamanical refers to the ideology that deals with religious ideas and practices.

[14] Vedic refers to one of the most sanctimonious Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*.

women and suppressing their point of view post-Vedic age have made female subjectivity look like a deformed or insufficiently developed form of male subjectivity. Women must attain subjectivity. The concept of female self reconfigures the subjectivity of Draupadi. Moreover, this thesis attempts to analyze the selected feminist rewritings focusing solely on Draupadi.

My reading of the selected Anglophone Indian fiction is informed by Jean Francois Lyotard's propagation of postmodernism as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xix) which he states in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). According to Lyotard, all religions of the world, ideologies and the scientific disciplines are, in essence, rendered as metanarratives, which go unquestioned by their followers and religiously preserved within their cultural sphere (3). A metanarrative, by definition, is a comprehensive and all-embracing narrative which gives up depth to the sub-narratives connected to it. In addition, a metanarrative is a building block, or a foundation of a culture which shapes and defines any culture. Lyotard asserts that metanarratives are narratives created by power structures that conveniently ignore the heterogeneity that marks human existence. The oldest examples of metanarratives are myths and legends. Lyotard argues that every belief system has a metanarrative: a meta-theory or meta-ideology, a story told to explain the belief system. He strongly believes that all aspects of modern society depend on these metanarratives. These narratives lead to legitimization of knowledge and tend to project one idea as the norm, thereby excluding the narratives of subaltern groups (3). The concept of metanarrative is contested by Lyotard through his theorization of postmodern condition that provides a concrete ground for petit récit, which is characterised by an increasing scepticism towards the totalising nature of the metanarratives. To be specific, Lyotardian notion of petit récit is considered as a primary lens in this study to deconstruct the cultural metanarrative of *Mahabharata*.

I investigate, at length, in this study the antithesis of metanarrative that is petit récit (little narrative). Lyotard rejects metanarratives in favour of petit recits or stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large scale universal and global concepts. Petit recits are always situational, provisional, contingent, temporary and make

no claim to universality, truth, reason and stability. He elucidates that these petit récits (localized narratives) offer legitimation for parts (Patrick 41). Petit récits validate several peripheral voices that are not a part of the mainstream, which go unheard by the metanarratives as these marginal voices contradict one totalizing voice. In addition, petit récits are 'little stories' or in fact testimonies which draw attention not to the universal but to the particular. In other words, petit récits foreground individual experiences, local events and heterodox ideas which do not fall under the ambit of the predominant metanarratives. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard empowers petit récits and refutes the authority of metanarratives. *The Postmodern Condition* paves way for dissension and celebrates differences. Lyotard through his concept of petit récits challenges homogeneity which he terms as 'totalitarian'. Unlike metanarratives, petit récits subvert the manipulation of the homogeneous stereotypical narrative rather open up new avenues for multiple interpretations. Petit récits are part of dissent and pervasive scepticism that refute the universalizing theories and all sorts of authoritarianism. Lyotard is of the view that petit récits can breakdown metanarratives by inventing creative knowledge. He defines 'petit récit' as "…a multiplicity of finite meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that, concerns metaprescriptive and is limited in space and time" (Lyotard 66). According to Lyotard, only situation-specific and locally-determined narratives could constitute legitimation that is not generalized but particular. In order to bring about a colossal change where metanarratives stand incredulous, he takes up the idea of language games to theorize plurality in any society. As this study underscores the feminist petit recits of Indian women authors, therefore, a feminist framework is required to study the selected novels. Keeping the feminist concerns of the study in view, this thesis brings in Helene Cixous's idea of L'ecriture feminine.

Helene Cixous's essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) is regarded as a manifesto of post-feminism. Her essay explores postmodernist trends in formulations of a new form of writing rendered as L'écriture feminine which is imperfectly translated as 'Feminine writing' (Waugh 335). Through L'écriture feminine, Cixous foresees the end of the patriarchal system. Cixousian framework of feminine writing asserts that women can reject the language of oppression by telling stories differently and reality would start to transform. It is described as a uniquely feminine style of writing, characterized by

disruptions in the texts; gaps, silences, puns, rhythms, and new images (Waugh 335). Her idea of feminine writing subverts phallogocentrism and offers liberating ideas about women and the practice of writing. This study particularly focuses on Cixous idea which she mentions in her essay: "I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. The woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (Cixous 875). By "write herself" Cixous means breaking away from the stereotypes of the phallogocentric society and culture. Cixous explains that when women refuse to be assimilated into the mainstream (male) ideology, they become subversives and saboteurs.

This thesis through its theoretical constructs attempts to study the phallogocentric myths of the *Mahabharata* and the repositioning of Draupadi in the contemporary feminist rewritings of the epic. Therefore, it is necessary to dig into the idea of rewriting as a postmodernist strategy. Rewriting is an act of looking at old things with a totally new perspective. It is like entering into an old text with new critical directions (Ostriker 213). Modern Indian writers have often foregrounded their literary works on the narratives of two famous Indian epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. And the practice of rewriting the epics is not a recent phenomenon in Indian literature, as one can find in the Indian literary history a number of retellings of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. For instance, *Shudra Tapasvi* (1946) by K.V. Puttappa; *Rashmirathi* (1952) by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar; *Andha Yug* (1954) by Dharamvir Bharati; *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) by Shashi Tharoor; *The Epics Retold* (1995) by R. K. Narayan; *Draupadi* (1997) by Mahasweta Devi; *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013) by Kavita Kane and *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* (2015) by Devdutt Pattanaik. For the modern Indian women writers, rewriting of patriarchal canonical texts from a female perspective is an act of survival. Rewriting helps women to search for their own identity and subvert the patriarchal perception of a woman's identity in literature. For which, women writers have the option of using the effective strategy of revisionist mythmaking as propounded by Alicia Suskin Ostriker in her book *Stealing Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (1987). Ostriker highlights revisionist mythmaking as an effective approach to evolve an alternative linguistic medium to make "corrections" to constructed "images of what women have collectively suffered" (216). Women writers can try for a

self-definition by deconstructing myths that imprison women within the binary opposition with a stable subordinated status. Traditional narratives and symbols that perpetuate male hegemony are deconstructed and the same materials are rewritten to promote a vision of equality and equitable production of cultures. Re-vision opens possibilities for multiple perspectives or views (219). Revisionist mythmaking makes an alternative reading possible by bringing woman to the centre or by shifting the perspective from the male to the female. Keeping in view this dimension, the notion of revisionist mythmaking is used as a supporting lens in this thesis to compliment the notion of petit recits, as well as, to study the contemporary women rewritings of *Mahabharata*.

By calling into account the selected feminist contemporary rewritings, this thesis explores Draupadi's experience in the *Mahabharata* and contrasts it with the seemingly phallogocentric view. Women writers in India write in postmodern sensibilities by acknowledging the defiant female voices in their fiction. The selected novels of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee and Saraswati Nagpal attempt at rewriting the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's vintage point. The selected novels try to articulate her concerns in a patriarchal society by prioritizing the trajectory of female experience and by foregrounding questions of her self-identity. Even though these feminist rewritings of *Mahabharata* do not attempt to change the destiny of the suppressed female characters, the female subjectivity of Draupadi stands out in the selected rewritings. Similarly, in order to delineate the female subjectivity of Draupadi, Kristeva's concept of abjection becomes indispensable. Kristeva's feminine abjection can help see Draupadi as a subversive character.

Julia Kristeva propounds the concept of abjection in her chef-d'oeuvre *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Etymologically, abject, hails from Latin origin wherein 'ab' prefix means 'outside' and the root word 'ject' connotes 'to throw'. Kristeva defines abject as, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law, but turns aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (Kristeva 4). J. Cuddon in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* traces the concept of abjection from Julia Kristeva's book, *The*

Powers of Horror (1980) that explains the formation and maintenance of subjectivity. In Kristevan viewpoint, the subject formation (development of a discrete 'I') happens in early infancy. Infant creates a borderline between 'I' and the 'other' by abjecting. Despite being excluded, abject still continues to linger at the periphery of consciousness (Cuddon 161). The abject is utterly repulsive and constantly threatens the sense of 'self'; however, it is also alluring as it invokes a state of unity with the maternal. Throughout life, the abject challenges the borders of selfhood.

Along with Kristeva's concept of abjection, this thesis foregrounds different traits of abjection. Kristeva discusses different traits of abjection in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The first of which is psychic space in which a person views himself/herself as a body. Kristeva exemplifies this state with that of a corpse that is both an object of disgust as well as reminiscence of life. It is an embodiment of life getting infected by death, hence an abject. As per the trait, an abjected individual is caught between the living and the dead. He/she has physical appearance of a human being, but the soul that gives a person identity is missing (7). The second trait is Kristeva's concept of abjection along with the three traits of abjection trace out abjection as abjection as something out of subject object dichotomy. This trait of abjection explicates that abject self cannot differentiate between self and other. Consequently, the abjected individual remains confused and unclear pertaining to his/her identity that makes him/her exhibit weird behaviour unacceptable by the society (7). The last trait of is abject as seductive/ destructive space. It highlights two properties of abjection that is both seductive and destructive at the same time (8).Kristeva's concept of abjection and its three traits are used in this study as a main lens to decipher the subversiveness of Draupadi in the selected novels.

The hitherto mentioned debate at length discusses the theoretical constructs of the study. In conjunction with the selected theoretical constructs of the study, this thesis also brings in the Vedic concept of feminism. As this study intends to frame out the *Vedic* feminist trajectory, therefore, it is important to find out what is Vedic feminism and how does the strong culture of female identities got eclipsed over the period of time.To dig deep into the strong culture of assertive female identities and how it has been marred over

the period of time, it is important to holistically reread Indian history in order to briefly trace out the status of women and its evolution.

The status of women, in Hinduism in particular and India in general, has been debated over centuries. Religious scriptures and socio-political norms play a pivotal role in crafting and sustaining gender identities and consciousness (Abhas 87). In the Indian framework of gender based differences, women are often sidelined for the vested interests of various agencies and Indian history is replete with such instances. The religious elite, the interpreters of sacred texts, creates guidelines for gendered roles in economic, social and political spheres. They often bypass the works of centuries of theological experts and come up with fresh interpretations to perpetuate the exploitation of women (Nikita 605). The female gender is often subjected to the regimentation of an oppressive selection process of interpretations. They are made to act as the driving force in the supposed task for preserving social-righteousness. Specific genres of phallocentric literature (poetry and drama) cater to specific genre of readers and the desired model for the ideal woman is created and shattered (607). In India, over the centuries, religious scriptures are used to convey social, political and economic ideas that support toxic version of patriarchy in such a way that their violation by the female gender becomes almost a violation of religious norms. Hence, in the interplay of texts, histories, interpretations and interpretations of interpretations, the liberal position of women is muted and the strong culture of assertive female identities is lost. By holistically analyzing the evolution of the status of women in India in different eras, this thesis will bring to light the idea that how strong culture of assertive female identities is lost in Indian history.

According to *Bhagvatam Puranas*[15], there are four yugas[16]: the Satya Yuga[17], the Treta Yuga[18], the Dwarpa Yuga[19] and the Kali Yuga[20]. The descending of the yugas

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[15]*Bhagvatam Puranas* (देवनागरी) is also known as *Srimad Bhagvata Maha-Puran*. It is one of Hinduism's eighteen *Puranas*. As a Hindu scripture, it discusses a wide range of topics including cosmology, astronomy, genealogy and culture.

[16] A Yuga (युग) cycle is a cyclic age in Hindu cosmology.

[17] Satya Yuga (देवनागरी) is, according to Hinduism, the age of truth and perfection. In this era *Vedas* were revealed.

observed gradual decline in dharma[21] (the code of righteousness) and intellectual capability. The religious, historical and literary evidences of Satya Yuga (Vedic era) points to the fact that the idea of gender equality is most strongly projected in the *Vedas*—the religious Hindu texts. As this thesis takes the *Vedic* concept of female self, therefore, it is necessary to dig deep into *Vedas* as a sacred Hindu text along with the Vedic age to understand Vedic feminism. The word *Veda* means knowledge. There are total four parts of *Vedas*: *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda* and *Atharvaveda* (Abhas 120). *Vedas* are considered as oldest sacred books of the world and these, according to Hindu scholars, are source of religion, culture and civilization of India. All ancient thinkers from Brahma[22] to Jaimini[23] opine that *Vedas* are revealed by god for the benefit of mankind. In view of Hindu popular belief, *Vedas* guides men in religious as well as secular matters. Vedic age is the period between the *Rigveda* and the *Vedanta-sutras*[24] that covers about seventeen to eighteen centuries. *Vedas* define both a period of time and a culture. The *Rigveda* and *Atharva Veda*[25], as parts of *Vedas,* consist of hymns that celebrate femininity. According to Hindu scriptures, Vedic Age or the Satya Yuga (Golden Age) is the age of truth and perfection (Bhatnagar 6). In the Vedic epoch, it is argued that the matriarchal origins of Indian civilization can be traced. The prevalence of the worship of Hindu goddesses like Lakshmi[26], Parvati[27], Saraswati[28], Durga[29] and Kali[30] in

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[18] Treta Yuga (त्रेतायुग) is the era after Satya Yuga. In this epoch, Valmiki wrote *Ramayana*.

[19] Dwarpa Yuga (द्वापरयुग) is the era after Treta Yuga and it is the time when Vyasa wrote *Mahabharata*.

[20] Kali Yuga (कलियुग) is the last of the four yugas. It is known as the age of darkness and deception.

[21] Dharma (युग)) is the code of righteousness.

[22] Brahma (ब्रह्मा) is the creator god in Hinduism.

[23] Jaimini (ब्रह्मा) was an ancient Hindu scholar and the founder of Hindu philosophy. He was the disciple of Ved Vyasa.

[24] *Vedanta Sutras* (ब्रह्मसूत्र), as a Hindu religious text, summarizes the philosophical and spiritual ideas in Hinduism.

[25] The *Atharva Veda*(अथर्ववेद) is the fourth *Veda*. It is a collection of hymns that includes women-centric hymns too.

[26] Lakshmi (लक्ष्मी) is the Goddess of prosperity.

[27] Parvati (पार्वती) is the Hindu goddess of fertility.

[28] Saraswati (सरस्वती) is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom, and learning.

[29] Durga (दुर्गा) is a principal and popular form of the Hindu goddess.

[30] Kali (काली) is a Hindu goddess. She is the destroyer of evil forces and the most powerful form of Shakti.

contemporary India is the reflection of the elated status of women in the *Vedas*(Vinay 27). In pro-Vedic culture, women sit on the high pedestal and they enjoy respect and autonomy. Widows could remarry; unlike, the practices of Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga (Shubhankar 3). In Vedic times even the divine power in the form of *Shakti*[31] is considered feminine. The concept of *Vedic* feminism emerges from the hymns of *Rig Veda* and *Atharvaveda*. It is written in the *Rig Vedic* part of the *Vedas*: "Where the women are worshipped, there the God dwells" (*Rigveda* 387). *Rig Veda* provides ample evidence to propagate gender equality. Nonetheless, the glorious position of women gradually deteriorated in course of time due to the later *Bhagavata Puranas* that pushed women to domestic spaces and reduced them to subservient position. According to the *Rigveda*, "A woman is Ardhangani[32], Sahadharmani[33], Sahakarmani[34], and Sahayugani[35]" (Rigveda 339). It further propagates, "Husband and wife being the equal half of one substance are equal in every respect; therefore, both should join and take equal parts in all works" (*Rigveda* 339). *Vedas* call all energy as Shakti and Shakti is feminine in nature (Mishra 21). Moreover, similarly, *Yajurveda* discusses the concept of Trimurti[36] in such a way that it brings to focus the emancipation of the female gender. It articulates that Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh are all powerless without their female counterparts. Mahesh gets all energy from Parvati for destruction, Brahma gets energy from Saraswati for creation and Vishnu is inseparable from Lakshmi who is a source of good fortune and wealth (Nirmala 2). In terms of gender equality, Vedic era is termed as Golden Age. Nonetheless, the elated status of women started declining with the *Smritis*[37] or the

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[31] Shakti (शक्ति) is the personification/goddess of energy. In Hindu religion it is named as "The Great Divine Mother" in Hinduism.

[32] Ardhangani (इंग्लिशमे), according to *Rigveda*, is a better-half. In Indian culture, Husband and Wife are recognized as a single entity, comprising both of them as a half each; hence "Ardhangani", meaning "half of the entire".

[33] Sahadharmani (पार्वती), according to *Rigveda*, is a woman who is an associate in the fulfilment of human and divine cause. In other words, Sahadharmani is a woman who helps her husband in completion of Hindu rituals.

[34] Sahakarmani (लक्ष्मी)) is a woman who is a path to all her husband's actions. She, as a good wife, makes sure that her husband sticks to the path of dharma.

[35] Sahayugani (शक्ति) is a woman who is a vertical cooperator in all her husband's ventures.

[36] Trimurti, (Sanskrit: three forms) in Hinduism is triad of three gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh.

[37]*Smritis* are Hindu religious texts.

Puranic Indian literature including *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in Treta Yuga and Dwapara Yuga respectively.

Post-Vedic time underwent a shift vis-à-vis the status of women. Satya Yuga is followed by Treta Yuga—the second Yuga in order. In Post-Vedic period, when *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were written, women were denied equal rights. In Treta Yuga, Valmiki wrote *Ramayana*. He introduced female stereotypes embodied in the character of Sita—the heroine of the epic. It appears that he projected Sita as benign, weak and submissive that, later on, became the key-traits of a chaste woman (Mishra 39). Moreover, throughout the epic, 'Nari Dharma' is taught, preached, glorified, evaluated and practiced by all the female characters (Abhas 17). *Nari dharma* entails endless loyalty and servitude towards her husband, who is an epitome of god in her eyes, abiding to all the rules designed by the patriarchs, devotion to household work, sacrificing herself for the larger good. These toxic patriarchal notions tacitly constructed the foundation of Indian society (Abhas 17).

As the time elapsed, in Dwapara Yuga, the third Yuga in order, Ved Vyasa wrote *Mahabharata* that hails from the tradition of Indian puranic literature. *Mahabharata* primary deals with the rivalry between Pandavas and Kauravas and gives a detailed account of the lives of kings, warriors, gods and noble man who believe in dharma. It showcases male-heroism and brings to perspective male-chauvinistic society. Vyasa's *Mahabharata* projects a patriarchal world-view that reduces women to subservient position who only play a supporting role in the lives of men. In other words, women are depicted as the unvoiced, the disenfranchised and the dispossessed beings that are compelled to live on the margins of society. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as glaring examples of patriarchal texts, eclipsed the *Vedic* feminist ideals. The stereotyping of the female gender suggests that the matriarchal basis of Indian society has been overlaid by patriarchalism in post-Vedic time (Vinay 27).

Mahabharata is described as a cultural narrative of Hindu and non-Hindu culture. There is in the *Mahabharata* itself a saying that "Poets have told it before, and are telling it now, and will tell it again. What is here is also found elsewhere, but what is not here is found nowhere else" (Vyasa 7). The *Mahabharata* narrates the anecdote of the struggle

between two collateral branches of Kuru clan: Kauravas and Pandavas vying for the throne of Hastinapur ultimately leading to the War of Kurukshetrya. *Mahabharata*, along with the heroic male characters, brings to light the female characters of the epic as well. However, the female gender is projected as totally dependent on men in all spheres of life. The gender stereotypes that Valmiki introduced in *Ramayana* through the character of Sita, seeps into *Mahabharata* too. In addition, Lakshmana, who draws Lakshmana-rekha[38] for Sita, remains relevant for Draupadi.

Mahabharata is a fertile ground of artistic inspiration for the writers who have tried to question its patriarchal ideology .The epic presents itself to critical enquiry and different writers who tried to critique the dominant discourse of *Mahabharata*, have consistently questioned patriarchy's victimization of the female characters who have tried to subvert or challenge its vicious designs. The epic casts women in the typical role of the other. Indian women authors reflect on feminocentric issues like female subjugation. These female writers have attempted to question the clichéd myth called "Bharatiya nari" (an Indian woman). Through the feminist Indian rewritings, Indian woman is redefined. The desires, dreams and fears of an Indian woman have been reinterpreted in these feminist rewritings. Through their postmodern fiction, these women writers attempt to reposition women from the margins to the centre.

Like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* is a canonical patriarchal epic that reinforces female stereotypes. Valmiki's Sita is referred to as a female archetype in *Ramayana* that still remains relevant in modern India, where Sita's signature traits: acceptance and sacrifice have been glorified as true feminine traits of a pativrata stri[39] in India. To be specific, in India, a submissive woman who remains subservient to men finds acceptance in patriarchal society (Mishra 32). However, women who resist and subvert patriarchy are pushed to the wall by the social and religious police. Thus, feminist rewritings of the canonical patriarchal text championing female cause was needed to address atrocities of toxic patriarchy in the founding myths of societies. In the constantly shifting socio-political dynamics, the marginal female characters have acquired their own space within

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[18] Lakshmana Rekha is the line that Lakshmana draws around the hut to save Sita from Ravana when he goes out to search his brother Ram in the forest.
[39] Pativrata stri means an ideal wife.

the tradition of the rewritings of *Mahabharata*. Often victims of social injustice in the classical epics, these characters seem to appear in rewritings in order to tell their own stories which are not given enough narrative space in the metanarrative of the ancient Sanskrit epics. The selected feminist rewritings of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Lekha Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* revamps the epic by narrativizing the female voice of Draupadi through these feminist rewritings.

The selected petit recits of *Mahabharata* are a feminist take on the epic. This thesis attempts to look at how the petit recits transgress the phallogocentric metanarrative of the epic and question the toxic patriarchal ideologies that even remain relevant in the contemporary era. As this study is exploratory in nature, the research paradigm employed is qualitative and the research method used in this thesis is of textual analysis. Chapter three contains a detailed discussion on the research methodology used in this study. Just as the position of the author of the works in the society is considered to be significant for analysis, the researcher's place and identity is also a matter of importance for the interpretation of texts. Therefore, I need to explain my position as a researcher.

1.2 Situatedness of the Researcher

As a researcher, my identity deeply impacts the theoretical forays, accessibility of research material, methods and analysis of the research. However, my identity does not impede in the way for transformation. As our identities are fluid and not mere lenses through which we see the world. This research analyzes the selected Indian Anglophone fiction from the eclectic postmodernist theoretical forays of Jean Francois Lyotard, Helene Cixous, Alicia Suskin Ostriker and Julia Kristeva that ranges from the idea of postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives, postmodern feminist trajectory of women's writing, concept of rewriting to the theory of abjection and its traits. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, *The Palace of Illusions* and *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, as selected novels, are postmodern feminist rewritings of the great-grand Indian epic the *Mahabharata* that subvert phallogocentric logic deeply incorporated in the epic. Puranas along with two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* constitute the enduring foundation of age old and magnificent construction of the Indian culture and civilization.

The everlasting appeal of these treaties still influence, to a greater extent, the cultural and behavioural pattern of the people of South Asia in general and India in particular. The Indian sub-continent—before partition—had Hindu, Muslim and Sikh population that means they co-existed and intermingled freely, sharing customs and culture. Therefore, the post-partition Pakistan cannot disavow its past and its identity. Pakistani culture is not particularly unique to the nation, but rather a part of cultural identities shared by South Asians. Kaleidoscopically, the deep-set cultural mores have tied India and Pakistan together. In the same vein, the *Mahabharata*, a canonical patriarchal Indian epic written in Sanskrit, is a store-house of knowledge that has influenced Indian thought through centuries of time. If democratic pluralism is taken into perspective then truth dawns upon us that the way women are treated today in Pakistan has deeply rooted misogynistic and masochistic roots in the ancient Indian Puranic literature which continues to exert considerable cultural influence. Furthermore, Pakistani culture is inclusive as it has preserved Indian culture and its folklores to a significant extent. Consequently, my identity, as a Pakistani and a South Asian, is likely to affect the analysis of the selected feminist rewritings. As qualitative is ungeneralisable and subjective, and as I have taken partially subjective perspective of selected primary texts to valorize my arguments, this study resonates with my situatedness. In this context, textual analysis as a research method can help me out.

1.3 Thesis Statement

The selected novels subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata* by relegating the feminine self of Draupadi into an abject position. These novels, as petit récits, in explorably Lyotardian terms, take a postmodernist stance for retrieving the *Vedic* concept of female self by using abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is based on the following objectives:

- To analyze the selected feminist petit recits as counter-narratives to the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*.
- To foreground abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy in the selected women's writings.
- To map out the subjectivity of Draupadi in contemporary feminist renditions of *Mahabharata* reclaiming Vedic feminism.

1.5Research Questions

1. How do the selected feminist rewritings as petit recits counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*?
2. How does abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy play out in the selected women's writings?
3. How do the selected novels map out the subjectivity of Draupadi?

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

I have delimited this study to Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. The present study investigates the aforementioned works using the multifaceted postmodernist theoretical constructs to map out the subjectivity of Draupadi. This study is a fusion of the critical theories of Jean Francois Lyotard, Helene Cixous, Alicia Suskin Ostriker and Julia Kristeva. This study takes a postmodernist stance on the feminist rewritings of the *Mahabharata* by reviving the Vedic concept of female self that can be traced out in the *Vedas*. The selected feminist rewritings of *Mahabharata* shed light on the character of Draupadi that brings to notice a feminist petit récit. These rewritings attempt to reposition Draupadi as abject self. Draupadi, as a subversive, rejects the laws and conventions prevalent in a patriarchal society in the contemporary renditions of the epic. These selected texts, as feminist petit recits

deciphering the narrative of Draupadi, focus on the feminocentric perspective of Draupadi.

1.7 Significance and Rationale of Study

India, a country that is being addressed as a mother to its citizens, its soil is being respected as a woman namely Bharatmata (Mother-India) that speaks volumes about the specification a woman may have in this country but unfortunately there is nothing identical to the above statements and beliefs. From politics to academics, from science to literature and from mythologies to the contemporary culture all are predominant by men (Deshpande 7). This thesis reflects on the degraded treatment accorded to women in Dwapara Yuga, which continues its legacy in the Kali Yuga as well, has been a tipping point in brandishing Hinduism as a highly patriarchal religion. This project unfolds that by turning back to the *Vedas*, the true status of women in Hinduism can be traced. My research is significant in a Pakistani context as Pakistan is a part of the cultural identities shared by South Asians that shows pluralistic nature of Pakistan's myriad cultures. The intricate mosaic of Pakistani identity foregrounds a shared past with India. Furthermore, vibrant cultural expressions are inclusive of the Hindu Puranic tradition that still manifests itself in the way women are treated in India in particular and South Asia in general.

Considerable researches have been conducted on unveiling patriarchy as an ideological insertion in the Indian Sanskrit epics. However, I take the contemporary Indian feminist rewritings of the *Mahabharata* as petit récits to question the phallogocentric idealism entrenched in the respective Indian puranic literature by taking a postmodern stance to retrieve the Vedic female self. This research takes a postmodern perspective on the rewriting of the Vedic female self in contemporary Indian fiction. The Vedic Age equals a woman to a man in all walks of life which later on deliberately got eclipsed by male writers writing in Sanskrit like Vyasa and Valmiki. This research is a significant addition to literature for the fusion of four multifaceted postmodern theories of Jean Francois Lyotard idea of petit recits, Helene Cixous feminist framework of l'ecriture feminine, Alicia Suskin Ostriker notion of revisionist mythmaking and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and its three traits have not been studied altogether so far. In addition,

Draupadi's character has not been researched keeping in view all contemporary feminist rewritings based on her character that this thesis has accomplished.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Before review of literature, a brief overview of research would be in order. In this thesis, I analyze Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* as petit recits countering the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by foregrounding the female character of Draupadi who, as a sole narrator, narrates incidents of *Mahabharata*. These feminist rewritings reclaim the *Vedic* concept of female subjectivity and projecting Draupadi as abjected individual. Furthermore, the present research examines how the selected women's writings as petit recits underscore incredulity towards the metanarrative of *Mahabharata* to foreground Draupadi's character. Literature review provides review of existing literature that is available in my concerned area of study. There are mainly two reasons to conduct this review of related literature. Firstly, examining the literature produced in the concerned area enables me to locate my research properly by establishing the significance of the study. Secondly, it points to the research gaps in existing corpus of the study. Furthermore, this chapter is significant to the study for it helps in understanding how others researchers have used multifaceted postmodern theories in different contexts. Section 1 of the literature review provides a detailed exegesis of how the selected multifaceted theories used in this research have been evolved and the researches already done on the selected novels, whereas section 2 reflects at length on the forces and motives responsible for the marginalization of and amnesia over a strong Vedic culture of assertive identities by delving deep into the four yugas.

2.2 Postmodernism

2.2.1 Etymology and Semantic Aspects

Postmodernism—as the "post" preface implies is something that is followed by modernism. However, literary critics have a divided opinion on whether postmodernism is a break from modernism or a continuation of modernism, or both. The term

postmodern was first used in 1917 by a German philosopher, Rudolf Pannwitz, to explain Western culture in terms of the offshoot of nihilism in the twentieth century (17). It again resurfaced in the literary works of a Spanish critic Onis in 1934 to refer to the protest against literary modernism. In English, it appeared in the year 1939 used in two distinguished ways by Bernard Iddings Bell and Arnold Toynbee, where the former used it to signify the failure of secular modernism and the reclamation of religion and the latter used it in context of the rise of mass society in post-World War 1. Then in the 1950s and 1960s, postmodernism was implied in the literary criticism as a reaction against literary modernism.

2.2.2 Definitional and Theoretical Aspects

Postmodernism, largely, is a reaction against the Enlightenment Movement of the Western philosophy (from 17th through the 19th century). It marks the end of the Enlightenment. Postmodernist critical approaches gained currency in the 1980s and have been adopted in cultural and literary studies. With postmodernist literature, literary studies have gone through a sea change in the last few decades. What has earlier been considered as truth now invites scepticism. Postmodernism, as a literary theory, is the rejection of the metanarratives and acceptance of relativism. The postmodernist theories of Michael Foucault, Jean Francois Lyotard and Jean Derrida are considered as seminal works in postmodern literary theory. Michael Foucault argues, "Knowledge is power" (91). "There is nothing outside the text" (32), says Derrida. Jean Francois Lyotard, in his book, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, defines postmodernity as "...incredulity toward metanarratives" (1).

2.3 Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1979)*

2.3.1 Metanarrative

Jean Francois Lyotard's defines postmodern as "...incredulity toward metanarratives" (1) which he states in his famous work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). Lyotard propagates in his seminal work on postmodernism that human societies are based on the dominant metanarratives. Lyotard speaks against

the scientific, religious and cultural metanarratives that tend to legitimize a particular version of truth. On the contrary, Lyotard propounds that in postmodern era there is no one big narrative that can dominate. He rather discusses the different micro-narratives that have become a part and parcel of postmodern societies. According to Lyotard, this carnival of localized narratives replaces the monolithic presence of a metanarrative. John Stephens defines a metanarrative as 'a global or totalising cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience' (6). The term grand recits (metanarratives) simply refers to the epic narratives that tell overarching stories about the world. These metanarratives make grand and totalizing claims about reality. In Lyotardian terms, metanarratives are stories which not only claim to tell a grand story but also try to legitimize them by appealing to universal reason (7). A metanarrative, for Lyotard, is an inclusive theory that validates all proceedings in a society. Metanarratives aim at being all encompassing and explicating other little narratives with an over totalizing voice. According to Lyotard, a metanarrative is a master-narrative that points to the all-embracing mythic narratives which are used by individual and societies to legitimize truth-claims. A metanarrative is a narrativisation that aims at limiting an individual's capacity to conceptualize identity outside the parameters of these superstructures. In fact, all religions of the world, ideologies and the scientific disciplines are, in essence, rendered as metanarratives, which go unquestioned by their followers and religiously preserved within their cultural sphere. All in all, a metanarrative—by definition—is a comprehensive and all-embracing grand-narrative which elucidates and gives up depth to the sub-narratives connected to it. In addition, a metanarrative is a building block, or a foundation of a culture which shapes and defines any culture.

2.3.2 Petit Recits

Lyotard refutes legitimization of metanarratives which claim to govern everything under the sun; on the contrary, these so-called narratives are not able to legitimize as they do not acknowledge plethora of other different voices present in a society by trying to replace them with solely one voice (3). Within the ambit of postmodernity, these unheard voices are given immense prominence. According to Lyotard, petit recits (little-narratives) should take place of the metanarratives. Lyotard elucidates that these petit

récits (localized narratives) offer legitimation for parts. Petit récits validate several other peripheral voices that are not a part of the mainstream, which go unheard by the metanarratives as these marginal voices contradict one totalizing voice (5). In addition, petit récits are 'little stories' or in fact testimonies which draw attention not to the universal but to the particular. In other words, petit récits foreground individual experiences, local events and heterodox ideas which do not fall under the ambit of the predominant metanarratives. *The Postmodern Condition* paves way for dissension and celebrates difference. Lyotard through his concept of petit récits challenges homogeneity which he terms as 'totalitarian'. Unlike metanarratives, petit récits subvert the manipulation of the homogeneous stereotypical narrative rather open up new avenues for multiple interpretations.

According to the postmodernist perspective, our world no longer works on the principle of totality rather it is experiencing anarchy, chaos and total absence of control. Postmodernism, as a literary theory, attempts to destabilize the preconceived controlling and dominating notions vis-a-vis history, culture, society and literature. Moreover, postmodernist perspective wards off all coherent interpretations and side lines the totalizing voices to highlight alternate perspectives. Petit récits, as projected by Lyotard, are part of dissent and pervasive scepticism that refute the universalizing theories and all sorts of authoritarianism. Lyotard is of the view that petit récits can breakdown metanarratives by inventing creative knowledge. He defines 'petit récit' as '…a multiplicity of finite meta-arguments, by which I mean argumentation that concerns metaprescriptive and is limited in space and time' (66). *The Postmodern Condition* emphasizes that the monolithic foundation of truth is contested and the pluralistic worldview should be embraced that brushes away all generalizations and closure. According to Lyotard, only situation-specific and locally-determined narratives could constitute legitimation that is not generalized but particular.

2.4 Ecriture Feminine

Cixous states that a woman is different from a man both sexually and linguistically. Her aim is to write about a positive representation of femininity in a discourse that she terms as Ecriture Feminine (women's writing). In her point of view, the societal

constructs relegate the feminine to the position of 'other'. However, she argues that if a woman's writing becomes ecriture feminine, it can subvert masculine and the symbolic phallogocentric language.

Cixous' exhortation to women to write in such a mode comes from her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) that is regarded as a manifesto of postmodern feminism. Cixous uses the myth of Medusa—a fearful entity—to interpret men's fear of the female voice and the act of killing Medusa is men's attempt to silence her. The new writing style, discussed in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, employs different disruptions in the text like fluid syntax, puns, new images and gaps in order to release women's bodies from the existing representations. This distinct female practice of writing is incomprehensible, eccentric and inconsistent, as its difficulty to understand is attributed to centuries of suppression of the female voice. She argues in her essay that through ecriture feminine, a new mode of writing, new identities for women will erupt.

Cixous states: "...woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (17). The women's writing is significant in order to break the deadlock of the male writing. In Cixousian perspective, writing consolidates power. The ecriture feminine is different from the phallogocentric writing, as it inscribes the female body— "write yourself". Her essay is based on multi-Cixousian scheme: "to liberate", "to subvert and "to invent". The weapon Cixous uses to end the hegemony of the phallogocentric ideology is to incorporate ecriture feminine. She propagates the idea that writing is liberation.

Cixous, instead of using patriarchy as a term, uses phallogocentricism which is a much broader concept in her essay. *The Laugh of the Medusa* states that women ought to make an effort to sidestep and reject the language of oppression (phallogocentric language) and to tell their own stories differently in their own language.

Throughout history women have been defined by the male gaze. They have been pushed to play passive roles defined by men. To be specific, history has been biased to women, for it never produced and recorded anything but phallogocentricism. She calls phallogocentricism as an enemy and urges women to invent the 'other' history.

Phallogocentric language has played an important role in excluding women from the public discourse and it reflects exclusion of women from literary from literature, as they have been echoed in literary arenas as subject of male-discourse only.

Cixous rebels against the oppressive language and the patriarchal conventions through a new form of writing—ecriture feminine. Her concept of ecriture feminine is, in fact, a reaction against the female repression executed by the phallogocentric structures. Ecriture feminine is an alternative writing for women to subvert the phallogocentric discourse. This alternative writing can help women to reclaim their voices hushed-up throughout history. Moreover, she urges women to unchain themselves from the barriers of the masculine language through feminine writing. Cixousian trajectory of feminine writing goes beyond the logo and the symbolic. Thus, ecriture feminine as a sole mode of women's writing, strives for the erasure of gender differences, for open-ended textuality and for the erasure of the phallogocentric hegemony. By employing ecriture feminine, Cixous has chalked out a way to subvert and to deconstruct the concept of phallogocentricism.

2.5 Abjection

2.5.1 Definitional and Theoretical Aspects

In order to trace the evolution of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection which has been mentioned in her book, *Power of Horrors* (1982), I need to dig into the background of this theory by making sense of the views of other theorist like Ferdinand de Saussure, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Kenneth J. Gergen.

2.5.2 Ferdinand de Saussure on Binary Opposites in Language

Language processing is rendered as one of the influential functions of the human cognitive operations. In psychological development of an individual, language process plays a significant role. In *A Course of General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure laid down the very foundation of Semiology, the science of meaning making (Saussure 120). Saussure highlights the importance of human language in the developmental phase of human psychology. He believes that meaning and perception are deeply interconnected and these are the ultimate products of human mind. What is more, according to his point

of view, language is based on the binary opposition. It points to the fact that meanings in human language are extracted through the reciprocal determination. A thing can only be determined that what it is by determining what it is not. Similarly, red colour is red because it is not black, not green, not yellow etc. Through these simple examples it can be deduced that thinking and interaction are solely based on binary opposition that operates in language. Man or woman, joy or sorrow, good or bad and all such kinds of binaries exist because of the reciprocal other. It can be said that the psycho-linguistic development of the human mind is based on binary opposites.

2.5.3 Sigmund Freud on Psycho-sexual Development of a Child

Saussure, on the one hand, speaks about language and its relation to human understanding so, on the other hand, Sigmund Freud highlights that human sexuality is a key component in the development of human psychology. Freud's magnum-opus work on the psycho-sexual development of a human mind is groundbreaking. He, for the first time in history, floated the idea that how a child comprehends the world around him in context of his psycho-sexual development. Freud also refers to the phallic stage where a child for the very first time encounters the sexual differences between the two opposite sexes. Child interprets his father's position differently to that of his mother's as the former possess phallus and the later does not have a phallus (Freud 109). Thus, for a child, phallus becomes a symbol of power. With the passage of time, he comes to realize that in a society to have a phallus means to have power. In response to the sexual differences, a child locates a world of his mother on the other side of the binary. Freud also points out that those individuals who do not follow the normal course of psycho-sexual development have to face serious abnormalities in the form of Oedipus and Electra complex.

2.5.4 Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory

Jacques Lacan's Mirror Stage Theory underscores a phase in the psychological development of a child where he understands the concept of self. At this very stage, a child sees the world in reflection of his own image in the mirror (Lacan 66). Moreover, when a child gets language exposure it is right there and then that he becomes fully aware

of the world around him and is pushed to the space of 'other' in psychological terms. When a child gets exposed to a language, he/she internalizes the binary based nature of language. A child understands the concept of self only with the reciprocal concept of other. Moreover, other as a binary opposite of self helps him/her to situate his/her existence in social construct of meanings.

2.5.6 Jacques Derrida's Perspective on Phallogocentricism

In Deconstruction—a critical theory—Jacques Derrida coined a new term Phallogocentricism that refers to the privileging of the phallus. Phallogocentricism is, in fact, a portmanteau of phallocentric and logocentric. Derrida is of the view that modern Western culture has been intellectually and culturally subjugated by phallocentricism and logocentricism. Here logocentricism focuses on language in assigning meanings to the word, whereas phallocentricism is focused on the masculine point of view. Phallocentricism, as a term, was first used by Freudian psychoanalyst Ernes Jones in 1927. It propagates that as women are castrated and do not possess phallus so they are excluded of the phallocentric-structure. Derrida merged phallocentricism and logocentricism as Phallogocentricism. In his Deconstructionist works, Derrida takes notice of the dictatorial dominance of the abovementioned philosophies. In his essay Choreographers, he points out that "there is no one place for women within the phallocentric structure. This means she is not caged in a specific identity but can weave freely inside and outside of its boundaries (70)".

2.5.7 Kenneth J. Gergen's Postmodern Concept of 'Self'

Kenneth J. Gergen theorizes the postmodernist concept of 'self'. He states that in a postmodern realm, identity remains fragmented and has no significance at all keeping in view the ever changing nature of identity. He points out that identity is, in reality, one's own concept of self that is fluid and unfixed. In postmodernism, identity changes with the passage of time, is not fixed and lacks a centre (Gergen 11). He further highlights that if identity is not fixed then the postmodern concept of identity only keeps the present intact

and will let go of the past. He concludes that identity is indefinite as it is based on complex actions, attitudes and behaviours.

2.5.8 Julia Kristeva's Concept of Abjection

Julia Kristeva is a well-known linguist, literary critic and psychologist. In her book, *Power of Horrors* (1982), she discussed at length about the state of abjection. Her concept of abjection is utilized in as one of the primary theories to reread the character of Draupadi in the texts of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal. Her theory of abjection can only be understood if her views on human psychology are taken into perspective. Kristeva stresses upon the significance of the infancy stage in the psychological development of homo-sapiens.

She takes into perspective the concept of Jacques Lacan pertaining to language and human psychology and bases her argument upon them. Kristeva in '*Revolution of Poetic Language*' divides into the two communications—symbolic and the semiotic (90). Symbolic means the scheme of communication, while semiotic is a precondition to the symbolic. Effective communication can only take place if the semiotic part is moulded in accordance with the symbolic. This model of communication that is chalked out by Kristeva is applicable in context of the psychological development of a child.

A child considers that he is the part of his mother in pre-oedipal stage and considers that his mother provides for all his needs by responding to all the noises which a child makes. However, when a child with the passage of time grows up and becomes aware of 'self', he comes to realize that he is not a part of his mother and the mother is actually 'other' than 'self'. This awareness provides an impetus for a child to look around in order to identify the 'symbolic' world of the father. A child realizes that this is the symbolic order that should be followed. He tries to adjust himself accordingly to fit into the symbolic world of the father. The more a child seeps into the symbolic, the more conventional and rational he considers himself and ends up being a balanced personality. On the contrary, those who do not slid into the symbolic world and remain stuck with the semiotic world of mother develop disorders. Moreover to those who adjust themselves in the symbolic world and the ones who stick with the semiotic, there is a third

psychological state where the child although in the symbolic also remains under influence of the semiotic. This is what Kristeva refers to as 'abjection'.

Kristeva defines abject as perverse state for it neither gives in nor succumbs to any rule, or law; but misleads and takes advantage (4). Abjection subverts and negates all boundaries prevalent in a society. Abjection, as a state, points to corruption that takes place in the psychological growth of a person. Abjected individuals act as social mavericks who rebel against the social world and deviate from the norms of a society. Furthermore, the confused response of these subversives towards the binaries never allows them to be a part and parcel of the social hierarchy crafted by the symbolic world.

State of abjection can best be understood through the process of ingestion and secretion (excrement) that takes place in the human body where secretion stands as an example of the abject. The ingestion is considered necessary for its nutrition providing nature, whereas, though secretion is also necessary, yet it is hated for its outlook. Food, an important element for life, is abhorred and feared in its secretion form. Love for food and abhorrence for excrement is significant in understanding the paradox that exists in the concept of abjection. Love for food unfolds the sublime nature of abjection, while the rejection of excrement refers to the uncanny facet of abjection. When the process of ingestion takes place in a human body, the food becomes a part of 'being' so it is considered as sublime. Contrarily, the same food when ingested and turns into excrement is abhorred and is termed as 'non-being'. In Kristeva's Opinion: "Since the food is not an 'other' for 'me', who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abjected myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that the ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, gets sprawling: it is thus that they see that 'I' become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit (3)".

Other than excrements, body fluids such as tears, vomit, menstrual blood and other fluids that get secreted out of the body are accepted as well as rejected depending on their significance. On the one hand, these secretions protect the body from accumulation of toxic fluids in the body whereas on the other hand these secretions refer to the rejection of the 'self'.

Kristeva explains abject on the account of spatial and temporal disruptions that happen in the life of a subject when the subject comes across something frightening that removes the differences between object/other dichotomy. Abject is a state that is in-between the state of being and non-being. The paradoxical nature of the abject protects the boundaries. Kristeva does not limit the notion of abject to an individual or a subject only, she takes it to the level of society and propagates that it plays a pivotal role in the social existence where an individual can place him or herself in the inclusion/exclusion part of the social structure. According to Kristeva, abjection exists in the social sphere at two different levels: individual level and within the culture. In the same vein, Kristeva underscores the existence of abjection in everyday life, establishing the fact that abject is not something extraordinary rather it is ordinary. For instance, it is just like a daily encounter like when our lips touch the skin formed on milk or when a person sees decay, vomit, blood, sex, pregnancy, menstruation all are the examples of the abject where these expulsions from the body are necessary for its protection and at the same time they negate 'self' as well.

In Kristeva's perspective, 'abject' is a space in the psychological development of an individual that retains both the qualities of destruction and seduction for the subject. In *Power of Horrors*, Kristeva projects the mechanism of abject by discussing that it is seductive in the sense that it is a stage where an individual develops a deeper understanding of the symbolic world and have an inclination to be a part of the pre-symbolic (25). However, as explained earlier, abject has a destructive side to it as well. Although, a person shows inclination towards the symbolic world but he also desires for the pre-symbolic world of the Mother. An abjected individual is sandwiched between the two worlds, keeping the symbolic world as pining for the pre-symbolic world all at the same time.

One of the important attributes of abjection, that Kristeva highlights, is the psychic space in which an individual views himself as a body. Kristeva gives an example of a corpse that is both an object of disgust as well as a reminiscence of life. It is an embodiment of life getting taken over by death so it is an abject. From a psychological perspective, psychic space gets caught by an abjected individual in a state of in-

betweenness like both living and dead at the same time. A person in the psychic space has physical features of a human but he lacks identity like a body without soul.

Another attribute of abjection, according to Kristeva, is a psychological space that threatens the subject/object dichotomy. Abjection is a space that falls out of the subject/object dichotomy. If the psychological development of a child is taken into perspective then when a child enters the symbolic space and leaves the pre-symbolic world, he or she cannot relate with the former and remain unwilling to let go of the latter. Thus, this results in a psychological state that is neither symbolic nor pre-symbolic. It is a state where all meanings fail and that is the real state of abjection.

Kristeva then discusses the third attribute of Abjection that is a space where seduction and destruction co-exist. It is seductive as the child who has already entered into the symbolic space yearns for the joyance of the pre-symbolic state. However, it is also destructive as the abjected individual does not let go of the symbolic world ending up facing severe penalties and landing up in the web of utter confusion.

Kristeva is of the view that abjection is transferable where the abject parents can produce abject children. As parents themselves remain oblivious of the subject/object dichotomy they hail from, they also transfer the same state of confusion to their children making them abjected as well.

The abject carries both the contradictory attributes of being attractive as well as repulsive and on the bases of this amalgamation Kristeva terms the abjected individuals as 'Dejects'. Kristeva unfolds that the Dejects can be easily differentiated from the ordinary social beings on the bases of their being in the state of abjection. With other attributes of the dejected individuals, one of the important qualities that define them is wandering, navigating and nature. Dejects are wanderers with persistence in navigation. Kristeva deduces that the more the abjected individual wanders around the thin boundaries lay by the abject, the more he or she gets a chance to understand both the worlds: the pre-symbolic and the symbolic. For the abjected individuals, the only way to come out of this space is constant navigation that transforms the social beings.

2.5.9 Views of Other Literary Critics on Abjection

Kelly Oliver in her research article "*Julia Kristeva's Feminist Revolutions*" asserts most of Kristeva's works fall under the domain of semiotic. However, Kristeva's use of the term semiotic is different to that of "semiotics". For Kristeva, the symbolic is the signifier. She uses the term "theitic phase" as the threshold of the symbolic that emerges out of Lacan's the mirror stage that has already been discussed in the foregoing argument. Kristeva opines that the semiotic challenges the symbolic and the relationship between the former and the latter is the dialectical oscillation. This oscillation crosses semiotic and symbolic. Kristeva is more focused on the symbolic as to refuse the symbolic is to refuse the society. Abject, according to Kristeva, causes delirium and psychosis, for it makes a subject oscillate between the pre-symbolic and the symbolic by relating to none (96).

Judith Butler, a literary critic, discusses the concept of abjection in her book, *Bodies That Matters: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. She calls the state of abjection as "unliveable" and "uninhibited" zones of social life. Unlike Kristeva, Butler explains that the abjected individuals do not enjoy the status of the subject and have fixed idea of self. Contrarily, Kristeva propounds that abject is oscillatory and fluid that does not have any fixed self as it is out of the subject/object dichotomy. In addition, Butler also writes about abjection in her book, Gender Trouble where she explains the repulsive trait of abjection. According to Butler, abject is expelled out of object/subject so it moves to the space of "otherness" (Butler 126). The abject is the 'other' that faces expulsion, repulsion and exclusion from a society and the state of abjection is the true representative of the other.

2.6 Rewriting as a Postmodern Literary Strategy

With postmodernism, literary works have become ontological writings questioning the homo-sapiens and their re-defined role in the newly built society. Postmodernism is the by-product of the World Wars followed by genocide of masses and anarchy causing a strong reaction against the age of rationality. Thus, the interest in the ontology of the literary text becomes the prerogative of postmodern fiction. This context favours different textual strategies such as intertextuality, rewriting and parody, as these

strategies help to explore the multiple modes of postmodern literature. This study is focused on rewriting as a postmodernist textual strategy. In order to discuss the context and particularities of postmodern rewriting, it is essential to examine different opinions as they underline those characteristics of postmodernism that favour the use of rewriting. The postmodern literary technique of rewriting, although has been implied for a very long time, assigns new meanings to the old texts.

Rewriting is a primary literary technique of postmodernism that is a challenging and critical feature of it. In context of postmodernism, rewriting becomes anti-writing, since it aims at metamorphosing the text. This is exclusively the reason why feminism takes advantage of rewriting as a framework developed by postmodernism to restore identities and to shift a reader's standpoint from the centre to the periphery. The two critical terms: pluralism and alterity are the watchwords of rewriting. Under the influence of postmodernism, the feminist movement takes critical rewriting as a mode of revising, reconstructing and rewriting the past dominated by patriarchy.

2.7 Alicia Suskin Ostriker's Idea of Revisionist Mythmaking

Alicia Suskin Ostriker is one of the prominent feminist critics. Ostriker was the first critic to contribute the idea of feminist revisionist mythmaking. Ostriker defines "revisionist mythmaking" in her review, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (1986) as "Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible" (Ostriker 73). This study takes Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking that she propagates in her foundational article "The Thieves of Language: Women, Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking". She opines that feminist revisionist mythology, at its core, is the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth (73).

Through this supporting lens, this thesis attempts to analyze invocations of myths in the selected novels of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal.

These feminist authors exhaust the representation of Draupadi in their novels with a personal and distinct perspective. In words of Lois Tyson, "Feminist criticism examines the way in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women" (87). Ostriker found that women were portrayed negatively and as marginalized characters in Ancient Myths. In many ways, the selected novels studied in this thesis are themselves examples of feminist literary criticism in that they examine how these patriarchal myths have historically oppressed women and what needs to be reimagined.

2.8 Postmodernist Indian Rewritings

Postmodernist modes of renarrativization are viewed as a form of cultural critique(Moraru). Renarrativization is a strategy for transvaluing the more-or-less unquestioned pre-suppositions, values, and myths embodied within a corpus of the quasi-foundational Indian puranic literature (ancient Sanskrit epics): the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The following contemporary Indian rewritings have been chronologically discussed from the year 1981 to 2019. These postmodernist narratives challenge the former authoritative narratives by viewing the world of Indian mythology from a feminist vantage point. Some of the below given feminist rewritings discussed below are based on the character of Sita hailing from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. I have given references of all contemporary rewritings based on the character of Sita to articulate that her character is projected as an Indian female archetype that conforms to the gender stereotypes. It points to the fact that Valmiki in Treta Yuga through the character of Sita chalked out female stereotypes that Vyasa in Dwarpa Yuga also reiterated through Draupadi and other female characters of *Mahabharata*. My study contests this idea and brings back the Vedic concept of feminine self that is eclipsed by *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

2.8.1 *Feminist Fables (1981)*

Feminist Fables (1981) is a collection of feminist retellings in Indian mythology by Suniti Namjoshi. This book contains fables from Sanskrit and Greek mythology ranging from *Hansel and Gretel* to *Arabian Nights*. Namjoshi's tour-de-force fiction

compels the readers to re-examine the original phallocentric tales to reread them from a female perspective. The writer has implied a postmodernist technique of parodying to ridicule the arch-patriarchal thematic strands present in the fables. Namjoshi's feminist fables contest the idea of women accepting the cultural construct of the image of an Indian woman. Through her feminist renditions of the gender-biased patriarchal tales, she discards the male gaze by delineating femaleness, feminist and feminine aspects. In the *Feminist Fables* Namjoshi conveys: "What is needed then in for women to start reading as women"(Namjoshi). This text is replete with the feminist manifestations and can be regarded as a "gyno-text" as it articulates the female experience unvoiced by Indian patriarchy.

2.8.2 The Great Indian Novel (1989)

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* published in 1989 is a renarrativization of the ancient Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Tharoor takes up two different plots that run side-by-side. He unfolds the anecdote of Indian independence imbuing fictive realm and mythology quite adroitly. *The Great Indian Novel* is a fictional account of Indian history and mythology—the *Mahabharata* and British Indian politics. These two different accounts of history flow alongside each other. This novel is a fusion of different genres of literature such as epic, sonnet, novel and the folk tales that is one of the features of postmodern fiction. Tharoor's masterpiece is a historiographic metafiction which uses intertextuality to allude to the Indian mythological realm. He reinterprets and appropriates the version of Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. He deviates from the Brahmanical accretive epic and reclaims it from a secularist-liberal agenda. Under the influence of *The Postmodern Condition*, Indian writers like Shashi Tharoor produced the postmodernist rewriting of the *Mahabharata* in the form of *The Great Indian Novel*.

2.8.3 After Kurukshetra (2005)

After Kurukshetra is a collection of three short stories including *Draupadi* by Mahasweta Devi (originally written in Bengali) published in the year 2005. All three short stories revolve around the victims of the Kurukshetra War that happens in the end of Vyasa's epic, the *Mahabharata*. These victims of the war are women who have been

forgotten by everyone in the original version of the epic. Devi takes to surface the plight of the ordinary women who suffered a big deal in the war through her feminist retellings. Among the collection of three short stories, the first story *The Five Women* chronicles the story of five lower-caste war widows who are brought to serve the pregnant widow of Abhimanyu. The second story entitled *Souvali* tells the story of an ordinary woman who is employed to serve Dhritrarashtra. The story records the reaction of a lower-caste woman to his death. Mahasweta Devi, through her feminist rewritings, has eclipsed the bravery of the so-called mythological heroes and their supposed heroics; instead, these stories come up with a strong feminist agenda. Devi has voiced the dispossessed and the disenfranchised women victims of the Great War of Kurukshetra.

2.8.4 Sita's Ramayana (2011)

The *Ramayana* is an epic poem written by a Hindu sage Valmiki in ancient Sanskrit around 300 BC. It is an allegorical story that contains Hindu teachings. It exerts a great influence on Indian culture like Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Indian men and women are appreciated to have the virtues of the two main characters of the epic, Rama and Sita. However, Valmiki's *Ramayana* foregrounds androcentric vision that totally hushes up the female perspective. Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana* published in the year 2011 brings forth the perspective of Sita who is the narrator of this novel. Quite opposite to the Valmiki's version of *Ramayana* where Valmiki projects stereotype of the 'Bharatiya Nari' (Indian woman) through the character of Sita who remains a puppet in the hand of patriarchy, Arni comes up with Sita's perspective. Instead of projecting Sita as Rama's wife, Arni focuses on her own identity as Daughter of the Earth who is capable of making choices in her life. The novel manages to situate Sita's character from periphery to the centre. Arni's rewriting of the *Ramayana* questions patriarchy and the injustices meted out by the Rama Rajya on women, specifically Sita.

2.8.5 Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana (2013)

Sita: An Illustrate Retelling of the Ramayana is a feminist retelling by Devdutt Pattanaik which got published in the year 2013. The question arises that there are so many rewritings of *Ramayana* from Sita's vantage point so how is this contemporary

rendition of the respective epic different. Pattanaik's Sita celebrates her womanhood in the novel instead of crying, wailing and conforming to the societal norms. She behaves like a goddess who has had an abnormal birth, as she is the daughter of goddess Bhoomi; she is born out of the Earth. Pattanaik deciphers her character as a warrior princess who knows how to survive in a patriarchal world where there is no place for an ordinary woman. She is projected as an independent woman who does not rely on men. In the original version of *Ramayana*, Sita is a clichéd stereotype who embraces patriarchy without any complain. However, Pattanaik has reconstructed this image of Sita as a true Bharatiya Nari. He has focused on the *Uttara Ramayana* (the later part of *Ramayana*) where Sita when asked to pass a fire ordeal, accepts and goes through it and after passing the acid test decides to invoke her mother to take her back to where she belongs to without listening to her husband, Rama. This speaks volumes about Sita's courage and self-respect that she instead chooses to abandon her husband who has doubts about her character and who considers her unchaste as she spends months in Ravan's Ashok Vatika.

2.8.6 Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen (2014)

Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen is a novel by Kavita Kane published in the year 2014. This contemporary text is a feminist rewriting of *Mahabharata* from a less known character of the epic, Uruvi, the second wife of Karna[40]. Vyasa in *Mahabharata* has only projected the female characters in supporting roles with the heroic warriors. However, Kane's novel unleashes the story of Uruvi as a famous princess who prefers to marry Suta Putra (charioteer's son), Karna, over the great warrior of Bharat, Arjuna, whereas in the original version of the epic Arjuna is not rejected by any princess. The renarrativization of *Mahabharata* from Uruvi's perspective shows the power of femininity. After her parents' refusal of getting married to a pariah, she throws tantrums and remains fierce in her decision that makes them accept Karna as their son-in-law. Kane touches upon sensitive events that happened in *Mahabharata* and builds her plot on those incidents. For instance, when Karna ridicules Draupadi in Kaurava court, Uruvi

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[40]Karna (Sanskrit: कर्ण), also known as Vasusena, Anga-raja, and Radheya, is one of the major characters in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. He is the spiritual son of Surya (the Sun deity) and princess Kunti (later the Pandu's queen).

leaves for her father's palace not withstanding Draupadi's insult by Karna. Uruvi is an embodiment of female subversiveness who never accepts wrongdoings even if she has to face serious consequences for it.

2.8.7 Sita's Sister (2014)

Kavita Kane's novel *Sita's Sister* published in 2014 is based on the narrative of Lakshmana, the younger brother of Rama, who leaves Urmila, Sita's sister, to live in exile with Rama in the forest for 14 long years neglecting his wife. Urmila is one of the most overlooked female characters of *Ramayana* where Valmiki does highlight her character. *Ramayana* is considered to be a text showcasing Hindu teachings. However, the concept of dharma (code of righteousness) seems to be subjective as men in the epic can do away with it. A wife's dharma is to serve her husband and so is vice versa. Lakshmana could have taken Urmila to the forest, had he been a bit considerate about her. Kane not only depicts Urmila in the novel at length but also talks about the other unexplored female characters too. This feminist rendering of *Ramayana* unfolds the minute details about the princess of Mithila who later on becomes the wife of Lakshmana and sacrifices for her husband for fourteen long years. Kane, through her narrative, has bluntly spoken that those who remain in the background are as important as those who hog the limelight.

2.8.8 The Liberation of Sita (2016)

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* is a novel based on the innermost echelons of Sita's thought process published in the year 2016. Volga's version of *Ramayana* is purely based on a woman's perspective and her reactions to the patriarchal society. Volga writes in Telgu and this novel is a translation in English. Telgu literature, in India, has had a thoughtful tradition of questioning mythology that is the reason why Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* does not temper with the original *Ramayana*. This novel explores the world of Sita and also takes to surface the idea of 'sisterhood' where Sita empathizes with the woes of often misunderstood female characters of *Ramayana* such as Ahalya, Surpnakha, Renuka Devi and Urmila. Surpnakha, for instance, is projected in Valmiki's version of *Ramayana* as a wicked, ugly woman from the clan of demons and Sita

criticises her severely in the epic. Contrarily, in *The Liberation of Sita*, Sita is empathetic towards her and teaches her that real beauty is the beauty of character and she should self-actualize to curb her insecurities. Volga criticises the role of men being the flag bearers of dharma through Sita's interactions with the abovementioned subversive women. All layers of Sita's character have been exhausted in this feminist retelling where, in the end, Sita comes to terms with her real identity when she says: "I am the daughter of the Earth, Rama. I have realized who I am. The whole universe belongs to me. I don't lack anything. I am the daughter of the Earth (130)".

2.8.9 Abhaya: The Legend of Diwali (2016)

Abhaya is a novel written by Saiswaroopa Iyer that belongs to a mytho-fantasy genre and got published in the year 2016. The story is deeply connected to the subplot of *Mahabharata*; however, there is only a passing reference of Abhaya in puranic tradition. Iyer breathes out breath into the character of Abhaya who is princess of Anagha. She has put all manly traits into Abhaya's character such as feistiness, fearlessness, fighting for the good cause and excellent administration. If we talk about these traits, Vyasa projects all these abovementioned traits in the male characters like Bheeshma, Arjuna, Bheem, and Karna so on and so forth. However, female characters are supportive, fragile, chaste and submissive. In the given context, Iyer's *Abhaya* stands-out in terms of raising the feminine voice beyond the cliché of gender stereotyping. Abhaya is a story of a woman preserving dharma and fighting all odds like a fighter when her kingdom suffers attacks from neighbouring rulers. In *Mahabharata*, the rhetoric of preserving dharma always comes from male chauvinism. In this renarrativization of the original epic, Iyer breaks all stereotypes and delineates that *Shakti* (the power) is a symbol of femininity. Abhaya is projected as Shakti who has potential like heroic male characters of the *Mahabharata* to look into the eyes of adversity and cope up with challenges.

2.8.10 The Kaunteyas (2016)

The Kaunteyas is a feminist rewriting of the *Mahabharata* from Kunti's (mother of the five Pandava brothers and of Karna) perspective penned by Madhavi S. Mahadevan and got published in the year 2016. The *Mahabharata* does not showcase her

viewpoint; only those of the men dominating her life—namely father, husband and sons. Mahadevan delves deep into Kunti's character to the dark recesses of her mind by seeping into minute details of her life. Kunti, as a woman, is explored in the novel. She is one of the most misunderstood female characters in the *Mahabharata*. She is seen as a headstrong and vain character. Contrarily, Mahadevan's retelling answers the queries of what shaped Kunti throughout her life and marks her presence in the epic as a well-defined personality. What is more, Mahadevan's Kunti celebrates womanhood and has a sharp intellect. In the prologue section of this novel, it is stated: "Men's stories are the bones of a bygone age, sanctified as relics, preserved in stone. Women's stories are written in water" (2).

2.8.11 *Lanka's Princess (2017)*

Kavita Kane's feminist rendition of *Ramayana*, *Lanka's Princess* is a feminist renarrativization of the epic from Surpnakha that got published in 2017. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Surpnakha is the sister of Ravana who abducts Rama's wife, Sita. Surpnakha, being a demon, is ugly and wants to gratify her sexual needs so she comes across Rama and his brother Lakshmana. However, Lakshmana cuts her nose that infuriates her and then she goes to Ravana and complains about Rama and his brother. On the other hand, Kane's narrative attempts to humanize the demonic Surpnakha. In an interview Kane is reported to have said: "I was curious about Surpnakha, and I wanted to see how as a writer, I could handle her. I needed to understand why there was so much negativity around her" (Kane 5). This narrative throws light on the difficult life of Surpnakha. Since her childhood, she gets rejections for being an ugly and useless being. Moreover, she is neglected by her family and is overshadowed by her brothers. The simmering angst and bitterness in her character comes out of her inner most desire to take revenge, even at the cost of those few she loves. Kane's novel explores different layers of her character by stirring the emotions of sympathy in the readers.

2.8.12 *Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017)*

Amish Tripathi's magnum-opus work, *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* was published in 2017 that reflects on Sita's character as a warrior. There are innumerable feminist

rewritings based on Sita's character but Tripathi's Sita stands out among others. He does not delineate her character as a duty-bound woman. Contrary to the popular image of Sita, he locates her as a warrior who is the preserver of dharma. He mentions her struggles as a warrior in her homeland, Mithila. It should be taken into account that Indian puranic literature does not mention of any woman aspiring to become a great warrior, while in Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila*, his tour-de-force text, he showcases her qualities as a leader and a warrior that is quite unique and adds to the feminist stream of rewritings.

2.8.13 *The Forest of Enchantment*s (2019)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a well-known author of mythological fiction. Her recent book, *The Forest of Enchantments* published in the year 2019 narrates the story of Ram from his wife's perspective. This novel is a critical reassessment of the Sanskrit epic penned by Valmiki. The start of the novel is quite interesting as it sets the feminist tone. Sita, who now lives with her two sons: Luv and Kush abandoned by Ram, is handed over a tome by Valmiki where the whole story of *Ramayana* is written. Sita does not accept this version and says to Valmiki that his version has failed to chronicle her experiences, sacrifices and pathos. Therefore, Valmiki decides that she should tell her own story. Sita, in Chitra Banerjee's version, does not succumb to the faith of being pushed to the fringes and viciously maligned throughout history. Moreover, Divakaruni does not allow her as a narrator to be wronged in her interpretations of on the basis of her personal grudges. Sita of *The Forest of Enchantments* is devoid of meekness and filled with benevolence.

2.8.14 *Bhumika: A Story of Sita (2019)*

Aditya Iyenger's *Bhumika: A Story of Sita* was published in the year 2019. In this novel, Iyenger takes a fresh and contemporary perspective to decode Sita's character. *Bhumika* throws light on a supposition that what if Sita had not met Rama. The title of the novel unfolds that the writers in more interested in her maidenhood than to her marriage life, as the maiden name of Sita is Bhumika, one who is born out of the Earth. Iyenger's Sita is a feminist subversive who believes in standing up for herself by taking responsibility for her actions and dares to make choices incoherent with the social norms.

In addition, in this feminist rendition Sita speaks out that it is not necessary for a woman to have a man in her life to complete her. On the other hand, she is shown as a princess with follies and foibles and scepticism. Through her habit of raising questions, Iyenger turns this retelling into a thought provoking situation where the readers are forced to question the patriarchy. In addition to the character of Sita, Ram is projected as an individual who can only see a situation in white and black and being totally oblivious of the grey space in-between. In a nut shell, this novel deduces that gender parity is the only panacea in order to mitigate the menace of patriarchy.

The abovementioned feminist renarrativizations of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* mark a new beginning of subverting the social norms that plagues the existence of women in India. The abovementioned rewritings based on Sita's character have been included in this study keeping in view the idea that in India Sita is the true reflection of a pativrata 'Bharatiya Nari'. Moreover, Valmiki, through the character of Sita has come up with female stereotypes in the Treta Yuga that, later on, seeped into the phallogocentric metanarratives of Dwarpa Yuga eclipsing *Vedic* concept of feminine self. Since this research is interweaved on the analysis of three selected novels, projecting Draupadi as a protagonist, Pratibha Ray's: *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chita Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, so the following section takes into perspective different yugas that highlight that gender disparity marginalized women in Indian history.

2.9A Journey of Hindu Women from *Shakti* to *Sati*

Women in Indian art and culture have been described as having two totally contrasting aspects. In some landscapes of India, a woman is worshipped as the mother great goddess (Devi), as Primal Energy (Shakti), as Nature (Prakriti) and as a boon-giver who can slay the mighty demons (the Asuras). The other aspect is that of a domestic handmaiden working for endless hours in the house, yet trailing behind men in all walks of life (Ramanujan 4).

2.9.1 Women in Satya Yuga(Vedic Era)

The chequered Indian history unfolds the matriarchal basis of Indian culture. Ancient religious text of Hindus—the *Vedas* reveal the matriarchal base of Aryan and local Dravidian aboriginal cultures (Vinay 29).The classical texts highlight the role of women as divine, maternal, and saintly. Women as divine maternal appear in the Sanskrit scriptural *Vedas* (1600-300 BCE).*Vedas* compare god's purity to a mortal woman. Hindus regard *Veda* (Books of Knowledge) as a revelation (shruti). The *Rig Veda* hymnal (samhita) stems from the early era near the Indus. The *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva Vedas* were composed on the Ganges plain in the later Vedic period. Hindu women, in the Vedic era, enjoyed an honourable place in the society. Wife, dharampatni, was considered the mistress of the household and authority over the slaves. *Rigveda* mentions: "The home has, verily, its foundation in the wife" (311). A woman was permitted to participate in all religious ceremonies. Sati was not practised in this era. Moreover, girls had equal chance to get education; unlike the post-Vedic eras. The *Rigveda* mentions the names of some of the women intellectuals like Apala, Ghosa and Viswavara who composed hymns and attained the rank of Rishikas[41] (Smita 6). Girls got married post puberty. The practice of Swayamvara was also prevalent in the society where a girl was given an opportunity to marry out of her choice. What is more, monogamy was a usual practice. But polygamy was also practised in the upper strata of that society. Remarriage of a widow was also permitted (Smita 6).

Women were socially as well as economically emancipated in the Vedic era. A. S. Altekar, a Hindu historian, has mentioned in his book entitled, *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* that the high position of women during the Vedic era was because they took an active part in agriculture and the manufacture of cloth, bows and arrows, and other war materials. The book suggests that women being productive members of the society had earned them high standing in the Vedic society (36). Moreover, women's contribution to production had made them economically independent.

Tracing the status of women in society and economy of the then time cannot be completed without taking into perspective the religious aspect that how religion treated

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[41] Rishikas are female sages.

women. *Vedas*, the most authentic text according to the Hindus, in *Rig-Veda* and *Athurva Veda* exalt the feminine divine as Devi. Therefore, the local cult for the feminine divine turned into the tradition of Devi worshipping in India. In a hymn in *Rigveda*, it is written:

Aditi[42] is the heaven, Aditi is mid air,

> Aditi is the mother and the sire and the son
>
> Aditi is all gods, Aditi five classed men,
>
> Aditi all that has been born and shall be born (21)

This hymn discusses the highly-elevated role of the female divine (Devi). Here Aditi refers to Durga, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Kali. *Rigveda* documents the Hindu goddesses. Furthermore, the popular Hindu goddesses are believed to have taken shape in the Vedic era. These female goddesses represent different feminine qualities and energies. For instance, goddess Kali portrays the destructive energy, Durga the protective, Saraswati the creative and Lakshmi the nourishing (Doniger 277).Hinduism recognizes both the masculine and the feminine attributes of the Divine, and without honouring the feminine aspects, a Hindu cannot claim to know God in his entirety. It is pertinent to quote a concept in Hinduism called Ardhanarishvara[43]. This concept represents the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe (Purusha and Prakriti) and explicates how Shakti, the female principle of God, is inseparable from Shiva, the male principle of god (Anurag 2). They are described as chaste women and matrons in the hymns of *Rigveda*. Moreover, in the *Rigvedic* part of the *Vedas*, it is underscored that Vedic women used to express their sexual desire candidly. It chronicles the incidences in the lives of different goddesses where they enjoy a strong will. For instance, in *Rigveda*, Nymph Urvashi's account is given who ridicules Pururavas, her husband, for impotency and his inability to perform in bed (Doniger 451). Furthermore, it is mentioned in the Rigveda, "...even if a wife is quarrelsome, unclean, has left home, is raped or abducted by the thieves, she may not be abandoned and he who speaks harshly to his wife has to fast and expiate for it" (677). This highlights the elated status of women

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[42] Aditi is the goddess of eternity.
[43] The Ardhanarishvara is a composite form of Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati that is a combination of the masculine and the feminine attributes of the Divine.

underscored in the *Vedas*. *Rigveda* also mentioned women warriors: Mudgalini and Vishpala where Mudgalini wins the war and Vishpala loses her leg. Moreover, two other female warriors—Vadhrimati and Saisysai are also mentioned in the text for their heroism in the battlefield. In the same vein, the Rigveda also mentions several rishikas (the women saints), such as Ghosa, Kakhivati Surya Savitri, Indrani, Shradha Kamayani, Yami Shachi, Poulomi and Urvashi (Anurag 4). These instances presuppose some measure of freedom and equality enjoyed by women in the Vedic era. It also establishes the fact that women were not only destined to marry and to procreate, they had other options too.

On the contrary, the Indian culture in the post-Vedic eras underwent a paradigm shift in terms of gender equality, as the post-Vedic culture, the ancient Sanskrit epics: the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, *Dharmashastras* (religious texts), misogynistic social practices (Sati, Jauhar, self-abnegation as compulsion for widows and Devdasi culture) were instrumental in creating a woman-oppressive and patriarchal society that is still prevalent in India (Gupta 5). Slowly but surely women were relegated to the domestic chores and confined to the inner apartments in the post-Vedic eras.

2.9.2 Women in Treta Yuga

In order to trace out the status of women in Treta Yuga, it is important to dig into history so that all social, political and economic attendant forces can be analyzed that led to the marginalization of the female gender. Vedic society, as mentioned above, was flexible and less conservative. However, in epochs that followed Vedic Age: Treta Yuga, Dwarpa Yuga and Kali Yuga the status of women started declining.

Treta Yuga, according to Hinduism, is the second of the four Yugas—ages of mankind. It follows Satya Yuga and is followed by Dwapara Yuga and Kali Yuga. In Sanskrit, Treta means 'a collection of three things'. It is known as Treta Yuga because during this period, there were three Avatars of Vishnu as Vamana, Parashurama and Rama. There is also a possibility that the name could also be derived from the fact that Treta Yuga lasted 3600 divine years. According to Hinduism, the bull of dharma symbolises that morality stood on three legs during this period, as it had all four legs in

the Satya Yuga (Rajeev 11). This hints to the fact that how slowly but surely moral degradation took place affecting gender equation as well.

Literature is the true reflection of life that helps readers to come to terms with the time and space of the authors writing in a specific frame of time. Valmiki wrote *Ramayana* in Treta Yuga chronicling the life of Ram, one of the Avatars of Vishnu. *Ramayana* is a journey of Ram in the forest where he loses his wife, Sita, who gets abducted by Ravana—the king of demons. Ram wages a war against the mighty demons and rescues Sita. However, Ram gets suspicious and asks her to prove her chastity through the fire-ordeal. She comes out of the fire proving her chastity. The Sanskrit epic not only just brings the characters of *Ramayana* to the limelight but also reflects on the socio-political and economic situation of that epoch. Delving deep into the intricate mosaic of the epic, through the archetypal portrayal of Sita as an ideal Indian woman who is chaste and submissive, it is easy to analyze that Valmiki's stereotyping of Sita as a pativrata woman is an imposition of patriarchal gendered norms (Rajeev 5). Moreover, the phallogocentric language of the epic is such that it does not allow a female perspective to peep out. Valmiki highlights this proposition throughout the epic that men are the saviours of the world and women their inferiors. Ram is projected as a noble warrior, whereas Sita is the ideal wife who has no identity of her own. She is depicted as a woman who follows the patriarchal norms religiously (Abhas 9). *Ramayana* delineates, at length, Sita as an ideal woman who is coy, demure, self-sacrificing for her family, giving up her dreams and aspirations, has no opinion, and is denied agency at every level. Sadly, this image of an ideal woman continues to exist in contemporary India. Most often women in India are expected to conform to these ideals and values and the moment they challenge the culture of patriarchy, they are treated as potential threats to the society as evil force responsible for destroying the cultural fabric (Das 24).

With Valmiki's *Ramayana*, it is pertinent to mention Kalidas[44] who wrote a classical Sanskrit play *Shakuntala*[45]. *Shakuntala* is the best manifestation of the paralytic patriarchal legacy in Treta Yuga. The heroine of the play—Shakuntala appears as an oppressive victim of male chauvinism. Deconstructing the play with a feminist lens

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[44] Kalidas was a classical Sanskrit playwright writing of Treta Yuga.
[45] Kalidas wrote this magnum-opus play that chronicles the life of Shakuntala.

highlights the centralization of patriarchal power and authority. *Shakuntala* is a mythical play that presents the stereotypical representation of an ideal Indian woman in the form of its heroine. The narrative of the play revolves around Shakuntala, the protagonist of the play. She is the daughter of the sage Vishwamitra and the apsara Mehnaka. Abandoned at birth by her parents, she is reared up in the secluded hermitage of sage Kanva. Detailed and stereotypical account of her   King Dushyanta visits the hermitage where he chanced on Shakuntala. After Dushyanta marries Shakuntala, even then she has to stay in the hermitage, as the king has to return back to take care of affairs in the capital. One day sage Durvasa visits the hermitage where he finds Shakuntala lost in her thoughts. He curses her by bewitching Dushyanta into forgetting her existence, for she fails to attend to him. The only cure is for Shakuntala to show the king the ring that he gave her. However, she loses the ring and all her hopes dash down to ground. With the stroke of luck, in the end of the play, Dushyanta finds the ring and reunites with Shakuntala and their son Bharata. Kalidas's portrayal of Shakuntala reiterates the idea that an ideal Indian woman is all enduring, mute and submissive. She falls prey to the masculine oppression in the play. The concept of ideal womanhood is projected in the play through Shakuntala who is shown as timid and loyal. Dushyanta says in the play: "Hermit girls are by their very nature timid and loyal" (Kalidas 33). In Act-5 of the play, sage Durvasa mentions, "Husband has power for good or ill over a woman's life" (49). This excerpt speaks volumes about the stereotyping of women in the then time and the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. Kalidas's masterpiece—*Shakuntala* also points to the fact that the classical Sanskrit literary tradition insists on defining Indian women as historically mute and socially oppressed subaltern subject under the patriarchal supervision (Bhimla 7). The patriarchal social order set in Treta Yuga is extensively projected in *Shakuntala*.

Apart from literature written in Treta Yuga, there were social, political and economic factors too that are responsible for the marginalization of women. Post-Vedic age was not women's age. It is supposedly the 'dark age' for women. Woman was considered as the sole property of her father, brother or husband and she had no will of her own. Moreover, economically women were dependent on men in every way. However, The Hindus, a book on Indian culture highlights the fact that only women from the lower strata were considered as economically independent as they worked with men

to earn their livelihood (Doniger 344). Other than that, women hailing from higher castes like Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya were not given any opportunity to gain economic emancipation. In the same vein, politically women were only considered as ploys for their fathers. Whenever a king wanted strong allies with the neighboring states, he would get her daughter married to the king. The practice of swayamvara was also seen as a political strategy where princesses were offered to the mighty kings just to gain strong allies. Women had no say in politics, as they were considered fickle-minded. In kingdoms, queens were merely dummies who only sang to the tunes of their kings (Doniger 344). Holistically, women of Treta Yuga became victims of patriarchy. Unlike Satya Yuga, women lost their status and it got deteriorated with literary stereotyping, social, political and economic factors that contributed to their degraded status in India.

2.9.3 Women in Dwarpa Yuga

The Dwarpa Yuga is the third out of four Yugas, or ages, described in the scriptures of Hinduism. Dwapara in Sanskrit literally means "two-head", that is, something in the third place. The Dvapara Yuga follows the Treta Yuga and precedes the Kali Yuga. According to the Puranas, this Yuga ended at the moment when Krishna returned to his eternal abode of Vaikuntha. According to the *Bhagavata Puranas*, the Dvapara Yuga lasts 864,000 years or 2400 divine years.

Many important religious texts were written in this period that includes the *Shastras*[46] such as *Manusmriti*[47], the *Yajnavalkyasmriti*[48], and the *Naradasmriti*[49], as well as treaties of administration such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra*[50], and *Nibahndhe*[51]. These

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[46]*Smriti* (स्मृतिI) means "that which is remembered" are a body of Hindu texts usually attributed to an author, traditionally written down, in contrast to *Śrutis* (the *Vedic* literature) considered authorless, that were transmitted verbally across the generations and fixed.

[47] The *Manusmriti* (मनुस्मृति) is an ancient legal text among many *Dharamashastras* of Hinduism. It presents itself as a discourse given by Manu on dharma that includes duties, rights, laws and conducts.
[48]*Yajnavalkyasmriti* (स्मृतिI)) is one of the many Dharma related texts composed in Sanskrit. It reflects on moral codes.
[49]*Naradasmriti* is the part of Hindu *Dharamashastras* relating to the topic of dharma.

[50] The *Arthashastra* (मनुस्मृति) is an ancient Indian Sanskrit treaty on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy.

texts pruned the responsibilities of women and gave them a secondary status in the society. Patriarchy dominated the Indian society and women were considered as despicable objects (Ramanujan 22). *Manusmriti* or *Manava Dharmashastra* finds eminence in Dwarpa Yuga. According to Ashok, a Hindu scholar, this Smriti was penned down in Dwapara Yuga (43). It has remained influential in determining the structure and function of Indian society. *Manusmriti*, as a document interpreting Hinduism, is upheld as the ultimate guide to lead a moral life, the digression of which can be treated with serious negative sanctions. Mohan Das, a Sanskrit scholar, opines that *Manusmriti* has been singlehandedly responsible for the derogatory position accorded to women in Dwapara Yuga that continues to impact up to Kali Yuga. *Manusmriti* dictates stringent laws for Hindu women. The text cautions the society to guard and control women because they are malicious creatures (Bulhar 22). Instances from *Manusmriti* highlight that women are inferior to men. Vilification of women has been highlighted by projecting a woman as dependent and vile creature requiring constant protection and guidance initially by the father or brother and later by the husband and son (151). Moreover, the unabashed elevation of the patriarchal values is shown in the fact that Brahmins have been instructed not to accept food from a woman without a husband (Bulhar 178). Unmarried menstruating women are mentioned in the Smriti as a threat to the social equilibrium and a source of religious pollution (Bhimla 200). Furthermore, it is also underscored in the text that, "In season and out of season, in this world and in the next world, the husband who performed the marriage consecration with ritual formulas always gives happiness to a woman. Though he maybe bereft of virtue, given to lust and totally devoid of good qualities, a good woman should always worship her husband like a god" (Bhimla 277). Surprisingly, Indian society has wholeheartedly accepted the stringent and misogynistic laws of *Manusmriti* since Dwarpa Yuga. The inhuman perceptions of Manusmriti have not only tarnished the morality of women but also demeaned them to the status of a slave.

Along with the *Dharmashastras*, Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, penned down in Dwarpa Yuga, is considered as a structure upon which modern Indian society rests. The myth of the *Mahabharata* has enormously marked Hindu consciousness. It is composed in that

[51]*Nibahndhe* is a text reflecting on moral codes.

period of history that has left behind the age of matriarchal culture (Satya Yuga). *Mahabharata* paints a male chauvinistic society that praises male heroism and depicts the female characters in a supporting role.

Other than the *Smritis* (*Dharmashastras*, *Mahabharata*), Dwarpa Yuga's social norms and mores point to the fact that women were marginalized in all walks of life. Contrary to the social practices of the Vedic Age where women had a right to education, in Dwarpa Yuga education was not meant for women. They lost their right to education. Upanyan, a sacred thread ceremony, which was performed to initiate a person into *Vedic* studies, was prohibited in the case of women and shudras—the outcasts (Saikia 113).

The concept of child marriage also flourished in Dwarpa Yuga. It is mentioned in the *Shastras* that girls should be married before puberty or around the age of puberty. According to the sage Marichi, "A father who gives in a marriage a girl of eight attains heaven, the giver of a girl of the nine Vaikuntha, and one who gives his daughter before she reaches ten, attains Brahma Loka. The father of a girl who gets his daughter married after puberty goes straight to hell" (Usha 9). Hence, the social norms of Dwarpa Yuga expected that a girl should get married around the age of puberty otherwise it was considered social deviance. Thus, this evil practice of child marriage led to the subjugation of the female gender.

Apart from education and child marriages, the Hindu practice of Sati or Suttee was made a compulsion in this era. Sati is a practice in which a widow jumps into the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. It was a social ritual prescribed for the Hindu widows to show devotion to their deceased husbands (Doniger 298). In *Mahabharata*, Madri, the wife of King Pandu, self-immolated herself after the death of her husband. Furthermore, Krishna's five wives also committed Sati in Hastinapur after receiving news of his death. Many Hindu texts written in Dwarpa Yuga mention sati as the duty of women. Furthermore, *Brahmo Purana* also highlights that a woman's highest duty is to immolate herself after the husband (Seth 12). *Vishnusmriti*, for instance, gives two choices to a widow, "If a woman's husband dies, let her lead a life of chastity, or else mount her husband's pyre" (14).

In post *Vedic* age, *Shastras* and *Puranas* dictated the widow how to spend life after her husband's death. If a widow chooses to stay alive and not commit sati then the *Shastras* compel her to live in self-abnegation. According to the *Shastras*, "At her pleasure (after the death of her husband), let her emaciate her body by living only on pure flowers, roots of vegetables and fruits. She must not even mention any man's name after her husband's death" (Radhakrishna 422). When a woman becomes a widow, widowing ceremony takes place that is outrageous. No sooner than a man dies, senior widows come and smudge vermilion dot. Moreover, they smash all types of bangles, offload all jewellery, shave her head and ask the newly widowed woman to wear stark white sari by abandoning colourful attires. This ritual is still followed in the interior of India like Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Utter Pradesh (Meena 3). In 2005, Deepa Mehta, Indian-Canadian filmmaker, has made a film titled *Water* based on the plight of widows in India that resulted in protest and death threats from groups connected to BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) The right-wing Hindu extremist party, the BJP, believed that the core content of Deepa Mehta's film is blasphemous and she is misrepresenting Hinduism in the world through her films. The film brings into perspective the age old misogynistic Hindu norms, attached to widowed Hindu women, by subverting and countering *Manusmriti* that says, *"*A widow should be long suffering until death, self-restrained and chaste.A virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband has died goes to heaven. A woman who is unfaithful to her husband is reborn in the womb of a jackal" (211). Furthermore, the film also considers another proposition from Manusmriti that, "The scriptures say that a widow has three options: marry your husband's younger, burn with your dead husband (Sati), or lead a life of self-denial" (213). Mehta brings forth Gandhi's perspective that, "Widows should not live a life of self denial. They should get married and live their lives according to their whims and wishes" (Mehta 5). Water discards the ill-treatment spared for widowed women through eight-year-old widowed girl, Chuhiya, who remains headstrong and does not give in. Through this film, Mehta has made a mark by calling a spade a spade and articulating a strong female perspective against misogyny in India. Though these practices were more relevant until Dwarpa Yuga, however, widow ashrams (hostels) still continue to exist treating the widows inhumanly and pushing the disenfranchised widows into prostitution to earn their living. It begs a serious question

that women, who were equated with goddesses in the Vedic era, had been subjected to such an inhuman treatment in the name of religion.

Like Sati and the misogynistic laws for widows, the cult of Devdasi also victimized women in Dwarpa Yuga and continues to exist in Kali Yuga. The literal meaning of Devdasi or Devaradiyar is "servant of God". Devdasi is a woman who is considered given in marriage to God. She serves a temple all her life. The Devadasi practice has been a part of the Hindu society for centuries. The process of dedicating a Devadasi to the god involves a traditional ceremony and is performed before the girl hits puberty. After the ritual she is considered married to the deity and is not allowed to marry a mortal for the rest of her life. In Dwapara Yuga, Devdasis were nothing more than sex slaves dedicated to temples. The first known mention of a Devdasi is to a girl named Amrapali in the time of the Buddha. In words of Nandita Das, a luminary Indian actress, "Devdasis are actually prostitutes of God as they are given to the temples in the name of God but in reality they have to gratify the carnal desires of the Brahmin pundits" (Das 6). Das paints a real picture by calling Devdasis as prostitutes. In contemporary India, Devdasis still exist in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa. Sarah Haris, an Independent journalist, made a documentary titled *Prostitutes of God* about temple prostitutes in south India in 2011. The prostitutes of the temple hail from the same Devdasi culture mentioned above. In the documentary, Haris goes travels to the remote villages of and towns of Southern India to unleash an ancient system of religious sex slavery dating back to the Dwarpa Yuga. She reflects on the hypocrisy involved in this practice, where a girl is considered given to god and then men ranging from pundits to farmers can use her body to gratify their sexual urge. Karnataka, a city in south India, is known for the Devdasi cult. Prostitutes of God highlights that this practice is still a living phenomenon.

2.9.4 Women in Kali Yuga

In Hinduism, Kali Yuga 'Age of Kali' is the last of the four stages the world goes through as part of a 'cycle of yugas' described in the Sanskrit scriptures. The "Kali" of Kali Yuga means "strife", "discord", "quarrel" or "contention" (Bali 9). Surya Sidhanta, a Hindu scholar, holds that Kali Yuga began on 18th February 3102 BCE. Hindu scholars

believe that the last of the four yugas began with Krishna's return to Vaikuntha[52]. This information is placed at the temple of Bhalkha. Hindus believe that human civilization degenerates spiritually during the Kali Yuga. Moreover, Hindu mythology also projects dharma as a bull. It is believed that in Satya Yuga this bull had four legs; however, by the age of Kali Yuga, the bull of dharma has only one leg. This instability/imbalance points to the moral imbalance of Indian righteousness.

In the same way, the status of women in the Kali Yuga, the post-Vedic era, has further degraded. Kali Yuga retained the same patriarchal worldview. The social norms and practices that made women victims of oppressive patriarchy seep into this era as well. For instance, child marriages, depriving girls from getting education, inhuman treatment with the widows, cult of Devdasi culture, and Sati remained in place as it was in Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga. What is more, the toxic version of patriarchy that nurtured in this era became the root cause of rape, honour killing, murder and domestic violence. As like other yugas, this era spans many centuries and is still going on; therefore, holistically analyzing the position of women in social, political and economic spheres, the researcher has to decipher it by digging deep into Indian history starting from the time Krishna left the earth till date.

Historically speaking, the beginning of Kali Yuga saw agrarian society in the making. The elite and middle classes solely banked on the farmers for the supply of wheat. That meant that women of the upper classes did not have to help their men in harvesting as they were consumers; consequently, they had to remain in the four walls of their houses. On the contrary, the poor women helping their men in the fields were more empowered than those of wealthy backgrounds (Vinay 90). In fact, working the field with men was an advantage for the working women in the agrarian setups. Economically emancipated, these women had an advantage over the women from the higher castes and classes. Behavioural norms were set for women hailing from wealthy backgrounds and they were supposed to adhere to the norms strictly. In addition, those who dared to violate these norms were given humiliating punishments.

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[52] Vaikuntha is heavenly abode where gods dwell.

In the same way, Swayamvara, as a practice, had become a totally rigid practice where, like Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga, women were given to the kings for political gains. However, if Satya Yuga is taken into perspective then it was a woman's choice to marry a man. According to Vinay Lal, a Hindu historian, Swayamvara became a political ground to settle down feuds (17). This led to further degradation of women as they were deprived of freedom to choose their bridegrooms. As the time elapsed, patriarchy became the order of the day.

When it comes to Indian politics, there are instances in Kali Yuga where women enjoyed autonomy. For instance, *Chach Nama*[53] informs of a powerful queen, Subhana Devi who actually paved the way for the accession of Chach. Kalhan, in *Rajtaranganai*, also mentions a number of such women like Sughanda and Didhta where the latter ascended the throne direcly in 981 AD and dominated the politics of that time since her husband's death in 958 AD. Didhta caused a dynastic change in the Kashmiri politics. However, these women are exceptions who, mostly, derived power through lineage or some male agency. But in any case, there status is not a marker in comparison to the common women who were in a rather weak position.

The Hindu political scene changed with the Muslim Arab expansion in the 7th century. Muslim rulers established the Delhi Sultanate under the legacy of Qutb al-Din Aibak and Islamization of the Indian subcontinent took place imposing Islamic shariah in the newly invaded land. As far as women are concerned, with the acculturation of Islam and Hinduism, there are certain Islamic practices like purdah system that were adopted by Hindus as well. Vishvanatan, a contemporary Indian history, opines, "Purdah system introduced by the Muslim invaders further marginalized the women of medieval India" (17). However, the gendered history of India reveals some striking contrasts to the popular Hindu beliefs that Muslims in the subcontinent are solely responsible for the marginalization of the female gender, yet Razia Sultana, the only female ruler of Delhi, came to power as an empress of Delhi Sultanate in 1231. But Razia's ascension was challenged by a section of nobles. The increasing assertiveness of Razia Sultana and her manly ways brought insecurity to the then nobles and, as a result, she was overthrown.

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[53]*Chach Nama* is one of the main historical sources for the history of Sindh in the seventh to eighth centuries.

Sultana became the torchbearer for women empowerment in Indian subcontinent; nevertheless, her overthrown dashed down all hopes of gender parity to the ground. With the passage of time, the arrival of the Mughals from Central Asia further deteriorated the status of women. As aforementioned, the Delhi Sultanate imposed Islamic shariah on the inhabitants of the land that resulted in adoption of purdah system, so when the Mughals came and invaded Hindu kingdoms, the Hindu practice of Jauhar came to the forefront. Hindu women, in order to escape the fear of capture, enslavement and rape by the Mughals performed Jauhar—a Hindu practice of self-immolation of a group of women. Jats, Rohilas, Rajputs and Marathas still ruled some Hindu kingdoms in northern India. Nonetheless, eventually, Mughals conquered those small kingdoms too that led to Jauhar. Historically, this practice was observed in northwest regions of Rajasthan where Rajput women performed Jauhar after the siege of Chittor. Queen Padmavati along with 133 women jumped into a pit of fire in order to avoid being raped and captured by the Muslim invaders (Ujwala 41).

Along with the practices of Sati and Jauhar, there were other reasons too that further deteriorated the status of women in medieval India. Zahir ud-Din Muhammad Babur, who laid the foundation of Mughal Empire in India, asserts in his letters named as *Tuzk-e-Babri* (Baburnama) that, "the decline in women's status from the glorious Vedic age has to be linked to the growing popularity of the Krishna cult which included a certain grossness in the religion of Hindus. More significant in the long run is the tendency to explain the preference for sons over daughters in terms of the requirement of a son for the funeral rites" (46). The Brahmanical tradition that propped out in the post-Vedic eras made it a compulsion that only sons can perform the funeral rites.

Mughal Empire ended up with British colonization of the Indian subcontinent. Things started to change for the better during the British rule with many reformers who stepped up and tried to better the lives of women leading to a massive movement of reviving Vedic culture called the "Brahmo Samaj" initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828. Roy, who is known as the first feminist man in India, was an integral part of Vedic revivalist movement that sought to reclaim the elevated status of women as mentioned in the *Vedas*. Roy was a prominent member of the "Brahmo Samaj" who stood against

paralytic patriarchy in India in the 19th century. Here it is relevant to mention that British colonial laws were also working to root out the misogynistic Hindu practices like sati and widow celibacy. Bengal Regulation Act 1829 banned the practice of Sati on the suggestion of Sir Warley, a British Christian evangelist. In addition, Roy's Brahmo Samaj was also working for the same cause of rooting out these misogynistic practices in India. As I have already mentioned in the preceding yugas that widows could not remarry, so Lord Canning passed a law "the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act" in order to allow widowed women to remarry. This law was supported by Roy as well as by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Mahatma Gandhi) later in the very start of the 20th century.

Twentieth century in India saw huge changes in terms of Indian politics. India was struggling for independence from the British colonial rule. However, the plight of women remained the same despite the fact that many reformist movements worked to bring gender equality in India. Quite surprisingly, Sarojini Naidu, Congress spokesperson and a proponent of civil women's rights, reached the highest echelons of Congress. She supported women emancipation movements through her poetry and by using public platforms to endorse her ideas. However, these women were less in numbers and, in majority, common women were suffering in the hands of patriarchy. The struggle for independence ended up in partition of the Indian subcontinent into two halves: India and Pakistan. In the wake of partition, communal riots resulted in massive genocide. In addition, women on both sides, Pakistan and India, were kidnapped, raped, and murdered. The trauma caused by partition is beautifully described by Ismat Chughtai, an Urdu fiction writer, in the following words: "Those whose bodies were whole had hearts that were splintered. Families were torn apart . . . The bonds of human relationship were in tatters, and in the end many souls remained behind in Hindustan while their bodies started off for Pakistan" (Bhalla 189). In the same vein, Amrita Pritam, a Punjabi poetess, wrote a famous poem *Aj Akhan Waris Shah Nu* (*Today, I call Waris Shah*). The poem was written keeping in view the horrors of partition. In the poem, Pritam invokes Waris Shah, a historic Punjabi poet, who wrote a popular version of Punjabi love tragedy Heer Ranjha. The poem narrates the misery of women:

Today, I call Waris Shah,

Speak from inside your grave

And turn, today,

the book of love's next affectionate page

Once, one daughter of Punjab cried;

you wrote a wailing saga

Today, a million daughters,

cry to you, Waris Shah

Rise! O' narrator of the grieving;

rise! look at your Punjab

Today, fields are lined with corpses,

and blood fills the Chenab (Pritam 10)

Post-partition India was similar to pre-partition India for women, as violence against the 'other' gender continued and the status of women got further deteriorated. Domestic abuse, sexual assault, murder, female foeticide and mutilation of genitals are common forms of violence against women in India.

The injunctions above have deformed the status of women in post-Vedic eras to a great extent. The categorization as 'good' or 'defiled' has been established with unmistakable clarity in the abovementioned paragraphs.

2.10 A Case of *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* (1984) by Pratibha Ray

Written in the third person, *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* focuses most of its attention on events in the *Mahabharata* that directly involve or influence Draupadi. The novel focuses majorly on Draupadi's sexuality and intellectual growth rather than seeing her as merely an object of male desire or a transaction between males in a patriarchal world that has no exceptional woman like her. Particularly appealing are the descriptions of her relationship with each Pandava brother, and the nuanced representation of the sabha scene (court room scene) in Hastinapur, where the legal and the moral dilemmas of the episode are examined in telling detail. Without delving into the realms of speculative

fantasies, the novel is a skilful exploration of the inferiority of a female character, sensitively carried out by the Sahitya Academy Award winner writer. *Yajnaseni* is the story of almost every Indian woman. If we overlook the details of Draupadi having five husbands, Ray's interpretation of Draupadi is the struggle of many a woman caught in the stranglehold of patriarchal system where they are required to conform. In the first chapter of the novel Draupadi asserts; "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 ever suffer such abuse" (4).

Different researches have been done on Pratibha Ray's novel that foregrounds different aspects of the novel. Following are some research articles written on *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*. Anila Chandran, a PhD research scholar in Sree Sanakra University of Sanskrit, Kerala, discusses in her research article entitled, *A Present Voice from the Past: Revisionist Mythmaking in Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni* that the use of revision as a feminist strategy is significant to subvert the phallogocentric idealism incorporated in the great grand Indian epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. It can retrieve the female identity from the clutches of the oppressive phallogocentric language. Her article foregrounds Pratibha Ray's novel based on Draupadi. Chandran argues that Pratibha Ray has appropriated and assigned new meanings to unfold her character. Kaleidoscopically, she analyzes that how Pratibha Ray has revisioned, rewrote and retold the androcentric myths of *Mahabharata* from a female perspective. She further focalizes that Yajnaseni speaks for all the women who have lost their energies, power and creativity in the patriarchal Indian culture.

Bhavana Sharma, a research scholar in Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyala, argues in her research article, "*Mythic Re-vision of Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*" that for centuries the female identity in an Indian context can be traced through mythology and religion and the mythic stereotypes which define femininity have totally been engrossed in the Indian subconscious. Sharma states that Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* is an attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by making Draupadi as a mouthpiece in her contemporary

rendition of the epic. According to Sharma, Ray's Draupadi is an epitome of feminism who not only stands up for herself but also stands against the predispositions which women must need to adhere to. Sharma incorporates a feminist lens of Simon de Beauvoir: "Women have gained only what men have been willing to grant" (19). This research article reads the Ray's text from a feminist angle by implying Beauvoir's feminist theory.

Sunal Sharma, Assistant Professor in the Govt. Degree College, Samba, in her research article entitled, "*Rethinking the Mahabharata: A Study of Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni as a Feminist Foundational Text*", argues that Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* as a feminist foundational text re-narrates and re-orders Vyasa's *Mahabharata* from a feminist angel. The narrative, through a subversive character of Draupadi, challenges patriarchy and resists succumbing to the predispositions that women have to adhere to. Moreover, according to Sharma, Yajnaseni's insight also challenges the oft-quoted lines of *Manu Smriti* that a woman should not be left alone on their own and should be subjected to her father in her maidenhood, to her husband after marriage, and her sons in her old age. Sharma's research article only highlights the patriarchal injustices meted out on the character of Draupadi and how women have been suffering even in contemporary India in the hands of the misogynistic religious texts like *Manu Smriti*.

Lata Bhardwaj, a PhD Scholar, and Dr Swati Chauhan, an Associate Professor, of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, in their research article entitled, "*Feminism in Mahabharata: The Unheard Voice of Draupadi*" discuss the feminist contours of Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni. They argue that Draupadi is not only an important female character in the Mahabharata but she is also a crucial figure in the Indian culture too. Bhardwaj and Chauhan draw a parallel between Draupadi and the contemporary Indian women as women of Himachal Pradesh are also fated to polyandry even in the Kali Yuga where the unvoiced Draupadi's voice echoes. This research article only highlights the feminist terrains of the novel.

Silima Nanda, a research scholar in English from Indra Gandhi Open University, in her research article, "*Revolving Gender in Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni and Mahasweta*

Devi's Draupadi", writes about the gender discrimination which Draupadi faces in the original epic and how Mahasweta Devi and Pratibha Ray have redefined her character and project defiance from social norms. These texts trace out the trials and tribulations faced by Draupadi and how her story is lost in the grand saga of the *Mahabharata*. The article further argues that how in these contemporary rewritings Draupadi refuses to remain only as an object of male desire and asserts herself as a subject. Nanda argues that the plight of woman has not significantly changed in spite of feminist movements in India and slogans of woman empowerment. This article simply discusses the issue of gender discrimination and how Draupadi face trials and tribulation in her life.

Amit Kumar, in a research article entitled, "*Dharma a Moral Code or a Force of Dominance: An Exploratory Study on Pratibha Ray's Yajnaseni*" discusses the role of dharma (a moral code) is a tool for patriarchal dominance and exploitation of women in both Hinduism and Buddhism. He highlights the role of dharma in Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* that how men's preservation of dharma makes her suffer throughout her life. He further explores that a chaste wife, like Draupadi, has to adhere to the strict version of dharma; however, he discusses that following dharma for a woman leads directly to suffering, injustice, in equality and marginalization. He unfolds that the inevitable dharma is enforced on the psyche of a venerable Draupadi as obligation and is also referred to as an absolute truth.

2.11 A Case of *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is a rendition of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* from Panchaali's perspective. In the original version of the epic, Draupadi is projected as a true 'Bharatiya Nari' like Sita who succumbs to her fate; however, Divakaruni's Draupadi is a strong and independent woman who never wants to be called Draupadi—as the name literally means the daughter of King Draupad.

The Palace of Illusions takes us back to the time of *Mahabharata*—a time that is half-myth, half-history and wholly magical. Through her narrator Panchaali, the wife of the five Pandavas, Divakaruni brings into perspective a unique feminist interpretation of

the epic story. Married to five Pandava brothers, she helps her husbands to regain their kingdom from the Kauravas by remaining at their side. She braves exile and the destructive War of Kurukshetra. What is more, Divakaruni reflects on her secret attraction to the enigmatic Karna who is her husbands' most dangerous enemy. Throughout the narrative, Panchaali is caught up in the ever-manipulating hands of fate. Moreover, in Divakaruni's version, Draupadi is aware that she has been objectified; she has a strong voice for change: "I'm a queen. Daughter of Drupada, sister of Dhrishtradumnya. Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl" (287).

Different research articles have been written on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* that highlights different aspects of the novel. Following are some research articles written on *The Palace of Illusions*. Debaline Sengupta in her research article, "*Deconstructing the Myth: Rewriting Panchaali from a More Humanitarian Perspective with Divakaruni*", implies Derrida's theory of deconstruction to examine the character of Draupadi in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. Sengupta, in her research article, argues that Draupadi has been treated as a thread that connected all the five Pandavas but was never loved as a beloved wife by any of her husband. Using deconstructionist theoretical lens of Derrida, she endeavours to deconstruct the popular receptive conception of Draupadi not only being a catalectic personality causing war between brothers but as disenfranchised and helpless one victimized by the wrong doings of the fate.

Priyanka P. S. Kumar in her research article, *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions: Revisiting the Epic through the Eyes of an Extraordinary Woman*, discusses that usually the female characters of the *Mahabharata* have been projected as epitomes of tolerance and as silent sufferers, while in the contemporary Indian feminist rewritings the women writers have deviated from that tradition by re-working the epic from a female perspective. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, according to Kumar, unfolds the character of Draupadi as independent and strong who makes her own choices in life. This novel deciphers the world from Draupadi's perspective by chronicling her joys, sorrows and achievements that make the novel a gendered retelling. The article

analyzes Divakaruni's narrative as demolishing the archetypal figure of Draupadi by adding up new stories to being in a feminist perspective. This article analyzes The Palace of Illusions by taking a feminist lens into perspective.

Soumyajyoti Banerjee in her research article, *Becoming Krsna: Panchaali's Quest in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions*, asserts that the women writings are based on the female experience in the light of the politics of representation. This article uses theoretical model of Orientalism as a tool for interrogating the feminine self in the patriarchal hegemony. According to Banerjee, traditionalist nationalist hegemony is the factor that solidifies the mythical representation of women. Orientalism, in words of Edward Said, is the knowledge-system disseminated through culture. Therefore, if the original epic is taken into perspective, the same gender stereotypes mark the very existence of women in Indian culture as promulgated by the Orientalism. Banerjee, in her research article, examines Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* through an orientalist lens which falls under the postcolonial lens.

Sunayana Khatter, research scholar, and Dipankar Sukul, an Assistant Professor, of Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, in their research article, *Draupadi-an Iconoclast-A Critical Study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions*, discuss the character of Draupadi who is an iconoclast and a rebel. Divakaruni, according to Khatter and Sukul, decodes her character as a fierce princess who wants to take hold of her destiny. Furthermore, this article traces the role of Draupadi as a daughter, wife, and mother; however, it focuses on her role as an administrator and a leader who works for women empowerment in the end of the novel by settling up small businesses for the women of Hastinapur. In addition, the article establishes that Draupadi's identity goes through a constant flux from the beginning of the novel to the end. Introspection and self-actualization, as tools, help Draupadi to situate her being the patriarchal world around her.

S. A. P. C Induja, a PhD research scholar and Dr S. Ambika, an Assistant Professor, of Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, in their research article, *A Reading of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions as a Discourse on Marginalization and Rebirth*, opine that the character of Draupadi is shown in a negative image as, according

to Vyasa, she is the root cause of the War of Kurukshetra. According to Induja and Ambika, Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* narrates the story of Draupadi who questions the patriarchal norms and does not succumb to the marginalized role she has been made to conform to. Instead, she tries to carve her own destiny. Draupadi, as a subversive female character, remains in denial of her identity as 'other'. The feminist terrains in Divakaruni's novel have been explored in this article.

Monali Bhattacharaya and Ekta Srivastava in their research article, *Contemporary Contextualization of Panchaali and Penelope through Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions and Margaret Atwood's The Penelopaid* discuss that how women in mythological fiction have been reduced to the subaltern space by the phallogocentric texts written centuries ago. This article draws a comparison between Eastern and Western female characters of the popular epics. The two female characters: Draupadi from the East and Penelope from the West, the wives of the greatest heroes, have been foregrounded in this research article. The characters of Draupadi and Penelope have been re-read from a feminist perspective in the contemporary renditions of the epic. Atwood's *The Penelopaid* and Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* endeavour to locate Draupadi and Penelope as subjects by bringing them to the centre from the periphery.

2.12 A Case of *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* (2012) by Saraswati Nagpal

Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* published in 2012 is a feminist renarrativization of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. Few researches have been done on Saraswati Nagpal's novel that underscores different aspects of the novel. Following are some research articles written on *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*.

Akanksha Singh, in BBC culture in an article, *How India's ancient myths are being rewritten*, surveys modern Indian retellings written from a feminist standpoint. She brings into perspective Saraswati Nagpal's feminist rendition of the *Mahabharata* and argues: "In Nagpal's version, this very meek, wronged character, who has been humiliated and harassed in a distinctly gendered manner, has a strong voice"(Singh).

Singh, in her article, points to the strong gendered resistance of Draupadi in Nagpal's narrative.

Anuja Madan, in her PhD dissertation from University of Florida entitled, *Hindu Mythology in Indian Comics and Animations for Young People, 2005-2015* analyzes the contemporary graphic novels to retell the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. It explores that how these visual mythological narratives contribute to the notions of Indianness that they conceptualize. This thesis argues that how do some visual narratives deviate from the popular monolithic ideas of Hinduism by resisting the hegemonic ideas of gender and the middle class. It further elaborates that the graphic novels and comics are different medium in contemporary literature to explain different versions of femininity and masculinity. With other graphic novels, Madan highlights Nagpal's graphic novel *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* and other post-millennial comics and visual narratives to unfold patriarchal agendas.

2.13 Conclusion

I have identified some research gaps while reviewing the corpus of literature. I have developed a link between the selected critical perspectives by firstly discussing Lyotard's idea of postmodernism, metanarrative and petit recits by relating it with Cixous post-feminist notion of ecriture feminine and Ostriker's notion of revisionist mythmaking. Furthermore, abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy is linked with the Cixousian feminist framework of ecriture feminine and Ostriker's idea of rewriting. After establishing the link, I have mentioned other contemporary feminist rewritings, which like my selected texts, articulate a female perspective of the female characters of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. These selected texts are extensions of the Vedic concept of empowered female subjectivity. Additionally, researches have not been done as yet on the three selected novels all together focusing on the character of Draupadi. Furthermore, the selected women writings have not been researched keeping in view the eclectic postmodernist subversive critical theories. In addition, as this study reclaims Vedic feminism and the contemporary selected Indian novels as extensions of the *Vedic* concept of feminism/Hindu feminism. My research considers the contemporary Anglophone Indian fiction of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal by

analyzing the character of Draupadi from the postmodernist perspective by interweaving multifaceted postmodernist theories: Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of petit recits, Helene Cixous framework of ecriture feminine, Alicia Suskin Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking and Julia Kristeva's idea of abjection and its three traits..The review of literature has made me understand the selected multifaceted postmodernist theories in detail. It has helped me to comprehend how postmodernist perspectives can be applied to the literary texts. Perusing these works closely has given me insight as to how to investigate postmodernist perspectives in Indian fiction.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Review of the existing literature on multifaceted postmodern theories has helped me to decide my theoretical framework for the ongoing study. The theoretical framework that I have selected to apply on the selected texts is Jean Francois Lyotard's notion of petit recits, Helene Cixous's ecriture feminine, Alicia Suskin Ostriker's idea of re-visionist mythmaking and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and its traits. In this chapter, I discuss their theoretical views in detail. Furthermore, in this chapter, I discuss the research methodology as well as the research method employed in the upcoming analysis chapters. What is more, this chapter highlights how a synthesis is developed between multifaceted postmodern theories employed in this research.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

For the application of the tailored framework of multifaceted postmodern theories, I have based my analysis on two postmodern theories, as my primary theoretical lenses, that include Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of petit recits and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and its three traits—abject as psychic space, abject as something out of subject/object dichotomy and abject as seductive/destructive space. In addition to the two primary theories, Helene Cixous framework of ecriture feminine (women's writing) is taken as a sub-lens along with Alicia Suskin Ostriker's idea of re-visionist mythmaking is taken to shed light on feminist rewriting and gynocritical framework of inscribing the female body in the selected women's writings.

This study uses a tailored framework comprising of different postmodern critical perspectives. The nexus between the multifaceted postmodern theories has been developed as all the selected theories highlight female subversion. Therefore, a synthesis has been developed using these theories to foreground the character of Draupadi. Firstly, Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of postmodernism has been used as this study is a postmodernist reading of the selected feminist rewritings. Synced with the concept of

postmodernism, this thesis takes Lyotard's concept of metanarrative to deconstruct *Mahabharata* by focusing on the stereotypical representation of Draupadi in the epic. The Lyotardian concept of petit récit is taken into perspective to underscore the selected feminist rewritings as feminist little narratives. Fused with Lyotard's concept of petit recits, *Vedic* concept of female self, Ostriker's idea of revisionist mythmaking and Cixousian framework of ecriture feminine have been employed. Moreover, Kristeva's notion of abjection and its three traits have further been used to unfold the female subjectivity of Draupadi and her subversive nature.

Jean Francois Lyotard in his seminal work on postmodernism, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), questions the cultural metanarratives by defining postmodernism as "...incredulity towards metanarratives" (4). He negates the legitimization of totalizing metanarratives. In his views, postmodernism is a war against cultural and theoretical agreement and the ideological unity. This study attempts to subvert the patriarchal metanarrative of the *Mahabharata* and foregrounds the selected primary texts as petit recits. Petit récit is the binary opposite of a metanarrative. By theorizing petit recits, Lyotard highlights the ever-increasing plurality of the contemporary culture. He totally discards the metanarratives that establish cultural views as absolute universal codes. Furthermore, metanarratives operate on totalizing effect on the culture, reducing culture to the universal codes which dominate their local counterparts (petit recits). Lyotard, in his work, opposes these metanarratives as they try to project a monolithic reality and enjoy a monopoly over knowledge. He theorizes a new world of knowledge based on petit recits. According to Lyotard, petit recits do not claim to have contained any universal truths and they form a body of knowledge more apt to describe the contemporary condition as compared to the generalized ideologies of the so-called metanarratives (xix). Lyotard claims that the metanarratives have lost their credibility; therefore, localized narratives should take their position. In other words, petit recits is a liberating postmodern expression. The current study utilizes Lyotard's stance on postmodernism and his concept of petit recits, as one of the primary theories, to analyze the selected texts. Lyotard's postmodernist views have been utilized to answer a research question that this research poses that how do the selected texts, as petit recits, counter the metanarrative of the *Mahabharata*. The selected novels as petit recits bring

the shadowy character of Draupadi from the margins to the centre by using a postmodernist technique of rewriting.

Synchronized with Lyotard's concept of petit recits, this research also utilizes rewriting as a postmodernist subversive technique to counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. The postmodern literary technique of rewriting assigns new meanings to the postmodern texts. In context of postmodernism, rewriting becomes anti-rewriting, since it aims at metamorphisizing the text. This is exclusively the reason why Indian postmodernist female writers, of the selected fiction, have taken advantage of rewriting as a framework to restore Draupadi's identity and to shift a reader's standpoint from centre to the margins. *Mahabharata*, as a mythological powerhouse, signifies male hegemony. It reflects the culture and ideology of patriarchy. Vyasa has imposed male view of culture and women's role in it, whereas the feminist rewriting of a myth is a constructive deconstruction. Alicia Suskin Ostriker in her work, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry* in America theorizes that "revisionist mythmaking is an effective strategy to evolve an alternate linguistic medium to make corrections to constructed "images of what women have collectively suffered" (216). Ostriker's idea of revisionist mythmaking is used in this study as a sub-lens to foreground the concept of feminist rewriting as a counter narrative of phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. These feminist concerns of articulating the feminist voice of Draupadi has made me utilize Helene Cixous' framework of ecriture feminine, as a sub-lens, to analyze the concept of female subversion.

This study decodes the female perspective of Draupadi in the women's writings of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal to counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of the *Mahabharata*. Helene Cixous, a post-feminist writer, in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) chalks out a feminist framework— 'ecriture feminine' (women's writing). Cixous states in her essay, "...woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (875). Furthermore, she also argues that ecriture feminine as a framework "subverts", "liberates" and "reinvents" (863). The women's writing is significant in order to break the deadlock of the male writing. In

Cixousian perspective, writing consolidates power. The ecriture feminine is different from the phallogocentric writing, as it inscribes the female body—"write yourself" (863). Her essay is based on multi-Cixousian scheme: "to liberate", "to subvert and "to invent". The weapon Cixous uses to end the hegemony of the phallogocentric ideology is to incorporate ecriture feminine. She propagates the idea that writing is liberation. The selected fiction, as gynocentric texts, counters the phallogocentric narrative by liberating, subverting and inventing a unique female perspective of Draupadi. Ecriture feminine, as a sub-lens, is utilized in the current study to bring into perspective the post-feminist idea of feminine self. Cixous' post-feminist views and her framework of ecriture feminine have been utilized to answer a research question that this research poses that how the selected novels map out the subjectivity of Draupadi. My analysis could not have been completed only by taking Lyotardian concept of petit recits, Ostriker's revisionist mythmaking, Cixousian framework of ecriture feminine and Kristeva's idea of abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy are sine-qua-non for analyzing the female agency of Draupadi in the contemporary feminist renditions of *Mahabharata*.

Julia Kristeva, in her work *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), discusses the concept of abjection. Kristeva defines abject as a line that is in between object and subject. Kristeva's concept of abjection, as one of the primary theories, is utilized to investigate Draupadi's concept of self as projected in the selected texts. Abjection along with its three traits have been utilized to study the female abjection of Draupadi. The three traits of abjection are as under:

1. Kristeva states different attributes of abjection. The first of which is that it is a psychic space in which a person views him or herself as a body. She exemplifies this state with that of a corpse, which is both an object of disgust as well as a reminiscence of life. It is an embodiment of life getting infected by death, hence an abject. As per this trait, from a psychological perspective, an abjected individual is caught between the living and the dead. He/she has the physical features of a human, but the soul that gives a person the identity is missing (25).

2. The second attribute Kristeva gives of abjection is as a psychological space that haunts the subject/object dichotomy. The state of abjection is a space that is

outside the subject/object dichotomy. A child who is entering the symbolic space and leaving the pre-symbolic state, cannot relate with the former and is unwilling to let go of the latter, thus, resulting in a psychological state that is neither symbolic nor pre-symbolic, a state where all meanings fail – a state of abjection (25).

3. The third attribute that Kristeva gives to abjection is that of a space that is seductive as well as destructive. It is seductive in the sense that the memories of joyance of pre-symbolic state that seduces an individual to go back to that state, whereas, it is destructive because of not giving into the symbolic order and facing the penalties of not adhering to it (27).

Kristeva's idea of abjection and its three attributes have been utilized to answer a research question that this research poses that how the subversive retrieval strategies (abjection) play out in the selected texts against the phallogocentric perspective in *Mahabharata*.

The abovementioned multifaceted critical framework (the model of analysis) is used to analyze the selected texts. This critical framework has enabled me to analyze the contemporary feminist rewritings and to reach to some conclusions.

3.3 Research Methodology

In order to carry out analysis of the selected works, researcher has to follow a research methodology that is a comprehensive design apt for the research. It explains the detailed plan of the researcher for answering the research questions floated out in the very beginning of the research. Research methodology, according to Elizabeth Jackson, can be defined as "the approach taken to the research design as a whole in relation to reaching answers to the research question (s)" (55). The current study is exploratory in nature and follows qualitative research as its research methodology. Elaborating on qualitative research methodology Dr. Sibghatullah Khan, Head of English Department, NUML, in his doctoral thesis entitled, "*Between Homes and Hosts: Life Narratives of South and Southeast Asian Diasporic Academic Women in America*", opines that qualitative research methodology works as a catalyst in understanding the human nature from the

standpoint of a researcher, or that of the researched (18). In addition, research methodology gives freedom to the researcher in order to devise the meanings of the text in accordance to his/her subjective interpretation of it by relating it with the selected critical framework. As I have chosen multifaceted postmodern theories as my theoretical framework in the current study, it helps me as I venture out to understand the meaning of Pratibha Ray's, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's and Saraswati Nagpal's fiction according to my understanding of it. Qualitative research methodology, as a matter of fact, has enabled me to look for the answers to my research questions by digging deep into the postmodernist perspective in the works of the selected authors.

Under the broader umbrella of qualitative research, this research also falls under the category of exploratory research. According to Marshall and Rossman: "Exploratory research aims to investigate the under-researched phenomena and the prime purpose is to develop an understanding in an area that is little understood" (33). In this contention, I look at the works from a postmodern perspective while investigating the meanings Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal have presented in their novels apropos feminine subjectivity through the perusal of Draupadi as abjected individual in the feminist petit recits countering the patriarchal bases of *Mahabharata*. Furthermore, as a trait of exploratory research, this research opens up ideas for further research, whereby the future researchers can utilize the framework of analysis for other works or juxtapose this understanding of the said phenomenon with another version of the explanation.

3.4 Research Method

Gabriele Griffin, in her book *Research Methods for English Studies*, points out that "research methods are concerned with how you carry out your research" and choosing a particular method "will depend on the kind of research one wants to conduct" (3). We can say, in other words, that the research methods provide the exact tools to conduct research keeping in view research methodology of choice. My focus is to investigate the selected novels as petit recits that attempt to highlight the Vedic concept of feminine self and deconstruct the phallogocentric metanarrative of the epic and keeping that in mind I have chosen textual analysis as my research method.

In this study, I attempt to make sense of the selected texts by keeping in mind the transient nature of meaning itself. It also suits the qualitative nature of the study as its results cannot be generalized to other researches. Thus, I take my selected works as 'texts' that are replete with meaning and aspire to draw an objective interpretation of them which provide me a better understanding of the dynamics of postmodernist subversion portrayed in the writers' fiction.

Catherine Belsey, in her essay "*Textual Analysis as a Research Method*" in Griffins' aforementioned book, discusses that textual analysis is "indispensable for English studies as "it focuses on texts, or seeks to understand the inscription of culture in its artefacts"(157). It means that by implying textual analysis as a research method, I take the author's novels as culture "artefacts" inscribed with meaning that ought to be explored to comprehend fully the culture in question. Hence, I consider these selected texts as windows to the culture of taking rewritings as petit recits which reiterate the Vedic concept of feminine self as depicted in the texts .I have chosen textual analysis as a research as it favours individuals reader's interpretation of the text by consolidating their viewpoint .In her above mentioned essays , Belsey takes in to perspective Ronald Barthes' notion of the reader as "the destination of the text " (161) That he mention in his famous essays *Death of the Author*. It establishes that Barthes assigns a superior position to the reader when it comes to deducing the interpretation of the text. Belsey discusses that Barthes , in his essay, writes that as a reader is at a superior position so he may sidestep the biography of the writer as well as his intended meaning of the text and can take text as autonomous entity and the reader's own understanding of it . While analyzing the texts, I have tried to ignore the writers' position and investigate these postmodernist texts as petit recits by tracing out subversion as depicted in their works.

Nonetheless, Belsey suggests that Barthes essay does not point out complete freedom of the reader over the text understudy .Moreover, Barthes also warn against the notion of reducing a text to "Vague subjectivism" where the text means whatever it means to be. Contrarily, 'to read' is, in fact a transitive verb that needs an object, as we read something (163). It can be inferred that an interpretation of the text cannot be reached until different sources help in the process of this analysis. Belsey calls these

sources as "extra textual knowledge" (160). These sources enable the researcher to widen his horizons regarding the problem under analysis. For this purpose I have utilized the theoretical perspective of postmodern theorists and critics to strengthen my subjective interpretation of the selected texts and also to make it objective in nature.

All in all, the selected primary texts under discussion in the study do not dictate that how these texts should be interpreted by the researcher. I, as a researcher, am also involved in the meaning making of the texts. Nevertheless, the selected text plays a significant role in this interpretation, for they participate "in the process of signification" of meaning (164). This establishes that the research carried out in this project does not solely base on the subjective interpretations of the selected texts but are informed by bringing others outside sources of knowledge into account as well. The selected texts have aided in specifying space for the signification of the meaning and in that particular space, I have chosen the postmodern perspective to help my analysis. Belsey, like Eagleton, states that textual analysis is in a close –relation with the post structuralist interpretive paradigm and takes the selected texts as locus of multiple meanings. The text might not signify a stable meaning. Therefore, as mentioned above, the interpretation drawn by my analysis of the texts may not be applicable to other studies.

As my primary object of analysis is text of *Mahabharata* along with the selected novels; therefore, the method that I have selected for analysis is textual analysis. Bauer defines textual analysis as: "Textual analysis explains the world within which the text is embedded; to open up the perspective of the author that is elucidated by his/her cultural and social context and to draw attention to the structural aspect of everyday practices and meaning patterns" (3).

This abovementioned definition implies that textual analysis is not merely limited to passive reading of the text only. It attempts to decode the message conveyed by the author by deconstructing it in order to develop an understanding of the various meanings that it conveys. The situations and characters that are presented in text cannot be regarded as unreal; rather, they are representations of life. Hence, analysis of the text and its consequential understanding is in fact an understanding of life as conveyed and depicted by the author.

For timely completion of my thesis, textual analysis has been delimited to certain textual elements. This is called "Winnow" by Guest (49). Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative research takes into account the denseness of the text and inability to analyze all of it. Thus, it uses only the information that can be used to elaborate it from an analytical perspective. The research is delimited to the character of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* and three of its contemporary postmodern feminist rewritings. Within this specification, the researcher has focused only on the instances of the text that assisted in analysing the character of Draupadi in the light of the selected critical framework.

Belsey argues: "Any serious textual analysis depends on a grasp of how meanings work. Meaning is not at the disposal of the individual... We learn to mean from outside, from a language... A substantial element of education... and it is this expanded vocabulary that permits us to think with greater clarity, to make finer distinctions" (164). As per Belsey's view of the methodology involved in textual analysis, there is always the understanding of meanings and that understanding of the meanings comes from some educational source which provides the vocabulary that helps in generation of meanings. This contention follows the same approach in its textual analysis. Instead of relying on guesses, the current study banks on textual evidence. The analysis of the selected content is done by applying the postmodern theories of Jean Francois Lyotard, Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva along and Alicia Suskin Ostriker. The textual content has been analyzed in the following order:

- The data from the text was selected via the process of decoding. The researcher identified the lines that gave insight into the psychology of the character and chose those lines for the purpose of analysis.
- The selected data was then deconstructed with the help of the selected theoretical framework.
- First, the researcher has identified that how Draupadi is depicted in Vyasa's phallogocentric *Mahabharata* and how do the selected feminist rewritings, as petit recits, counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. Moreover, analyzing the character of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* is of utmost importance for the researcher as without taking into account that how

Vyasa has penned out the character of Draupadi, analysis of the selected feminist rewritings cannot be completed. That is the reason why *Mahabharata*, as a powerhouse of patriarchal mythology, has been analyzed along with the selected novels.

- Second, the *Vedic* concept of feminine self is traced out in the feminine writings to inscribe the female body of Draupadi in text keeping in view Cixous's framework of ecriture feminine. Moreover, Ostriker's idea of revisionist mythmaking is fused with the Cixousian framework.

- Fourth, Kristeva's concept of abject self is fully exhausted in decoding the female subjectivity of Draupadi.

- Fifth, the researcher has identified how the abjected individual creates a psychic space providing escape from reality for Draupadi in the selected novels.

- Sixth, this contention helps to analyze abjection as something other than subject/object dichotomy. Under this tenet the researcher has analyzed the character of Draupadi who suffers from the element of abjection and fails to live a normal life.

- Last, the study examines the psychology of Draupadi via the seductive/destructive nature of abject. Draupadi's character and her actions in the novels have been analyzed as per this trait of abjection where she feels repulsion for the same phenomenon.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the theoretical framework that I employ in the upcoming analysis chapters of this study. The primary theoretical lenses comprise of Jean Francois Lyotard's idea of petit recits as laid out in his seminal work on postmodernism, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* and Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and its traits—abject as psychic space, abject as something out of subject/object dichotomy and abject as seductive/destructive space that is articulated in her book *The Power of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection*. Furthermore, my study also undertakes Helene Cixous framework of ecriture feminine chalked out in her essay *The Laugh of the*

Medusa, as a sub-lens, to foreground the female subjectivity of Draupadi along with Alicia Suskin Ostriker's idea of re-visionist mythmaking propagated in her book *Stealing the Language: Emergence of Women's Poetry in America*. This study is exploratory in nature. In addition, the research methodology employed is qualitative. What is more, textual analysis is employed in my study to critically analyze the selected texts. Theoretical framework and research methodology as mentioned in this chapter have helped me to use them in textual analysis of the selected primary texts.

CHAPTER 4

Voices of Dissent: Countering the Phallogocentric Metanarrative of *Mahabharata*

"Any woman, irrespective of age, caste, religion, country is worthy of a man's respect. For a woman is formed of Shakti and without worshipping Shakti none has become a hero. Thus, by saluting Draupadi this wise youth has paid obeisance to Mother Shakti" (Ray 45).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes the depiction of Draupadi in Vyasa's phallogocentric *Mahabharata* and in the feminist counter narratives of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. I take the selected novels as petit recits—which according to Lyotard— are the localized narratives that articulate the voices from the periphery. He opines that petit recits subvert the homogeneous stereotypical narratives. The selected novels as petit recits reposition the character of Draupadi from periphery to the centre. This chapter fuses Lyotard's idea of petit récit with Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking that foregrounds rewriting as the postmodernist strategy. I have focused on the premise that how the contemporary Anglophone feminist rewritings counter the metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by reclaiming Vedic concept of empowered female subjectivity. Furthermore, Cixous's concept of ecriture feminine that propagates women's effort to reject the language of oppression by telling stories differently is taken into account to relocate Draupadi in a feminist trajectory and maps out the subjectivity of Draupadi. Her concept of women's writing is based on multifaceted scheme: "to liberate", "to subvert" and "to invent" (Cixous 853). According to Cixous, writing can only liberate women. This study takes her framework of ecriture feminine and applies it on the selected women's writings to inscribe the female body of Draupadi in text. Succinctly, this chapter attempts to answer two research questions undertaken by this research: how do the selected novels as petit recits counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* and how do the selected novels as ecriture feminine map

out the subjectivity of Draupadi. In order to analyze the selected novel, a brief summary of the novels is indispensable to discuss.

4.2 Rereading *Mahabharata* as a Cultural Metanarrative

This section utilizes the phallogocentric criticism that implies the practice of approaching works of the male authors from a feminist perspective as it seeks to expose the masculine bias of the work. Phallogocentric literature has been a tool of political ideology because it has recreated sexual inequalities and cemented the patriarchal values of society (Waugh 326). In my study, I highlight *Mahabharata* as a phallogocentric text that is considered as a cultural metanarrative propagating patriarchy. By using Jean Francois Lyotard's concepts of postmodernism and cultural metanarratives, I attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. Moreover, as this study is based on the character of Draupadi, therefore, I analyze how she has been projected in the phallogocentric metanarrative of Ved Vyasa.

Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) defines postmodernism as "Simplifying to the extreme, as incredulity towards metanarratives" (xivv). He, in his work, focuses on metanarratives and its substitute—petit recits (mini-narratives/micro-narratives). In Lyotardian perspective, postmodernism is a war against cultural and ideological unity. *The Postmodern Condition* pinpoints totalizing sensibilities i.e. the metanarrative. His dismissal of these metanarratives paves way for ad-infinitum plurality of contemporary culture. As this study undertakes *Mahabharata* as a cultural metanarrative, therefore, Lyotard's cultural metanarratives are only taken into consideration.

Metanarrative is an authoritative cultural narrative that establishes its cultural views as absolute truth and is rendered beyond criticism. These metanarratives exert a totalizing effect on culture by reducing it merely to universal codes that gloss over other little narratives and push them to the periphery. Indian culture is driven by cultural metanarratives. As patriarchy is part and parcel of these metanarratives, therefore, patriarchal ideologies enjoy monopoly as universal codes. In addition, the generalized patriarchal metanarratives find roots in ancient Indian Puranic literature: *Ramayana* and

Mahabharata. These two great-grand Indian epics are rendered as warehouses of Indian culture.

      Mahabharata, as a warehouse of Indian culture established as an unquestionable cultural metanarrative, is a tool for patriarchy for making women subordinates. The Law of the Father operates within the realm of *Mahabharata* (Bhattacharyya 21). It highlights the patriarchal ideology and overtly projects the dominance of the patriarchal culture in Dwarpa Yuga through its authoritative patriarchal narrative strand. Patriarchy refers to a control of men over women by pushing them to a subservient position. In *Mahabharata* female characters are bound to remain in the subordinate abode of femininity where they can only excel in feminist endeavours (Nikita 7). Moreover, their sexuality is controlled by patriarchy and resistance of patriarchal norms is repaid in the form of vengeance by god himself. In the same vein, Kate Millet in her groundbreaking work *Sexual Politics* (1968) sheds light on patriarchy, "Patriarchy has a still more tenacious or powerful hold through its successful habit of passing itself off as nature" (58). Millet discusses that men have institutionalized power over women using patriarchy as a tool that pushes women to accept patriarchal values and norms. In addition, patriarchy propagates that female subservience is somehow natural (Friedan 21). In the patriarchal world of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, women are subject to gender disparity and they cannot question the powerful hold of patriarchy. In addition, subversion of patriarchal codes is not tolerated in any case. Masculine ideology and discourse can be traced in *Mahabharata*.

      Vyasa envisages a patriarchal Hindu society and endeavours to legitimize male dominance using *Mahabharata* as a tool. As patriarchy is still practised in India that is whythe epic narrative remains relevant even today, for it is an example of historical subjugation of women by patriarchal structures. In the same vein, Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1949) states that in mythologies women are the "elementary silence of truth" (145). She opines that women are not given agency in patriarchy keeping the fear in view that they might expose the unpleasant reality of society. Holistically, the study of *Mahabharata* brings to focus that the subjugation has come to force through the establishment of feminine character traits in both of the Sanskrit epics: *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The female characters in *Mahabharata* are depicted as irrational, wicked

and passive, whereas male characters are rational, followers of dharma and active (Gaur 51). These essentialist notion of masculinity and femininity made Beauvoir assert that, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (211). This oft-quoted line of Beauvoir is thought as a major breakthrough from essentialist gender theories. She highlights that the traits that have been known as masculine and feminine are mere social constructs. Furthermore, in compliance with her anti-essentialist views on gender, she also debates that to become a woman means to become the other. She foregrounds othering as the process of labelling women as less than the men who have been historically defined as the ideal human subjects (73). Moreover, she argues in *The Second Sex* that as the other, women are considered second to men and therefore systematically restricted from pursuing freedom. *Mahabharata* has constructed the female identity where the female characters have to endure injustice. Patriarchal conventions condition female gender to behave in a certain way that is acceptable by patriarchy. It can be said that becoming a women implies that a woman is not born secondary, inessential and passive, but patriarchy conspires to make her so.

Keeping the track of the abovementioned theoretical notions, this section focalises the character of Draupadi in Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and examines that how *Mahabharata* is a phallogocentric cultural metanarrative by analyzing her character in the epic. Kaleidoscopically, Vyasa's *Mahabharata* projects ideologies that are phallus-centred. These phallogocentric ideologies that surface in the *Mahabharata* operate using language as a tool. According to the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, it is solely the language which ultimately structures identity. He introduced a tripartite scheme of psychic development: imaginary, symbolic and real. In conjunction with Lyotard's idea of cultural metanarrative, the symbolic order and its accompanying concept of phallogocentricism are also highlighted to critically analyze the representation of Draupadi in the phallogocentric text of *Mahabharata*. The symbolic order as theorized by Lacan is the realm of the father, language, social roles, gender differences and law. Lacan calls the symbolic order "the phallogocentric universe in which men is in control of the world" (Guerin 228). In this state of symbolic male dominated discourse constructs the infant girl as a second class citizen. Through language, subject-formation takes place and Lacan is of the view that the symbolic order defines our being. He also reflects that the

signifier of this symbolic order is the Name of the Father—the centre of the universe—separates the child from his/her real being and starts the process of signification.

In *Mahabharata* the signified other—Draupadi is misrepresented. All contours of Draupadi's being and life are formulated through Vyasa's language. The dominant patriarchal discourse has enforced its values on her identity. In the epic she is projected as a recluse who does not know that who she is. She remains lost specifically when she is at crossroads in her life. She thinks that men around her are the symbols of knowledge, power and truth. On the contrary, she looks at herself as an irrational and weak individual and men as otherwise. Therefore, Draupadi's subjectivity never peeps out in the original epic. Likewise, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their book *A Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) highlight that how women have been subjected to the oppression of patriarchy. The book focuses on the fictional character of Bertha Mason who appears in Charlotte Bronte's famous novel *Jane Eyre*. Like Draupadi whose character is projected as a woman thirsty for vengeance in the epic, Bertha Mason's character in the novel is depicted as wicked, monstrous and insane. The book reflects on subjugation of women and how patriarchy defines a woman as either "angel" or a "monster" (30). This widespread image of a woman created by the male authors is detrimental. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* projects the same idea that patriarchy constructs a woman's image and narrowed women to the domestic spheres, and made women to lose their own identities (Friedan 45). Similarly, the governing patriarchal ideologies are ubiquitous in *Mahabharata* that make its universal codes central and as these patriarchal values become norms so they stand out unquestionable. *Mahabharata* positions its male characters at the centre of the narrative and like other female characters Draupadi is also rendered as other. Thus, the phallogocentric discourse creates the female subject, where subjectivity of the female subject is the product of patriarchal system. It can be inferred that female subjectivity of Draupadi is constructed by the dominant discourse that is based on the notions of difference and power. Draupadi is a subject of family, religion and society. These ideological institutions and operations are all phallogocentric. To dig deep and examine the status of *Mahabharata* as a phallogocentric metanarrative, it is direly required to see how Vyasa has projected Draupadi in his male-centric epic, the

Mahabharata. In order to deconstruct the character of Draupadi in the epic, the researcher focuses on Lyotardian concept of postmodernism and cultural metanarrative.

The epic projects that Draupadi plays a central role in the narrative; however, she is only being depicted as a princess, a virtuous wife and a mother of sons, while her individuality get shadowy in playing different roles. Moreover, the few descriptions of Draupadi that exist in the epic are stereotypical and formulaic (McGrath 3). Draupadi, in the epic, is first being mentioned in Book 1 of *Mahabharata* where old King Dhristrashtra sings a lengthy dirge, "When I heard that Draupadi, her throat full of tears, was led to the sabha, distressed, wearing a single cloth, menstruating...like someone without a protector..." (106). King Dhritrashtra's introduction of Draupadi to the readers for the first time establishes that despite the fact that she has five husbands who hail from Kshatriya clan none is her protector. Vyasa introduces the character of Draupadi drenched in grief, suffering and helpless. This is how the poets of Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga have reduced women in their patriarchal poetic metanarratives to gender stereotypes that virtuous women brave difficulties with patience. Valmiki, the poet of *Ramayana*, also reflects on the character of Sita in the same way that a *pativrata* woman never fears difficulties and serves her husband in every situation. The introduction of Draupadi is clichéd and points to the patriarchal designs of the narrative.

After being mentioned in Book 1, Draupadi again comes to surface in *Sauptika Parvan*[54]: when she hears that her five sons have been slaughtered whilst they slept (153). Again, she in her next mention in the epic is projected as a woman of grief. Propagating the notions that women are born to bear grief in life points to a patriarchal metanarrative that honours the women who are in grief and at the same time refers to the idea that the dharma of pativrata[55] woman is to bear the brunt in silence without complaining (Bhattacharya 20). These authoritative cultural views are established as absolute truths in Hindu dharma and have dipped deep into the cultural DNA of India.

Draupadi's next mention in the poem is in the opening lines of Book Four, where Yudhishtra one of her husbands speaks of Draupadi as "our beloved wife, dearer than the

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[54]*Sauptika Parvan* is the tenth book of *Mahabharata* that highlights the revenge of the Kauru survivors.
[55] Pativrata means a woman who is loyal to her husband.

breaths" (IV.3.12). He further refers to her as mother and elder sister. Yudhishtra points to all feminine relations of Draupadi such as wife to her husbands, mother to her sons and sister to her brother. In this context, Yudhishtra has reduced her to all feminine relationships towards patriarchy by eclipsing her individuality as a woman. Her identity gets marred in the overly feminine relations that she does have. Here the characteristic of a patriarchal metanarrative that the female gender has no individuality and her identity is always reflected best in the feminine relations that she posses.

Draupadi, throughout the narrative, is projected as having highly charged anger and wrathfulness as the defining personality traits that validate the patriarchal metanarrative that she is Kritya who is born to destroy everything and is the reason of the War of Kurukshetra that will end the Dwarpa Yuga and a new epoch will begin—the Kali Yuga. The wrathfulness and fury of Draupadi project her lust for revenge. In a way, Vyasa has projected her as a blood-thirsty woman without holding the events responsible for her fury. What is more, Vyasa brings a legitimizing metanarrative by saying that she is the one who will bring self-destruction to her own clan, the Kaurus. He totally brushes away the reasons that have made Draupadi fierce and revengeful. He does not bring in the perspective that she is sent to the earth as a pawn in the hands of gods who make her a reason for the War of Kurukshetra. Secondly, her wrathfulness touches extremes because whenever she needs her husbands they wrong her and instead do as per their dharma. Lastly, her fierceness and wrathfulness are part and parcel of her being as she is the reincarnation of Goddess Kali who is known for her wrathfulness. However, *Mahabharata* as a patriarchal metanarrative totally sidesteps the alternate perspective and only highlights what legitimizes patriarchy.

In the previous paragraphs Draupadi has been mentioned in the *Mahabharata* randomly. It is necessary to reflect on how she has been introduced in different parts of the books. Moreover, the abovementioned arguments only take into perspective few introductory verses that have discussed in the way she has been introduced in the original epic. The forthcoming argument considers the life events of Draupadi in chronological order that range from her marriage, the Sabha part, the forest part, the section of court of Virata and the war section; as mentioned in the epic.

In the marriage section, Vyasa projects Draupadi's swayamvara where she is won by Arjuna. However, he stresses more on an unusual situation that arises after her marriage when she is taken to her mother-in-law. Arjuna says to her mother that sees what I have brought for you. Without knowing that he has brought her daughter-in-law she asks him to share the *bhiksha*[56] you have brought with his brothers. Without considering the feelings of Draupadi, it becomes the dharma of all five Pandava brothers to marry Draupadi as they cannot refuse their mother. It is pertinent to discuss that Vyasa legitimizes polyandry stating that dharma dictates that sons have to follow their mother's command. However, he does not refer to Arjuna's dharma as a husband who wins Draupadi in Swayamvara and she chooses only him as her husband. They do not take consent of Draupadi at all that whether she wants to marry all five brothers or not. Contrarily, she is only informed. According to Hinduism, it is "a-dharmic" and "unlawful" (Lal 28) for one woman to marry many husbands; however, it is lawful for a man to have many wives. Moreover, a woman having many husbands has a status of a prostitute and is never accepted in the patriarchal Hindu society. This refers to the gender disparity engineered by patriarchal mindset, whereas in Satya Yuga women were free to choose men for sexual gratification. Even King Drupad, her father, disapproves of polyandry: "Such a situation where a woman marries many husbands never occurs and it is a-dharmic" (28). As patriarchal metanarratives postulate that in patriarchy all societies, ethnicities and identities are uniform so their problems are also the same. However, here the situation that arises is quite unusual where even getting married to the Pandavas she is called names by the Kauravas in the sabha part as courtesan and unchaste woman.

Vyasa mentions that as polyandry is an unusual practice, therefore, Draupadi is given a boon of virginity that after a year when she goes to her other husband, she again becomes a virgin. This virginity boon that Vyasa blesses her with is more for the benefit of her husbands than for her. He says: "After each union you will have your virginity restored and will become a kanya again" (190). In this way patriarchy legitimizes the polyandry practice, as with the virginity boon Draupadi will remain chaste. Briefly, incredulity towards the patriarchal metanarrative surfaces as patriarchy only benefits men and put women at the fringes. Virginity boon is merely for the benefit of her husbands.

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[56]Bhiksha means alms in English.

Further, in the same context of marriage, Vyasa explores the conjugal life of Draupadi with the Pandavas that "Draupadi always being vasavartini[57]. She was happy with her menfolk, like the river Saraswati was always happy with elephants; and she bore five beautiful sons—the draupadeyas—to the brothers, each one born a year apart" (82). Vyasa here objectifies Draupadi only as an object of male desire without referring to her individuality as a woman. He frames her in feminine relations towards patriarchy where she is a wife and a mother to five sons but she is presented as nothing more than that. Such totalistic perspectives position the female characters of *Mahabharata* as mere objects that support men and are only reduced to the domestic spheres. These totalizing and legitimizing patriarchal metanarratives do not reflect or include the female perspective. After the marriage section in *Mahabharata*, the sabha[58] part is underscored by Vyasa where he reflects on the character of Draupadi. The sabha part in *Mahabharata* sheds light on Yudhishtra's acceptance of Kauravas's invitation on the dice game to Hastinapur. In Sabha Parva, Yudhishtra describes his beloved wife—Draupadi in the commencing scene of the dice game as: "She is neither short nor tall nor too dark nor ruddy, possessing eyes impassioned with love... with eyes like petals of autumn blue lotus, like the deity Sri[59]... Her lotus face shines like a girl recently deflowered, and like a brown goose; a waist like an altar, long hair not too thick, coopery eyes..." (36). In fact the description of Draupadi's mesmerizing beauty is objectification of the female gender. *Mahabharata* as canonical patriarchal text reduces her character to a mere object of male sexual desire. Yudhishtra's depiction of her beauty in the shlokas[60] points to the fact that he only considers her as a sexual object instead of an equal partner. The phallogocentric metanarrative attempts at making the female gender internalize the idea of being viewed as an object and this process of self-objectification is detrimental for female identity. Through this process of self-objectification, women embrace that they are nothing more than a sexual object. Yudhishtra's projection of Draupadi merely reduces her to a sensual

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[57]Vasavartini is a Sanskrit word that means obedient.

[58] The *Mahabharata*, Book 2, has a *Sabha Parva* or *Sabha* episode, which describes the sabha under King Yudhishthira.

[59]Devi literally means goddess.

[60]Shloka or śloka (Sanskrit: श्लोक) is a poetic form used in Sanskrit. The sloka is the basis for Indian epic verse.

object. Furthermore, this description is rather a formulae of feminine praise that Valmiki has also used to depict Sita's character in *Ramayana*.

The critical juncture in the *Sabha Parva* comes when Yudhishtra stakes Draupadi in the game of dice that points to an instance of a wife being equated with wealth. Having lost Draupadi, Yudhishtra loses his right over his wife. Duryodhana asks his brother Dhushasana to drag her to the assembly to join the serving girls. Here none of her husbands speaks as according to their dharma, as servants, they are not allowed to say a word in front of their master, Duryodhana. Draupadi, who is menstruating and clad in a single cloth, comes and questions Yudhishtra, "Whom did you lose first, self or me, Bharata?" (60). Draupadi runs away to the women in the assembly. She asks the elders in the royal court of Hastinapur for help. Then she looks up to her husbands for help, yet none is her protector. No one helps. The code of righteousness—dharma—legitimizes the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* that as Yudhishtra has lost everyone including his wealth, brothers and even his wife so he has no right to talk against or act against the will of his master. However, Yudhishtra, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva are accountable to Draupadi as they are her husbands. Their pati-dharma demands to save the honour of their wife, Draupadi. Contrarily, she stands helpless bearing insults in the assembly. Duryodhana and Karna brand her as a characterless woman. But her husbands and the elders of the Kaurus clan remain dharma bound. She becomes revengeful, fierce and wrathful because no one comes to help her when Dhushasana attempts to disrobe her that eventually leads to the massive destruction of the Kurukshetra. It is mentioned in the *Mahabharata* that "He dragged the unprotected one, like a wind drags an afflicted plantain tree" (24). Dharma has totally been abandoned in the domination and rivalry, yet the elders of the family remain dharma bound and do not even utter a single word. Throwing derogatory tags such as harlot, maid and unchaste make Draupadi furious and she curses the Kaurus for this reason. As mentioned earlier, Vyasa who projects that Draupadi's ire is illogical is baseless.

Vyasa's gender stereotyping comes to surface when Draupadi, even after being severely humiliated in the assembly maintains her dignity and sense of decorum. As mentioned earlier that pativrata stri, according to patriarchy, should be patient and pliant

(Banerjee 4). Therefore, Draupadi has to maintain her dignity and the decorum that is required of her in front of elders and her husbands. Vyasa appears toeing the line of Valmiki, as he has created gender stereotypes through the character of Sita. The twenty-first century Indian patriarchy takes Sita's character as a standard that women should follow to be like. These gender standard-cum-stereotypes, quite surprisingly, are propagated by Valmiki and Vyasa in Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga respectively, while in Vedic Age women were free of these gender stereotypes and they neither were nor required to ascribe to these female stereotypes. Nonetheless, Valmiki and Vyasa created innumerable female stereotypes which echo in the assembly scene as well where even after bearing humiliation male members require her to maintain dignity and decorum. These gender norms make Draupadi only an object in the phallogocentric *Mahabharata*.

Sabha Parva chronicles another incident when Pandavas restore their wealth and status on the command of the old king Drupad, Duryodhana again invites Yudhishtra to play a game of dice where he again loses everything and in repercussion, along with his brothers and wife have to spend thirteen long years in exile in the forest where if in the thirteenth year they are recognized, they will have to go into exile for another twelve years. In this section, when Draupadi leaves for the forest, she curses the Kauravas saying: "The Kaurava women will have husbands, sons and brothers all killed" (20). Vyasa projects her character, in the Book Eleven of the epic that is the end of the sabha section, as revengeful and unforgiving by not foregrounding the reasons that have made her revengeful. Patriarchy only accepts plaint women who are patient and never accepts unforgiving and revengeful women.

The Forest Section of *Mahabharata* is the third section that chronicles life of Draupadi in Kimyaki forest for twelve long years. After being humiliated severely, she is no longer that quiet young and nubile bride, but a mother, a queen and a wife: one whose power has been usurped and her sons have been sent into fostering. The dicing game has taken everything from her and has made her wrathful and revengeful. Therefore, she repeats that how the Kauravas did her character assassination and how she feels about it. She repeats the same discourse to make Pandavas furious too so that they can avenge her honour. Draupadi asserts, "Devoted to feminine propriety, trembling, sprinkled with

blood, wearing one piece of cloth, grievous: I was dragged to the hall of the Kauravas" (54). She mentions such intolerable things to the Pandavas in order to turn them into fire that can burn and devastate everything. However, her fury has not been highlighted as a logical reaction to the events that happened in the court of Hastinapur rather her wrath is decoded as a feminine anger without reason. In the same vein, Valmiki's Shurpanakha, sister of Ravana, in *Ramayana* showcases the same behaviour. She tries to seduce Rama and Lakshmana and then insults Sita. As a result, Lakshmana mutilates her nose and she gets infuriated and revengeful. She narrates this incident to Ravana that how his sister is disrespected. She states that if he is a true Kshatriya then it is incumbent upon him to avenge her honour. She time and again reminds him of that incident, as Draupadi does. However, the fury of Draupadi is not unjustified as she has been wronged by her menfolk in the royal court. She further mentions, "Since husbands, even weak ones, protect a wife" (60). Here again she points to their pati-dharma that protects wife at every cost. Nevertheless, despite Draupadi's severe insults in the court, her angry reactions in the Forest Section points to her as "fierce" (822). She is depicted as possessing the quality of wrath at its extreme and Vyasa tries to temper it by aiming at making her more pliant.

The abovementioned reactions of Draupadi are justified in every way, as she has been wronged by her protectors who only remain dharma-bound without sparing any thought for their wife who is called a prostitute in the royal court. Thus, Draupadi, in the forest section, appears contained with anger and remains fierce to take revenge. Her bloodthirsty need for revenge and unalleviated anger attune her to the negative aspects of Goddess Kali and this ruthless side of Draupadi remains unaltered till the end of the War of Kurukshetra. Vyasa legitimizes his patriarchal metanarrative by showing the character of Draupadi as a wrathful as well as a pliant woman who reacts on what happened to her in the sabha scene but also grieves on Yudhishtra's loss of all his wealth. She is projected in the *Mahabharata* as grieving for her husband's lost status. It is mentioned: "I grieve for you—O' King—used to happiness, undeserving of sorrow" (10). It points to a practice in the patriarchal society where women put the male members in terms of priority. At this point, Vyasa projects Yudhishtra as a victim in the eyes of Draupadi whose riches to rags story disheartens Draupadi. Even though, he is the one responsible for her plight.

In the same section, another gender stereotype comes to surface. In a patriarchal society, women are not allowed to eat before their men or with their men. They are required to eat when all male members have eaten to their fill. The left-over food is what is left for the women of the house. Vyasa strengthens this tradition while legitimizing his patriarchal metanarrative by praising Draupadi for this. Vyasa states: "Draupadi the glorious, like a mother, having fed the husbands and all the twice-born, then eats the remaining food" (10). He quite adroitly praises her and then reduces her to a subjugated position, as she has to eat after all men of her family have eaten. These gender stereotypes championed by Valmiki and Vyasa hold the female characters back in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In the same context, Draupadi in *Mahabharata* mentions, "I awake first and I lie down last" (56). Clearly, Vyasa delineates the character of Draupadi in the epic as walking a tightrope, specifically, in the Forest Section where she has no attendants and she has to do all domestic chores herself. Furthermore, Vyasa states, "A virtuous woman obtains good things with difficulty" (223). The pliant women are branded as glorious, for they do not complain. Draupadi who bears all kinds of difficulties in life, according to Vyasa, can only obtain good things by facing more difficulties and keeping her dignity and decorum as a woman in place.

The fourth Section *The Court of Virata* reflects on the lives of Pandavas and Draupadi in their thirteenth year of exile where they have to disguise themselves to shun away from the exile of further twelve as conditioned by King Dhristrashtra. Draupadi, like her husbands, disguise herself as a maid and offers her services to the Queen of Virata. Draupadi has no idea that lust-driven Kichaka—brother of Sudeshna— would put her in a difficult situation by asking her to bed with him. She tries her utmost to protect herself from Kichaka but she fails miserably. It happens that once Draupadi is sitting in the garden, Kichaka approaches her and grabs her by her hand. She shouts and goes to the King of Virata to complain about the indecency of Kichaka. To her surprise, he does not say anything to that man. Yudhishtra, who has disguised himself as one of the King's attendants is also present at that time; however, he only asks Draupadi to be patient. This reminds Draupadi of past incidents where Yudhishtra wronged her twice: firstly, in the court of Hastinapur by staking her in the game of dice and secondly when Jayadratha molests Draupadi in the forest and he lets him go. She states, "What is not lamented—

whose husband is Yudhishtra!" (17). In all the above mentioned incidents, Yudhishtra shows his respect for his Kshatriya-dharma[61] only and remains oblivious of his pati-dharma. Vyasa legitimizes patriarchal laws by saying that codes of righteousness—dharma—must be followed by Kshatriya clan at any cost. It establishes that to protect women is not their priority.

The portrayal of Draupadi in *Mahabharata* penned out by Vyasa legitimizes the patriarchal metanarrative and with every injustice meted out on the female characters comes a phallogocentric logic. *Mahabharata*, as a cultural text, compromises on the visibility, voice and dignity of Draupadi, instilling a set of values in women, through her character, by justifying the subordination of the female gender. Draupadi remains the figure of paramount suffering and suffers miserably at the hands of patriarchy. However, her subversion of the moral stature and her status beyond the usual margins of feminine conduct remains unexplored and unvoiced in the phallogocentric *Mahabharata*. On the contrary, her feminine aura finds voice only in the contemporary feminist rewritings that give voice to the voiceless Draupadi by countering the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* with the feminist petit recits centred on the character of Draupadi.

4.3 Selected Feminist Rewritings as Petit Recits

As aforementioned in the *Mahabharata* section, phallogocentric criticism of the epic exposes the sexual politics and masculine bias of Vyasa. Therefore, an alternative female-centred criticism is developed to address the lack of women in the mythological canon. The pre-occupation with the female voice, in the feminist criticism, is known as gynocriticism (Waugh 328). The practice of gynocriticism is founded on the belief that the established male literary tradition had suppressed an alternative female tradition, which remained hidden and waiting to be discovered. Elaine Showalter, the originator of the term 'gynocriticism', used this term in her work *A Literature of their Own* (1977). According to Showalter, women not only write differently from men, but should be read differently. Women writing, she argues, form a subculture within the literary tradition; it has its own characteristics, its own patterns and themes, its own distinct identity (Showalter 11). Under the heading of "Feminist Rewritings as Petit Recits", I attempt to

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[61] Dharma is a code of righteousness. It is a behavior that is in accordance with the teachings of Hinduism.

do a feminist criticism of Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, fusing Lyotard's idea of petit recits, Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking and Helene Cixous's framework of l'ecriture feminine.

Mahabharata legitimizes phallogocentric metanarrative through its narrative. Male characters have been portrayed as heroic, whereas the female characters are depicted as shadowy and subservient to men. Taking Lyotardian postmodern perspective in view, cultural metanarratives, in the age of postmodernism, have been thrown into crisis. Furthermore, the postmodern age marks the beginning of feminist rewritings and these renarrativizations unleash alternate perspectives. Rewriting is, in fact, one of the postmodern strategies. According to Ostriker, rewriting is an act of looking at old things with a totally new perspective that gives birth to the petit recits: counter-narratives to the metanarratives (Ostriker 211). Lyotard states that with petit recits, the legitimacy has become local, plural and immanent. The patriarchal myths have collapsed giving way to feminist petit recits where female perspective is underscored through the women's writings (Edward 8). The selected feminist rewritings adumbrate different traits of l'ecriture feminine in the assertion of the female 'body' and in the representation of unique female experiences of Draupadi.

Cixous states that language is masculine that articulates a male ideology and a male view of the world. Furthermore, she says even in language, woman is mute. The female 'I' does not exist in language; therefore, when a woman says 'I', she is temporarily talking from the position of a man. Cixous believes that women were silent in patriarchal language—just as the religion had developed without a concept of the female subject, so had the language. The only solution for women is to disrupt the flow of patriarchal discourse (Cixous 113). Cixous uses ecriture feminine as antidote to the phallocentric literature. 'Feminine writing' is the imperfect translation of the French term Ecriture feminine. Cixous's ecriture feminine is described as a uniquely feminine style of writing, characterized by disruptions in the text; gaps, silences, puns, rhythms, and new images all signal ecriture feminine (Waugh 320).

Feminine writing is a medium to represent and give voice to women. Cixous argues that within a male paradigm of writing, woman has no voice. Writing about Indian female mythological characters provides deep insights in their struggles and sheds light on subtle sources of tension. Indian ecriture feminine has a significant role to play here, creating sensitivity to women's problems through female characters and denouncing the weight of patriarchal traditions whose negative aspects have been deemed acceptable because they have been endured. K. Meera Bai, author of *Women's Voices The Novels of Indian Women* (2000) states in this context that their intrinsic perceptions of and insight into women's reactions and responses, problems and perplexities, the complex working of their inner selves, their emotional involvements and disturbances help them in portraying a life size picture of the contemporary women with all her longings and aspirations, hopes and frustrations (167). Bai highlights that the insightful analysis of the Indian women writers allow them to realistically portray their feminocentric issues.

The mythological feminist fiction of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal prioritises female voice, female-point-of-view, female gaze, female jouissance[62] and female sensibility in the matrix of the contemporary Indian feminine writings. Moreover, these women writings, have suggested forms of feminist resistance and negotiation. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, *The Palace of Illusions* and *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, as selected texts, depict Draupadi as a diverse female character rather than limiting her life to one ideal i.e. the patriarchal ideal. The feminist mythology based on the character of Draupadi uses new feminine symbols and refutes to adhere to the patriarchal canonical versions of the epic. The mythological fiction of the selected women writers is significant in providing a medium for self-expression. The women writers, as authors of mythological fiction, operate within the realist context of Hindu culture to shatter its norms and to challenge its assumptions, not with new set of criterion drawn outside of the culture but rather highlighting the contradictions that the culture contains. These feminist rewritings unfold the repressive patriarchal metanarrative which refuses to recognise, or makes the female perspective unpresentable.

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[62] Jouissance is a term used by Luce Irigaray. It means physical or intellectual pleasure that a woman experiences.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* narrates the story of Draupadi who comes out of sacrificial fire along with her brother Dhristradumnya as a result of their father's worshiping of Lord Shiva to grant a son to help him defeat his archenemy Drona. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* is *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi. It narrates the story of a woman who dwells in an exceedingly chauvinistic society and the fall of Kauru empires. Novel's title *Yajnaseni* refers to Draupadi's birth of the yajna[63]. She marries Arjuna in her swayamvara. She is born in an age where words and promises are sacrosanct. One word of Kunti, her mother-in-law, makes her the wife of five men. In the beginning, Pandavas, her five husbands, only treat her as a domestic animal and then make her a people-pleaser who cares little about her desires. Draupadi sacrifices everything to maintain the unity among the Pandavas. She braves trials and tribulations, insults and sorrows to sail forth in her life until the game of dice with Kauravas comes. The Kauravas insult Draupadi in the court of Hastinapur where Dhushasana attempts to strip her sari that becomes the cause of the War of Kurukshetra. The danse macabre[64] begins with the Kurukshetra war that ends in heart-wrenching pain at the death of sons, friends and blood relations of both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. After the War, Pandavas, along with Draupadi, travel through the Himalayas to reach Mahaprasthana[65]. Draupadi falls off the cliff and without paying any heed, Pandavas walk away. In the end of *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Draupadi calls Krishna, her *sakha*[66], for help and departs from the world of sorrows. The novel also reflects on the fact that though Draupadi is counted among the five supremely virtuous women, honoured as 'pancha sati' in mythology, the name Draupadi still bears stigma and is often contemptuously uttered by people in society as the woman who brought about the great war of all times. Currently, in India, people name their daughters as Sita but no one wants to name his/her daughter as Draupadi (Nilmani 9). Ray attempts to decipher the misunderstood character of Draupadi through her novel by using creative liberties to highlight her female perspective. The uniqueness of the novel lies in the fact that it is as relevant today as the narration was in Dwarpa Yuga. Ray has striven to bring to the

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[63] Yajna means fire.
[64] Danse macabre, also known as Dance of Death, is an artistic genre of allegory of the late middle ages.
[65] Mahaprasthana literally means 'the great or final departure'.
[66] Sakha means a friend in Sanskrit.

forefront the female voice of Draupadi suppressed under patriarchy. Through her enigmatic heroine Draupadi, Ray aims to represent the womankind and the suppressed voices and opposes the deeply-rooted male supremacist culture.

Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, as a feminist rewriting, unleashes the phallogocentric metanarrative as problematized by taking into perspective the existence of the alternative feminist perspective of Draupadi. Her alternative perspective challenges and subverts the absolutist phallogocentric narrative of *Mahabharata*. Ray's feminist rewriting brings to perspective the subjectivity of Draupadi as fractured, fragmented and self-differentiated. Ray focuses on the feminocentric perspective of Draupadi in her novel. Draupadi, in the novel, narrates her own story and reflects on the events that happen in *Mahabharata* from her perspective. Ray's narrative gives voice to Draupadi in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, whereas in *Mahabharata* Draupadi's story is not narrated in detail. The novel traces the journey of Draupadi from being Krishnaa to Panchaali. Yajnaseni is a unique name in itself signifying one who is born out of the sacrificial fire. Hence, with time, she becomes the epitome of chastity, self sacrifice, courage and undying spirit. Draupadi summarises her life as *"the life of one born of this spark created by the friction of wood and fire — how could that be complete without conflicts"* (38). *Throughout the novel, conflicts await Draupadi. She falls victim to the oppression of patriarchy at every juncture of her life.* Ray unleashes the patriarchal euphemistic myth of *Mahabharata* that camouflaged reality and created a mindscape which shuts out all possibilities for the growth of women and self-assertion. By putting Draupadi's character in the centre from the periphery, Ray rewrites *Mahabharata* from an alternative feminist perspective. As mentioned earlier, in *Mahabharata*, Draupadi has to adhere to the laws and rules of patriarchy and remains unvoiced. Similarly, Mary Daly in her book, *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) mentions that religion, law, culture, and science were all methods of patriarchal control working to define and limit women (155). The feminist petit récit of Ray redefines Draupadi as a woman who is not merely an object of men's desires. The fact remains that *Mahabharata*, as a cultural text, reinforces patriarchal control and ideologies through its female characters and the maltreatment they get from their male-counterpart.

Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi as brings to light glaring differences from Vyasa's Draupadi with respect to her indomitable spirit where she not only dares to question patriarchy but also attempts to subvert it. This novel is written in an epistolary form- a single longish letter that Draupadi addresses to her Sakha[67], Krishna, while awaiting her death at the foothills of the Himalayas. It is through this letter that she charts her remarkable life for the cognizance of the world and she firmly hopes history should not repeat itself where no woman should be humiliated in public as she was. As Anila Chandran says, Draupadi reveals the underlying mysteries of the society and often explodes at the objectification of woman (2). As a postmodernist rewriting, Ray's narrative questions the authority of the patriarchal ideological insertions deeply incorporated in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Ray attempts to question the male dominance in *Mahabharata*. The incredibility of the patriarchal metanarrative comes to light when Draupadi shows her contempt for patriarchal norms in the novel, whereas in *Mahabharata* Draupadi embraces patriarchy fully and as a pliant woman adheres to all laws and rules of patriarchy. Ray contradicts the popular pativrata image of Draupadi in her petit récit.

The novel begins with the scene where her husbands are leaving for Mahaprasthana and she is laying on Himalayan cliffs waiting for death. As her foot slips in the Himalayas, Yudhishthira says to Bhima, "*Do* not turn back to look! Come forward" (2).With a heavy heart, Draupadi makes her first revelation to Krishna, *"Those words shattered my heart. I mused: how false is this bond between husband and wife! Affection, love, sacrifice and surrender! If man suffers the consequences of his own deeds, then offering myself at the feet of five husbands for the sake of preserving Yudhishtra's dharma! Why did I have to bear the burden of the whole world's mockery, sneers, innuendos, abuse, scorn and slander?" (4)* The opening lines of the novel speak about the trials and tribulations she undergoes in her lifetime. In addition, Draupadi's epiphany points to the fact that all her sacrifices and the unbearable emotional burden that she endured all her life for her husbands went null and void. Draupadi introspects about her life. She says, "What agonies did I not suffer for preserving dharma?" (5)

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[67] Sakha is a Sanskrit word that means friend (male).

Ray's Draupadi recalls her sufferings for the sake of dharma and realizes that her existence has solely to be a catalyst to execute the plans of gods. The revisionist mythmaking strategy here helps the author to highlight Draupadi's subjective opinion that goes unheard in the original epic. "Petit récit" (60), as theorized by Lyotard, provides an alternative localized perspective that does not succumb to the totalizing views of patriarchy. Draupadi's contemplation in the novel redefines her character as a subversive woman. Keeping in view that how women have suffered in history at the hands of patriarchy as men have written history by excluding the female gender, Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, writes that writing liberates women. She introduces ecriture feminine (women's writing) in order to end patriarchy.

Cixous states in her book, "I wished that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might claim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body know unheard - of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth, I didn't repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: you are mad! What's the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts?" (876) Keeping *Mahabharata* and Draupadi as a case in mind, Cixousian framework of ecriture feminine finds relevance as the character of Draupadi remains mute throughout the narrative of *Mahabharata*. Cixous reflects on this dilemma of woman in phallus-centred literature that women were silent in patriarchal language—just as religion had developed without a concept of the female subject, so had language. The only solution for women was to disrupt the flow of patriarchal discourse by using, for example, puns to disturb and fragment meaning (879). Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* as an ecriture feminine liberates both Ray, as a women writer, and Draupadi as an unvoiced character in the mythological Indian fiction. Cixous states that ecriture feminine aims "to liberate", "to subvert" and "to invent" (863).

Ray's petit récit liberates the character of Draupadi using rewriting as a postmodernist strategy to highlight her character. The feminist rewriting of Ray, as a

feminine writing, therefore, uses revisionist mythmaking to make the minor female characters as the major characters in her novel. Rewriting is an act of looking at old things with a totally new perspective. It is like entering into an old text with new critical directions (Ostriker 213). The abovementioned excerpt from the novel highlights that Draupadi subverts the patriarchal ideology by not accepting the patriarchal norms and she questions that she has only suffered agonises in the process of preserving dharma.

Furthermore, Ray's narrative underscores that women are used as mere catalysts or medium to preserve dharma and to annihilate the evil. Vyasa's metanarrative legitimizes it with the idea that Draupadi is pre-destined to preserve dharma as well as annihilate the evil being a reason *to* initiate War of Kurukshetra. On the one hand, Draupadi of *Mahabharata* embraces this reality and lacks agency to question patriarchy, whereas on the other hand, Ray's Draupadi counters this idea by questioning it that why since the inception of time women have to be the medium to preserve dharma and to destroy evil. The overt dominant patriarchal metanarrative is shown as problematized by existence of the alternative feminist petit récit of Draupadi in the novel. The feminocentric perspective of Draupadi challenges and questions the absolutist patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. However, the female subjectivity of Draupadi in the feminist rewriting of Ray questions the make-believe world of patriarchy. Draupadi constantly refers to Sita (a sati) in the novel. Sita was a docile wife unable to raise voice against the wrongs meted out to her and she ultimately enters Mother Earth to prove her chaste life. But Draupadi rebels for every wrong done to her. She is never reluctant to question the patriarchal hegemony. Draupadi does not obey the stri-dharma passively. She refers to Valmiki's Sita that she also acts as a medium to destroy Lanka and to establish the rule of Ram. She states, "Should women be forced to be the medium for preserving dharma and annihilating evil throughout the ages?" Sita had to become the medium of destruction of Lanka and the establishment of Ram's rule" (8). *Lajja* (Shame), a film by Rajkumar Santosh, also questions the submissive nature of Sita and the unjust treatment meted out on her. Like Ray's Draupadi, Janki, a theatre artist, while performing in *Ramayana* as Sita, questions Ram and asks him to go through the fire ordeal and not her. Consequently the so-called patriarchal society calls her mad and sends her to the mental hospital. This shows that even in the Kali Yuga women are prone to violence

when they attempt to question patriarchy. Similarly, Draupadi's question appears pertinent, as women are pushed to play only supporting roles in the lives of heroic men. Her narrative counters the patriarchal ideology of *Mahabharata*. Draupadi rejects the patriarchal logic of branding women as objects rather she paves way for the empowered female subjectivity. Ray's rewriting liberates the character of Draupadi by enabling her to transgress the phallogocentric metanarrative and inventing petit récit to counter it.

Mahabharata does not dig deep into the character of Draupadi. It projects her character merely as object of men's desires or fears—metaphorical virgin or whore—but never sheds light on her character as a complex autonomous individual (Chitrangada 511). Moreover, her character only comes to limelight with reference to the male characters of the epic. Her individuality never comes to the frontline in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. He does not refer to her character as an individual. In Ray's narrative, Draupadi reflects on her birth, "I had not experienced my childhood, having been born with a youthful body" (24). She is born as a nubile that is ready to be won in the Swayamvara. This begs a perennial question that why she only comes to surface as a character when she is in a supporting role? Why her true identity does not get highlighted? Ray's rewriting brings in the female subjectivity of Draupadi by projecting her character before marriage as well. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* reflects at length at the maiden phase of Draupadi. *Mahabharata* only mentions her in relation to King Drupad and then in her swayamvara leading to her marriage to the Pandavas. Bringing maidenhood, Ray highlights her real character as a subject and not merely as an object. The novel subverts the idea that women must play a supporting role in the lives of men. In a way, as Draupadi herself narrates the story of her life in Ray's novel, the rewriting becomes a petit récit that attempts to highlight the localized narrative of Draupadi.

On the one hand, Vyasa's patriarchal metanarrative project the strong female characters as pliant women who are merely subordinates of men. The female characters in the *Mahabharata* are the victims of oppressive patriarchy. On the other hand, Ray's Draupadi complains about bearing up all the difficulties silently. She articulates her contempt for a woman's subservient position in a patriarchal society. She does not accept the idea that a woman has to suffer all her life in the hands of patriarchy and having no

right to question it. Draupadi opines, "Why should I silently bear such an insult?" (56).The novel as petit récit rejects arch-patriarchal ideals through the character of Draupadi. In the excerpt, she refutes that why a woman is made to suffer silently without complaining. She refers to the concept that patriarchy controls every action of the female gender and does not give any autonomy to a woman. Moreover, it makes a woman apologetic. She counters the patriarchal metanarrative and subverts patriarchal norms. It appears that the feminist petit récit brings into focus a female perspective by refuting patriarchal norms. Through ecriture feminine, Ray liberates the character of Draupadi and gives her agency to resist laws and rules. Furthermore, the female subversion questions the old established rules made by men and reinvents feminine ways to counter and tackle patriarchy.

Ray reworks Indian mythology giving voice to the silent female character of Draupadi by redefining her as a strong female character that has agency and autonomy to reject patriarchal norms established to subjugate women. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Draupadi's character in the epic never introspects about her life and the adverse situations that she has to face time and again. Ray's petit récit not only liberates her character but also counters the totalizing metanarrative. Draupadi articulates, "Was I a lifeless statue?" (56).After her swayamvara when she has to marry five Pandavas, she complains in the novel that she is not a lifeless statue; while in the epic Draupadi says nothing about it. Ray foregrounds in her novel that women are objectified in marriages and so was Draupadi. King Drupada agreed to give her away as an object in a swayamvara. She could not escape the lustful eyes of the invited guests only to be rescued by a veil formed by the bees. She seethed with anger and started questioning the norms of society when she was divided amongst the Pandavas. She questioned why a man with several wives was acceptable in society but a woman with several husbands would be called unchaste. Here Beauvoir's perspective on marriage appears relevant. She holds that, "Marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality" (173). The swayamvara of Draupadi testifies that women fall prey to oppression through the institution of marriage. Women have to function only for the welfare of the state, like Kunti and Draupadi do. Draupadi's mind rebelled at the humiliation hurled at her on being divided among five men."Did I have no say? . . . I had

placed the garland of bridegroom-choice around the neck of one already. By law, and according to dharma, it was he alone who was my husband.… Why should I accept the other brothers as my husbands? Would that not destroy my dharma? The very idea was ridiculous: one woman to live as the wife of five men! Why should I silently bear such an insult? Bereft of reason and judgment, would these brothers impose upon me their whimsical authority and should I accept that?" (211). Here Ray criticizes the ritual of Swayamvara that in the Vedic era allowed a woman to choose a husband out of her own choice; however, in Dvapara Yuga, Draupadi was not allowed to choose her husband, for her father wanted her to marry Arjuna. Furthermore, Ray's narrative questions the patriarchal notion that women are only commodities and reproductive machines. Her novel, as feminine writing, liberates the character of Draupadi who is capable of resisting the patriarchal traditions with her petit récit that women too have identity. They are not lifeless statutes to gratify the sexual needs of men only. In Cixousian terms, Ray "invents" new Draupadi in her writing that cannot withstand the injustices meted out on the female gender.

Draupadi's anger is suppressed in the *Mahabharata* except the sabha scene where she burst out in anger on everyone who is present in the royal court of Hastinapur. Ray sheds light on her emotions and feelings in the narrative. There comes times in Draupadi's life when she has to bear the brunt because of the ill-doings of the men around her. Ray's Draupadi expresses her feelings and breaks the myth of a submissive woman. In the sabha scene when no one comes to rescue her, not even her husbands, she states: "I wished I could turn into a searing flame of the sacrificial fire and destroy the world and in it these five brothers too" (57). *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* as a counter-narrative of *Mahabharata* articulates female perspective and makes her speak her mind up by bursting out her true emotions that remain suppressed and bottled up in the epic. In this excerpt, Draupadi shows her anger that none of her husbands tries to rescue her, so after she gets humiliated in the court, she remains angry. Voicing her true feelings, Ray emerges out of the claustrophobic concept of femininity that is constructed by patriarchy. Moreover, Ray's feminist rewriting creates a utopia for Draupadi where she has agency to invert the patriarchal mindset. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* challenges the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* that endeavoured to keep

Draupadi's position liminal. The feminocentric issue of representation is addressed in Ray's narrative which attempts to foreground the female perspective of Draupadi.

As this thesis endeavours to reclaim the Vedic concept of feminine self, therefore, it is necessary to look into Ray's novel to find instances of Vedic feminist strands. *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* refers to the *Vedic* concept of feminism when Lord Krishna in the Swayamvara praises Arjuna who has been disguised as a Brahmin for saluting his future wife. He asserts: "Any woman irrespective of age, caste, religion, country is worthy of a man's respect. For a woman is a form of Shakti and without worshipping Shakti; none become a hero. Thus, by saluting Draupadi this wise youth has paid obeisance to Mother Shakti" (45). Krishna alludes to the *Vedas* and Vedic Age where women are highly regarded. He also points to *Vedic* notion that the concept of power is feminine. Additionally, Krishna highlights the Hindu concept that men seek their heroic strength from Shakti the goddess of energy and strength (Lekha 21). When Arjuna salutes his future wife in the Swayamvara, other kings who have also been invited ridicule him that a man is saluting a woman. It establishes that the patriarchal mindset never accepts empowerment of a woman in any way. Kavita Kane, an Indian fiction writer, states in her essay, *Women in Sanatan Dharma* (2015) that the ancient Indian epics attempt to violently over-thrown an earlier, goddess-based Hinduism found in the *Vedas* (Kane 3).

In the Vedic Age, women were well-read and had thorough knowledge about *Vedas*. Women as intellectuals and sages were respected in the pro-Vedic culture. Nevertheless, in Treta Yuga and Dvapara Yuga, women were not allowed to read the scriptures and female sages were looked down upon in the society; instead, women were pushed to do menial house chores and limited to domestic circles (Bhattacharaya 41). In Ray's narrative, Draupadi is depicted as an intellectual who has knowledge of religious scriptures and she is the one who thinks critically. When women were denied access to education, Ray presents an unseen side of Draupadi. She portrays Draupadi as a poet and having profound knowledge in the *Vedas* which is not often mentioned in the other versions of the epic. Arjuna even once says: "I had heard that the princess is adept in the scriptures. Then I believed that for women to know scriptures meant learning them by

rote like parrots. But now it appears that you have not memorized the scriptures but internalized them. You are not only knowledgeable but full of wisdom too. I admit defeat before you" (177).Arjuna is taken aback when he comes to know about Draupadi's in-depth knowledge of the scriptures. He appreciates her intellect. However, his bewilderment shows that the patriarchal society is not accustomed to see women intellectuals who have real knowledge about the scriptures. Moreover, even if they have known some verses from the scriptures that too is limited to memorizing few verses. Ray's Draupadi appears as an intellectual who can outwit men in her Vedic knowledge.

The consequences of being a learned woman are further pointed out in Ray's novel refer to the assembly scene where Draupadi questions that how a man can stake his wife when he himself is a slave. The intellect and stubbornness disturbs the arch-patriarchs present in the assembly. Shakuni, Duryodhan's uncle, says: "The greatest offence that a woman can commit is to try to be learned" (238). The excerpt refers to the stereotyping of women in Dwarpa Yuga who are only considered as house makers and who have no right to question patriarchy, whereas in *Vedic* Age women were the epitomes of intellectual and spiritual attainments (Chakravarti 3).

The second selected novel is *The Palace of Illusions* written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. *The Palace of Illusions* triggered a trend of rewriting an epic narrative from the point-of-view of a female character in all its interiority. In the 'introduction' of the novel, Divakaruni clearly states, "But always, listening to the stories of Mahabharata as a young girl, I was left unsatisfied by the portrayal of women". The excerpt points out that a need for feminist rendition of the epic arises because of the unsatisfactory projection of the female characters. In the same vein, Divakaruni asserts in the introduction that the novel places "women in the forefront of the action" (Divakaruni 3) and narrates "the story that lays invisible between the lines of men's exploits" (3) in the *Mahabharata*. The narrator voice is that of Draupadi's, whose access to the male realm of action is limited to observance and reflection. She finds herself in the curious space between the man's and the woman's world, born for great things, beautiful and accomplished, restricted by her gender within the royal chambers where her spirit feels stifled. As a woman's

interpretation of *Mahabharata*, *The Palace of Illusions* narrates the events through the lens of a woman married to five Pandava brothers, the greatest heroes of their time. Divakaruni has written this novel in first person giving Panchaali's own thoughts on her life. Though she is popularly known as Draupadi (literally meaning daughter of king Draupad), however, she renames her as Panchaali (princess of Panchal) that speaks about her subversive nature. She refuses to believe that her identity, in any way, is to be bound by men in her life. As a feminist rewriting of the Sanskrit epic, *The Palace of Illusions* discards the popular Hindu belief that Panchaali brings the destruction of the Third Age of Men (Dwarpa Yuga) that gives her the name 'Kritya' (one who brings doom to her clan). However, this is also a reality that in today's India, many Sitas can be found but one can fail to find any girl named Draupadi in the entire country. Divakaruni's rewriting is unique in the sense that she provides a new outlook on Panchaali. The narrative delves deep into the realm of female desire and longing for spiritual awakening, even as it fashions the protagonist along the lines of tragic figure with a flaw in a bildungsroman narrative. As she constantly negotiates her way as anomaly, Panchaali is granted a special insight that leads to her ultimate realization at the end of the war which she has been an instrument.

The Palace of Illusions as a postmodernist feminist rewriting subverts the patriarchal metanarrative of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* by bringing into perspective the feminist petit récit of Draupadi in order to counter the metanarrative. It repositions the character of Draupadi and places her at the centre of her narrative .Divakaruni's novel attempts to shed light on the feminist micro-narrative which reinvents the female characters and highlights the female side of the story. Moreover, *The Palace of Illusions* adumbrates traits of Cixousian ecriture feminine by inscribing the female body and projecting the unique female experience of Draupadi. Draupadi's own female narrative counters the patriarchal mindset that breeds misogyny. Through her feminist petit récit, she attempts to decipher the phallogocentric perspective in the *Mahabharata* that aims to project all female characters bound to patriarchal norms. It appears that Divakaruni opines through her novel that within a male paradigm of Vyasa's writing, female characters have no voice. This is the reason why Indian women writers have been rewriting history with a female perspective in order to counter the views of a typical

patriarchal frame of writing. Divakaruni's narrative is female-centred that liberates the character of Draupadi, as Draupadi appears to have a postmodernist trait of scepticism that does not allow her to embrace norms of patriarchy as it is. What is more, she subverts the phallogocentric idealism with her unique female subjectivity. In this way, Divakaruni invents a new Draupadi that is different to that of Vyasa's in every single way. Draupadi questions and calls the patriarchal metanarrative as incredible by believing in her feminist petit récit.

Divakaruni clearly mentions in the author's note to the novel that why a feminist rewriting of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* is indispensable. She writes, "I was left unsatisfied by the portrayals of women in the epics. It wasn't though the epic didn't have powerful, complex women characters that affected the action in major ways... But in some way they remained shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons" (Divakaruni xiv). This excerpt from the introduction of the novel reflects on the significance of the feminist rewritings, as they articulate the voiceless female characters from the phallic-centred narratives. According to Ostriker, rewriting is like entering an old text with new critical directions (213). Divakaruni's rewriting brings in the misrepresented female character of Panchaali to limelight. Her rewriting foregrounds the psyche of Draupadi by delving into the recesses of her mind. *The Palace of Illusions* measures out the mental strength of Panchaali that Vyasa failed to bring out in the orignal epic. Divakaruni's Panchaali tells her own story in the novel revealing her joys and doubts, her trials and tribulations, her heartbreaks, her triumphs, her achievements and her unique female perspective in which she sees the world. In a way, Divakaruni's narration becomes a gendered retelling that attempts to look at the epic through the eyes of Panchaali. Divakaruni, in a crystal clear way, points in the author's note to the novel, "If I ever write a book, I remember thinking... I would place women in the forefront of the action. And who would be better suited for this than Panchaali?" (xv) Hence, Divakaruni's feminist rewriting uses Panchaali as her mouthpiece to advocate a feminist perspective absent in the epic.

Mahabharata at every point reiterates the idea that women have to play supporting role in the lives of Kshatriya men. They have to support their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons in becoming good warriors by supporting them. In the *Mahabharata*, a pativrata woman has to support the men of her family in becoming a true Kshatriya. It is her dharma to play significant role in men's life by extending her support. However, Divakaruni's Draupadi does not accept this idea that a life of a woman should only revolve around men. Questioning the dharma of a pativrata woman, she states: "...I plan on doing other things with my life" (25). Instead of playing a supporting role in a man's life, she rather wants to live her life according to her desires. She elucidates that she intends to do innumerable other things in her life instead of just supporting her husbands. Her views subvert the patriarchal ideology. However, she remains stern with her ideas of living a life, while totally negating a clichéd patriarchal assumption that women are born to support men in their endeavours. Her petit récit counters Vyasa's metanarrative bringing a female perspective that has not been explored in the *Mahabharata*. In addition, Divakaruni's female rewriting repositions Draupadi's character as a female protagonist who carves her own destiny.

Divakaruni ridicules the typical patriarchal norms that only try to push a woman to a subjugated space where they are only subservient to men. As Hindu dharma idealizes Kshatriya men whose only aim in life is to become a good warrior and become a martyr while fighting valiantly in the war. However, female perspective differs from the male perspective. In *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi has a different perspective about war. She holds that Kshatriya women should never ask their men to die in the battlegrounds rather they should try to save their lives. She questions the ideology of male chauvinism where men who die fighting in the war are the heroes. She also subverts this patriarchal notion that the only purpose of a Kshatriya woman is to prepare her men for wars. Her female subversion questions the so-called ideology of war. She articulates: "I promised myself I'd never pray for their deaths. I'd teach them; instead, to be survivors. And why a battle necessary at all?" (26) Like George Bernard Shaw who states in his play *Arms and the Man* that "What use are cartridges in battle? I always carry chocolates instead..." (23), she holds the same views that instead of dying foolishly in a battlefield one should rather try to survive. It points to the idea that Draupadi's petit récit rejects male-chauvinistic

ideals about war and the glorification of martyrdom by highlighting the female perspective that opposes patriarchal ideology.

Divakaruni refers to the incident when Draupadi in her swayamvara has to choose her husband out of her choice. She refers to the swayamvara as a farce, where nominally the swayamvara is for the girl to choose her husband; however, in real life, men of the family decide that which man their girl has to marry. In *Mahabharata*, King Drupad designs the test in swayamvara in such a way that only Arjuna will accomplish the test. This takes away Draupadi's right to marry a man out of her choice. Similarly, in *Ramayana*, King Dhashrata, the father of Sita, designs the test in swayamvara in such a way that only Ram will accomplish it and no one else in Bharat. This establishes that swayamvara is in real terms a farce that is only designed to cater for the patriarchal design. Nonetheless, in the epic Draupadi does not resist her father's wish who wants her to marry Arjuna rather she succumbs to her desire without saying a word. But Divakaruni's Draupadi questions the practice of Swayamvara. She says, "How foolish I'd been, dreaming of love when I was not but a worm dangled at the end of a fishing pole" (57). Before Swayamvara, Draupadi thinks of getting married to the person whom she would choose. Contrary to her expectations, she has to succumb to her father's will. Her female perspective never comes to the surface in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. Resisting the patriarchal practice, Divakaruni's narrative subverts the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* that fails to acknowledge the female perspective in true letter and spirit.

Mahabharata does not refer to romantic relationship of Draupadi and Karna. Nonetheless, as a feminist writer, Divakaruni makes use of creative liberties to add many new stories in the epic in order to demolish the archetypal presentation of Panchaali. *The Palace of Illusions*, as a petit récit, projects the female sexual desires of Panchaali which remains a taboo subject in the epic. According to Anita Sehgal, an Indian intellectual, when a woman speaks of her sexual desires, she becomes a fallen woman" (Sehgal 3). Keeping the romance between Karna and Panchaali alive, Divakaruni plays out with Panchaali's fascination for Karna in her novel. When, for the very first time, Panchaali sees the portrait of Karna before the Swayamvara, she is attracted by that "austere faced man whose eyes were filled with an ancient sadness" (69). *Mahabharata* only mentions

that incident when Karna comes to accomplish the task set to win Draupadi; she stops him by saying that he is not a Kshatriya. In Divakaruni's narrative, Draupadi falls for him and she wants to get married to Karna and not to Arjuna. The female perspective of Draupadi is highlighted in *The Palace of Illusions* who out of compulsion chooses Arjuna. She mentions, "When inside me a voice whispered, Karna would never have let you down like this..." (109). The excerpt refers to the incident when Draupadi is asked to marry all five Pandavas. Here she reprimands her decision and comes up with an alternative perspective that had Karna in place of Arjuna, he would never have let her down. She criticizes Arjuna as he does not resist the idea of polyandry, for he could have taken a stand for Draupadi as he won her in Swayamvara not his other four brothers. Contrarily, he accepts the decision of his elders and does not think of her feelings and emotions. Divakaruni sheds light on her feelings for Karna in detail that how she wanted to marry him and how throughout the novel she feels for him. The feminist petit récit speaks volumes about the female desire that finds no place in *Mahabharata.* Moreover, it questions the male dominated assumption of female sexuality. As a female writer, Divakaruni's point-of-view counters the patriarchal metanarrative deeply incorporated in the epic.

The representation of Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* is thoughtful, nuanced and straightforward. Her postmodern deconstructive thinking dissects the patriarchal metanarrative. As a sceptic, she subverts the patriarchal bases of religion. She appears as the advocate of postmodernism, for she believes in relativity of truth and acts rationally. Her identity as a postmodern sceptic comes to fore when she questions religion. The concept of lokas is a Hindu concept that means that after this world, people will go to different lokas according to their deeds. Firstly, Draupadi rejects this idea that there are any lokas. She articulates, "But I thought that if lokas existed at all, good women would surely go to one where men were not allowed so that they could finally be free of male demands" (157).Divakaruni's female perspective dips deep into her character who chalks out infinite number of feminist interpretations of religion. The excerpt counters the patriarchal mindset that imposes male domination on the female gender. By discarding the hegemonic patriarchal narrative, Draupadi brings in feminist petit récit that

problematizes and deconstructs patriarchy. The female subjectivity of Draupadi allows her to emerge out of idealised and reticent object of male desire.

Similarly, Divakaruni's feminist rewriting further questions the injustices meted out on the female gender that are rooted in religion. She questions her destiny and the roles of gods in the narrative that they give you one thing and take away things that are more valuable. She asserts: "I should have remembered how tricky the gods are. How they give what you want with other hand while taking away, with the other hand, something much more valuable" (251). Contrary to Vyasa's Draupadi, Divakaruni's Draupadi shows female power and agency. Her point of view differs from a typical Hindu woman in terms of believing things without investigating. Furthermore, liberating herself from religious orthodox views, she believes in female power and agency that is to women in their social spheres. In the abovementioned excerpt from the novel, Draupadi is referring to the double standards of morality. When she comes to know that she has to marry other four Pandavas too she mentions that gods play with the emotions of human beings. Divakaruni questions and investigates the patriarchal ideologies of a religion through her writing. She, in a way, revises and reformulates the character of Draupadi with new possibilities.

In the same context, *The Palace of Illusions* refers to the status of women as mentioned in the *Vedic scriptures*. Draupadi states: "Have not our scriptures declared, father is equal to heaven, but the mother is greater?" (68). It sheds light on the women empowerment in *Vedas*. Draupadi here shows her in-depth knowledge of the scriptures to Dhristradumya's tutor who has misogynistic point of view. She refers to the Vedas to strengthen her argument that women are not inferior to men.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni has also depicted the character of Draupadi as an intellectual who is well-informed about the world around her and who knows what the real status of women is as mentioned in the *Vedic Scriptures*. Divakaruni's Draupadi, who gets disturbed by the over-imposing laws and rules of patriarchy, opines: "I will enter a hermitage! I will never marry" (32). It refers to the practice that was acceptable in

the Vedic times that the intellectuals and the women rishis[68] used to enter hermitage instead of marrying. There is a huge list of the names of women who entered hermitage and sidestepped patriarchal norm of getting married. The list includes Ghoshsha, Godha, Vishwawra, Apala, Upanishad, Brahmjaya, Aditi, Indrani, Sarma, Romsha, Urvashi, Lopamudra, Yami, Shashwati, Sri, Laksha and many others (Bhattacharya 43). In the novel, Draupadi also wishes to enter hermitage in order to avoid patriarchal norms.

Saraswati Nagpal's Draupadi: *The Fire-Born Princess* is a reimagining of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*—told from the perspective of Draupadi. The novel takes its readers back to the time that is half history, half myth, and wholly magical. The novel gives a feminist interpretation of the ancient Sanskrit epic. Nagpal highlights through her narrative that though Draupadi is counted as pancha sati[69], the name Draupadi still bears stigma and is often contemptuously uttered by people in society as the woman who brought about the greatest wars of all times. However, Nagpal makes a determined effort for a balanced portrayal of Draupadi and brings to surface the broader and deeper aspects of Draupadi's mind that lay submerged in the majestic sweep of the grand *Mahabharata*. As the title of the book suggests, it takes its reader through the life of Draupadi—the princess of Panchal. The renarrativization of *Mahabharata* attempts to answer questions about Draupadi that go unanswered in the original epic. In addition, the selected feminist rewriting is unique in a way that it breaks patriarchal myths. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata* Draupadi is depicted as a woman thirsty for vengeance and who is capable of no emotion other than anger; however, Nagpal's novel counters this myth. She, in the introduction of the novel, mentions that, "I was to write the story of a character on whom volumes had been written, specifically in Hindi, from academic to pop literature. I wanted my story to be unique and yet highlight the core of Ved Vyasa's heroine" (Nagpal 2). She introduces the character of Draupadi as "...a woman who had the brains to propel the future, spine to stand up for truth, will to fight, and the heart to love despite the cruel games of fate" (2). It must be taken into consideration that Nagpal's narrative is inspired by *Andha Mahabharatamu*, a Telgu recreation of *Mahabharata* composed between eleventh century to fourteenth century. As in the Telgu version of the

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[68]Rishi (Sanskrit ऋषि) is a *Vedic* term for an enlightened person.

[69] Pancha satis are the five supremely virtuous women.

Mahabharata, her feminist rewriting also projects Draupadi as Icha Shakti[70]. Nagpal redefines and reinterprets the character of Draupadi by unfolding the psychological complexities of the mythological character. In the novel Nagpal endeavours to cover the early developments in women's movement in India and to reposition women in the Indian society. Nagpal attempts to reinterpret myth through the character of Draupadi, who was born of a sacrificial fire. Through the narrative, Nagpal makes Draupadi question her identity as her birth is exceptional. She is given the 'autobiographical voice' in the narrative to interpret the events which are interwoven in the story of the great dynasty. Nagpal's rewriting of Draupadi unfolds the issue of women being considered as a commodity or "property" (52). Not only does the narrative highlight women as property but also focuses on woman's anguish, pain, sorrow, and anxiety in her never ending conclusion of representations.

Saraswati Nagpal's novel *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* is the story of *Mahabharata* told from the perspective of Draupadi. Nagpal redefines and re-representsthe character of Draupadi. Ray's Yajnaseni is written in a linear sequence to understand the psychological complexities of the mythological character, Draupadi. In the novel Nagpal endeavours to cover the early developments in women's movements in India and to relocate the position of women in the Indian society. Nagpal attempts to reinterpret myth through the character of Draupadi, who was born of a sacrificial fire. Through the narrative, Nagpal makes Draupadi question her identity as her birth is exceptional. She is given the 'autobiographical voice' in the narrative to interpret the events which are interwoven in the story of the great dynasty. Her rewriting of Draupadi highlights the issue of woman being considered as a commodity or "property". Not only does the narrative unfolds woman as property but also focuses on woman's anguish, pain, sorrow, and anxiety in her novel reflecting the never ending conclusion of representations. She seeps deep into the recesses of her mind to take to the fore what Draupadi has to say about the male domination that mars female subjectivity. Moreover, Draupadi in Nagpal's narrative celebrates her womanhood and sticks to her subjectivity by not allowing the male perspective to change her views. Draupadi who never accepts the singularity of phallogocentric traditions rather rebels against it. Nagpal proliferate her

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[70] Icha Shakti is a propelling force initiated and powered by the Janana Shakti of Lord Krishna.

character by giving her agency to speak out against the injustice of patriarchy. She is endowed with an ability to question that challenges male perspective as well as patriarchal ideology through her feminist petit récit. Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* is an attempt to reformulate, revise and exploit the form of feminist rewriting with new possibilities in order to create a utopian zone where her character can have enough agency to counter the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata* with her feminist micro narrative.

Nagpal presents Draupadi as a unique female character from the *Mahabharata*. Her narrative uses creative liberties to project the character of Draupadi as a strong and assertive female character. Born out of the sacred fire, Draupadi is no ordinary woman, and her destiny cannot be to walk the beaten path. Witnessing estrangement and betrayal within her own family makes her perceptive and intuitive. Complicated marital relationships, a meteoric rise and a fateful loss, humiliation unheard of and her ordeal seemed never-ending, yet she stands up to it all—never succumbing, never breaking. Draupadi shows what a woman is capable of. Unlike the passive character of Mahabharata's Draupadi, she is an intellectual who comes to a conclusion in her life that she has merely been treated as an object by patriarchy and realizes that she has to rise above it. She introspects and says, "How naive I was about myself and my life" (16). This shows that Draupadi is not oblivious of the ill-doings of the patriarchal society that pushes her to the wall by making her an object of male desire. In the epic, Draupadi embraces the patriarchal laws and rules b*y s*uccumbing to the patriarchal norms. However, Nagpal's Draupadi introspects and draws conclusions logically. Introspection enables her to subvert the patriarchal laws and repositioning her as a strong woman in a typical Indian patriarchal society.

Nagpal's feminist rewriting uses Uttara[71]—a female narrator—to tell the story of Draupadi. Unlike, Ray's and Divakaruni's rewritings that used Draupadi as a narrator, Nagpal uses another important female character of *Mahabharata* to narrate the story of Draupadi. Uttara tells Janamejaya, her grandson, the story of Draupadi. However, the novel does not focus on any other female character from the epic and strictly highlights the character of Draupadi, whereas in other selected novels Ray's and Divakaruni's

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[71] Uttara is the daughter-in-law of Draupadi and wife of Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna and Subhadra.

novels have subplots which brings to focus other strong female characters as well. For instance, at length projection of Kunti, Gandhari and Subhadra takes place in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* and *The Palace of Illusions*.

In Nagpal's narrative, Draupadi questions the dominating male perspective at every point of time. In the sabha scene when Yudhishtra stakes her in the game of dice and loses her as an object, she questions her husband. She asserts, "Whether he is a slave or a king, a man cannot stake his wife as if she were an object!" (32). In Vyasa's *Mahabharata* Draupadi questions her husband for staking her but she has to remain silent after all. Contrarily, Nagpal's rewriting presents a subversive Draupadi who never compromises on her principles and who is intelligent enough to handle any situation. Moreover, she is a learned woman who has studied religious scriptures and on the bases of her knowledge of Hindu dharma, she points to the fact that her husband can stake her as if she were merely an object. This feminist counter narrative shakes the very bases of Vyasa's patriarchal metanarrative. Draupadi's speech in the royal court of Hastinapur leaves everyone speechless and awe-struck after seeing her knowledge about the religion and the way she tackles a difficult situation being a woman.

Draupadi's subjectivity comes to surface in Nagpal's narrative when after the sabha scene she states: "I am a woman of royal blood, and I do not take insults to my honour with ease" (58). She counters the patriarchal metanarrative by bringing her feminist petit récit that positions her as a subject in her rewriting. Unlike Vyasa's Draupadi, she is assertive and blatant who knows how to counter-argue where it is required. It appears that Nagpal's fiction unravels the realm of her female psyche. Her Draupadi is not a pliant woman. She is a strong woman who wishes to articulate her opinion and has a desire to be heard. Moreover, her dignity and self-respect do not allow her to kneel down.

Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* projects Draupadi as a strong female character who is endowed with the ability to transform adversity into opportunity. When Draupadi has to leave Hastinapur for Kamika forest, she utters: "What patience? I do not understand this patience!" (58). She points to the fact that she has not done anything to deserve an exile for thirteen long years. She articulates that it is Yudhishtra's mistake that

has landed them to live a difficult life of forest dwellers. Yudhishtra asks her to stay patient. In a response she says that she cannot stay patient because she is not the one who has invited adversity but him. In *Mahabharata*, Draupadi does not utter a single word and like a pativrata woman accompanies her husbands to the forest. On the contrary, Nagpal's Draupadi cannot accept and breaks the myth that a sincere wife has to go through the trials and tribulations along with her husband rather she shows her anger to Yudhishtra for putting her in this situation. In a nutshell, the selected Indian ecriture feminine as petit recits subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by propagating the female perspective of Draupadi.

Draupadi as an intellectual also comes to the forefront in Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. In the novel, Draupadi projects that no one except Krishna appreciates her intellect. She states: "Krishna, a trusted friend of my father, was the only man who respected my intelligence enough to spar with me as an equal" (16). Draupadi's response sheds brings to light that patriarchy hates women intellectual and never appreciates a woman's intellect. The patriarchal mindset is misogynistic that brands a woman as an ignorant being. In the same context, Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, "There is no such thing as 'feminine nature'. There was no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men, and yet, throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second-class citizens" (244). The aforementioned quote from Nagpal's novel highlights that women are only seen as homemakers; other than that, women are considered a threat for patriarchy. Beauvoir unfolds that over the centuries, the concept of the female's passive maternal role has become so deeply entrenched in culture and society that it was presumed to be a woman's natural destiny. The passive female theory of patriarchy never accepts women as intellectuals. In fact, in the times when *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* was written, at that time women and shudras were kept from learning the *Vedic Scriptures* and were pushed to superstition so that they could not question patriarchy. However, in Vedic Age women as intellectuals and rishis were accepted. In addition, Ray Draupadi asserts, "We would discuss philosophy and politics for hours" (16). As mentioned earlier, women in the Vedic Age hold a high place in society and their opinion on different matters of life was given weighed no less than men. Hence the *Vedic* concept of women empowerment dips deep into Nagpal's narrative

too where her character also is considered as an intellectual who can talk on philosophy and politics as men do.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter entitled, "Voices of Dissent: Countering the Phallogocentric Metanarrative of *Mahabharata*" attempted to examine Vyasa's *Mahabharata* as a phallogocentric metanarrative that portrays the character of Draupadi as a typical pativrata woman who sacrifices everything in her life and remains patient in the times of adversity without complaining patriarchy for her suffering. On the contrary, the selected feminist rewritings counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* using Lyotardian concept of petit récits. Fused with the concept of petit recits, this chapter also brought Ostriker's idea of revisionist mythmaking and Cixous's framework of ecriture feminine. Furthermore, the chapter endeavoured to answer two research questions that how do the selected feminist rewritings as petit recits counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. This chapter utilized postmodern theoretical lens of Lyotard's petit recits, Ostriker's revisionist mythmaking and Cixous' ecriture feminine. The chapter analyzed that the selected feminist rewritings of Pratibha Ray, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Saraswati Nagpal through the selected theories countered the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by reclaiming the *Vedic* concept of feminine self. What is more, this chapter highlights the subjectivity of Draupadi in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, *The Palace of Illusions* and *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. The next chapter of analysis brings into perspective the concept of abjection by considering Draupadi's character as an abject self.

CHAPTER 5

Abjection as a Subversive Retrieval Strategy

5.1 Introduction

As chapter 4 entitled, "Voices of Dissent: Countering the Phallogocentric Metanarrative of *Mahabharata*" explores *Mahabharata*, as a phallogocentric text, and the selected feminist rewritings, as subversive feminist petit recits; in the same way, chapter 5 titled, "Abjection as a Subversive Retrieval Strategy" attempts to study the subversiveness of Draupadi using abjection and its three traits: abjection as a psychic space, abjection as something out of subject/object dichotomy, and abject as seductive/destructive space. As this study aims at focalising the feminine subjectivity of Draupadi, therefore, by utilizing Kristeva's lens of abjection, the intersection of the former and the latter can be achieved. This chapter focuses on the representation of Draupadi as an abject self in Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. By the deconstruction of meanings, this chapter focuses on connotations that reflect the psychological conditioning of Draupadi. Firstly, this chapter focuses on how the abjected self of Draupadi creates a psychic space in her mind that serves as a space providing escape from reality. Secondly, the chapter analyzes abjection as something other than subject/object dichotomy. Under this tenet the chapter focuses on Draupadi's character that suffers from the element of abjection and fails to live a normal life. Lastly, the chapter examines the psychology of Draupadi via the seductive/destructive nature of abjection. Draupadi's character and her actions in the selected feminine writings are analyzed as per the traits of abjection where she feels repulsion and attraction for the same phenomenon. Moreover, the Kristevan concept of abjection and its three traits are applied on the selected texts to explore the feminine self of Draupadi by dipping deep into her feminine identity that never comes to limelight in Vyasa's epic. This chapter addresses the research question undertaken by the research that how does abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy play out in the selected texts.

5.2 Draupadi as an Abject Self

Julia Kristeva in her work, *Power of Horrors: An Essay on Abjection*(1982) defines abjection, "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them" (4). The selected Anglophone Indian rewritings of *Mahabharata* highlights the perspective of Draupadi, as the selected women's writings are from her vantage point. Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* project the character of Draupadi as a subversive female character who transgress the normative boundaries of patriarchy.

To begin with, the selected contemporary feminist rewritings do not succumb to the phallogocentric idea of calling her Draupadi. The literal meaning of Draupadi is the daughter of Drupad. In all selected novels, Draupadi, as the narrator of the story, finds it loathsome to be called as Draupadi. The selected novels use different names for Draupadi: Panchami (one with five husbands), Malini (one who is an expert stylist), Nityayuvani (one who is given a boon of virginity), Yajnaseni (one who is born of fire), Panchaali (princess of Panchala) and Krsihnaa (one with dark complexion). However, in Ray's novel Draupadi chooses Yajnaseni as her name. In the same way, in Divakaruni's novel Draupadi calls herself Panchaali and Nagpal's narrative names her Krishnaa. This act of defiance speaks volumes about the subversive nature of Draupadi delineated in all selected feminist rewritings. Through the names given to Draupadi in the feminist rewritings, it can be deduced that giving her different names highlight her individuality. Draupadi's defiant behaviour comes to surface in these novels where her story and her female perspective are unleashed. Similarly, keeping Kristeva's concept of abjection in perspective, Draupadi breaks the rules in the selected texts and finds psychic space as an escape to all her sufferings.

Draupadi in *Mahabharata* remains in the boundary chalked out by patriarchy. She is projected as an unvoiced woman. Vyasa's Draupadi is projected as embracing patriarchal norms and, as a female character, she lacks agency to question the injustices meted out on her. Contrarily, Draupadi of contemporary feminist rewritings can be seen

as an abject self who abhors rules and a law that are socially constructed, rejects patriarchal binaries that are established in the social world and fails to behave in the way society wants her to behave. The subversive nature of Draupadi in the selected novels comes to limelight through the characterization, plot, symbolism and stylistic choices of the female authors.

Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi, as a selected feminist rewriting, traces the character of Panchaali (Draupadi) as an abjected individual who questions gender disparity and who possesses a razor-sharp intellect to outwit patriarchal rules and laws. Being an abject self, Draupadi questions the world ruled by men where women only play supporting roles. Through her narrative, Ray retells *Mahabharata* from the female perspective of Panchaali and voices a tale of an unheard woman who suffers in Vyasa's *Mahabharata* at the hands of patriarchy and never questions anything, while Ray's Draupadi not only questions men made rules but also rebukes the evil designs of patriarchy.

Ray's novel begins with the death scene of Draupadi on the foothills of Himalaya. The narrative begins with a flashback where she revisits her life incidences while dying. She introduces herself to the readers with an emphatic tone announcing, "I was born nubile. The sacrificial altar is my mother. Yajnasena is my father. So I am Yajnaseni. Yajnaseni! Panchal princess, Panchaali! Draupad's daughter, Draupadi!" (5). On the one hand, in Vyasa's version of *Mahabharata*, Draupadi's life has not been discussed at length and she is only named as Draupadi which she accepts without complaining. On the other hand, Ray's Draupadi takes pride in her birth that is not biological. She is born of sacrificial fire. Thus, she takes pride in being a daughter of fire, whereas in the epic her birth has a side of mystery to it. Draupadi, as a fire-born, possesses fierceness and stubbornness as personality traits who, as an abject self, never accept the social boundaries easily.

Draupadi, as abject individual, questions the purpose of a woman's birth and negates the phallogocentric raison d'être that "a sati is born to preserve dharma and to annihilate evil throughout ages" (24). She draws a comparison between her life and that of Sita's life, as both were born to preserve dharma. She negates the idea that women are

only a medium of destruction. By alluding to Sita's life, she argues that being a medium to bring destruction to Lanka, Sita renounces all worldly pleasures and had to become a forest dweller in order to establish dharma on the earth. Contrarily, being an abjected individual, Draupadi interrogates that after establishing Ram's rule what did Sita get ultimately? She only gets a sentence of exile from Ram and is asked to prove her chastity in public in a fire ordeal. However, she does not accept the boundaries that are laid out by men and speaks up her mind that a woman is not born to conform to patriarchal norms but to live life on her own terms.

Ray's Draupadi does not accept the idea of accepting five Pandavas as her husbands, for she is being married to Arjuna only. In the epic, Draupadi succumbs to the will of elders that she should accept it as fate. Nonetheless, Draupadi, in Ray's feminist rewriting, renders this decision of getting married to all five Pandavas as bereft of any reason and logic. She not only rejects the idea of marriage to the Pandavas but also maligns Arjuna for not speaking up against her marriage to the other four Pandavas. She gives this reason that she is won in swayamvara[72] by Arjuna so the other four Pandavas have no right on her. Swayamvara is actually a Hindu practice that has been practiced since the Satya Yuga where a princess has to choose from many suitors. However, in *Mahabharata*, this practice of choosing a suitor has been ridiculed, as instead of Draupadi choosing her husband from the suitors, Drupad, her father, asks her only to choose Arjuna and not Karna. Here all her hopes of living a happy life shatter down. She falls in love with Karna the time she sees him for the very first time; however, in her swayamvara she is to choose only Arjuna for her father's political reason. She asserts in a fit of fury: "I wished I could turn into a searing flame of the sacrificial fire and destroy the world and in it these five brothers too" (57). Vyasa's Draupadi could never have thought of thinking this way. It's the subversive Draupadi who has the courage to subvert from male dominance. In a state of abjection, she never gives up on challenging the patriarchal laws and denies socially constructed rules.

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[72]Swayamvara (Sanskrit: स्वयंवर,), in ancient India was a practice where a girl had to choose a husband from the suitors.

Draupadi again refers back to *Ramayana* when the question of her marriage to the Pandavas arises. Vyasa, the writer of *Mahabharata*, argues that if Draupadi marries all five brothers then they would remain united all their life. On the other hand, Draupadi rejects this idea by bringing into argument that despite not getting Sita as their wife, "Lakshmana, Bharat, Shatrughna had remained loyal brothers of Ram. Why would the five Pandava brothers not remain loyal to one another without me?" (62). She gives a reason that marrying one woman cannot assure that Pandavas would remain united or not. It is a matter of bonding and their mutual love. She never fully accepts this idea that one woman should marry all brothers for the sake of unity. This reflects her subversive nature that rejects "boundaries" and laws prevalent in a patriarchal society.

As the plot matures, Draupadi takes to surface the idea that she marries Pandavas because she is compelled to. However, she also states that in the Kali Yuga people will blame her and ridicule her for being called a sati and yet having five husbands. Draupadi fails to accept the laws and conventions imposed on the female gender. She, in the same vein, says that "why these laws are only for women and not for men?" (92)

Mentioning Urmila, from *Ramayana*, she points to the dual standards of patriarchy that Mandodari, wife of Ravana and a worshipper of Ram, is rendered as a sati; however, Lakshmana's wife, Urmila, who waited for her husband for fourteen long years, is not hailed as a sati. The subversive soul of Draupadi is restless and eager to find out the answers that why women are treated with injustice, whereas Valmiki's Sita never has the courage to question the rules chalked out by men. Draupadi embraces the rules of patriarchy and tries to be a pativrata woman who only cares for her dharma as a daughter, wife and a mother. On the other hand, Ray's Panchaali as abjected individual questions the hypocrisy of patriarchy and tries to shun away from the male dominant society.

In *Mahabharata*, the female characters only desire to have food, clothing and a roof. They appear happy with these basic necessities of life provided by men, whereas Draupadi is of the view that a woman cannot live only on getting food, clothing and a roof. She underscores that "a woman needs social status, respect and everyone's support" (153). Furthermore, she asks her friend, Krishna, that "there should be some remedy for the injustice that a society does to a woman" (153). Here Draupadi appears as an

intellectual who wishes to curb gender inequality in a patriarchal society. Her abject self abhors patriarchal rules and laws that only reduce a woman to a subservient position. She questions that why woman should be contended with the basic necessities of life, as, for her, social status and respect are of foremost importance too.

Draupadi's intellect lands her in difficulties as the patriarchal world does not allow a woman to question its norms. Shakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana[73] says, "The greatest offence a woman commits is to try to be learned. It is because she became wise and scholarly that her condition is thus!" (238).From the beginning of Ray's novel till the end, Draupadi's intellect stands-out. She outwits the laws of patriarchy by counter-arguing, subverts the male dominating ideals and lets her abject self come to surface. As a learned abjected individual, she is not accepted in the society and is rendered as a "pervert" who transcends all boundaries that are being laid for the female gender.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, like *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, projects Draupadi as a social maverick who does not accept patriarchy and shows contempt for the patriarchal norms. Divakaruni's Draupadi is a learned woman who knows the Holy Scriptures and the status of a woman in her religion. This also points to the reality that patriarchy never accepts an intellectual woman that is why all female characters in the *Mahabharata* know nothing about *Vedas*, *Shastras* and *Puranas*. In Dwarpa Yuga women and shudras (pariahs) were not allowed to study the Holy Scriptures. The reason behind keeping the Scriptures away from women and shudras is that they must not know that Hinduism does it not propagate social stratification on the bases of caste adding to it, *Vedas* empower the female gender. Divakaruni's Draupadi is an educated and cultured woman that calls a spade a spade. She has an inbuilt ability to counter the misdoings of patriarchy.

The Palace of Illusions begins with a discussion that Draupadi is not satisfied with her name. She subverts the idea that she should be called Draupadi. The literal meaning of Draupadi is the daughter of King Drupad. Her name reflects patriarchal domination. As an abjected individual who is beyond boundaries, she suggests her own

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[73]Duryodhana (Sanskrit: दुर्योधन,) is a major antagonist in the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* and was the eldest of the hundred sons of blind king Dhritrarashtra and Queen Gandhari.

name Panchaali that means the princess of Panchal. She selects this name and takes pride in her name, as Panchaali reflects her individuality where her identity is not dependent on her father's name. Draupadi opines in the novel: "I needed a more heroic name" (5). In *Mahabharata*, men have heroic names such as Dhristrashtra, Bheeshma, Arjuna, Duryodhana, Karna, and Drupad just to name few. Keeping this in view, Draupadi who thinks of herself no less than a hero, names herself as Panchaali—a name that liberates her feminine being.

Draupadi, as abovementioned is a learned woman, questions the patriarchal tales of male chauvinism. In the beginning of the novel, Dhrishtradumnya, her brother, repeatedly narrates the story of his father and Drona by highlighting the bravery of his father. She, however, subverts his version of reality and says: "...a story is a slippery thing" (15). She rejects Drupad's narration as it glorifies him as a king and does not bring into perspective the other side of the story. Draupadi asserts, "...for a story gains power with retelling" (20). According to Draupadi, a story can only be authenticated if both sides of the coin are taken into consideration. She subverts the patriarchal tales that are designed to glorify male heroism. She rather believes in the stories that come from the marginalized. It establishes that Draupadi does not behave in the way patriarchal society wants her to.

Draupadi crosses all boundaries of patriarchy and tries to uncover the reality. Dhristradumnya, her brother, takes tuitions from a male tutor who along with his lessons inculcates a sense of misogyny in him. He projects that man's real woe is a woman who is responsible for all evil in this world. Rejecting his misogynistic ideas, Draupadi subverts his opinion and resents the tutor's declaration that "women are the root of all the world's troubles" (24). The rejection of patriarchy and its gender biased views points to Draupadi's subversion and transgression. The abjected individuals, according to Kristeva, do not follow laws and rules. Furthermore, they turn them aside and abhor binaries constructed and established by the society. Divakaruni's Draupadi appears to subvert the phallogocentric logic of Vyasa and endeavours to reconstruct a gender-friendly world.

The marginalization and cornering of women pushes them in a space of solitude. Draupadi realizes that she is not like other women who tempt men and act like sexual

objects rather she is resentful of how women are treated. She transgresses the limitations imposed on the female gender and bluntly negates patriarchal norms of her society. She observes that men enjoy freedom and are not answerable for their actions. Spending more time with Dhrishtradumnya, she acts more like a man and stays alone than to be in a company of subjugated women. She discusses, "And I? Each day I thought less and less like the women around me. Each day I moved further from them into a dusky solitude" (26). As a social maverick, she finds solace in isolation than being in the company of pativrata women who are no less than domestic animals. Her abject self comes to the fore as she is unwilling to adhere to the rules made by men.

In the same way, Draupadi remains adamant to denounce the social life of a woman whose only motive in life is to please men of her family including father, brother, husband and sons. Other than pleasing men, she has no role to play. This establishes that women are destined to play supporting roles. They can never be the writers of their own destiny. Panchaali abhors this way of living. She does not accept the laws and conventions prevalent in her society. Keeping the lives of the women of her clan, she opines, "I'll enter hermitage! I will never marry" (39). She thinks of entering hermitage because she cannot accept male dominance in her life. Being an abject self, it is difficult for her to accept a man's authority in her life. Divakaruni's Draupadi is more fierce and stubborn than that of Ray's, she counts only on herself and writes her own fate.

The third selected novel, *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* is written by Saraswati Nagpal that chronicles the events of Mahabharata from the female perspective of Draupadi. Toeing the line of Pratibha Ray and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Saraswati Nagpal's Draupadi is a learned, assertive, restless and unruly woman who has a deep-seated hatred for patriarchal laws that govern the lives of subjugated women. Nagpal's Draupadi is projected as a subversive who questions men and does not remain a victim of male-dominance. She tries her utmost to carve her way out of the chauvinistic rules imposed upon women. Draupadi, as an abjected individual, acts as a "perverse" (4) to transgress the Lakshmana rekha chalked out by patriarchy. She turns the rules and laws governing women aside and rejects patriarchal conventions.

The novel introduces Draupadi as an iron-lady who does not worry about the adverse situations she has to put up with. Nagpal draws a contrast between the subservient women of Dwarpa Yuga and the fire-born Draupadi: "Born in an age when women were appreciated for their patience and sweetness, they say that my thoughts burnt bright as flames, and my words were sharp like fire-tipped arrows (5). Nagpal's Draupadi is unlike Valmiki's Sita or Vyasa's Draupadi, rejects gender stereotypes that limit the potential of a woman. In Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga, pativrata women have some pre-requisites to qualify as a chaste women that they are sweet, cultured, obedient and blind followers of patriarchal convention. Contrarily, Nagpal's Draupadi is depicted as a liberal intellectual and as an iconoclast who is blunt and unruly. Her words are not like roses rather she believes in brevity and answering back with logic. However, Patriarchy does not withstand transgression of a woman in any way and demands that a woman should remain submissive. Being a subversive, Draupadi remains fierce and does not follow the oft-trodden path.

Female subversives confront a backlash from the chauvinistic society as they do not succumb to their will and confront all men-made rules with reasoning; therefore, they are made to live life on the fringes of a society. As society is meant for social-conformists; for non-conformist women, the society never shows any acceptance. Draupadi puts it in perspective, "All my life I have been surrounded by people. Yet, strangely, I have always felt alone" (6). As mentioned above abjected individuals are not accepted in a conformist society. They, despite being the part of a society, dwell in the marginalized spaces. Draupadi says that all her life she is surrounded by people, yet she feels like she is a loner. Even living with the people she loves, Draupadi lives a life of a recluse. Draupadi as an abject self has to pay a heavy price for being a subversive that she cocoons her being in an isolated abject space. In the same vein, Draupadi articulates, "Why did I, a fire-born princess, live such a lonely life?" (7). Here Draupadi questions and tries to dig out that irrespective of the fact that she has always been surrounded with people why does she feel lonely. She deep down knows that abjected individuals find no acceptance in a society that only accepts conformist women and not the female transgressors.

In Ray's and Divakaruni's narratives this has been pointed out that abjected individuals as intellectuals are discarded by patriarchy as a patriarchal society demands dumb women who have no ability to question the injustices meted out on them. In the same way, Nagpal also asserts that intellectual women, the subversives, are not appreciated in the men's world. She points out that Draupadi's intellect, in the same way, is also not appreciated in her society where uneducated women, who are devoid of any logic, are only appreciated. Draupadi asserts, "Krishna, a trusted friend of my father, was the only man who respected my intelligence enough to spar with me as an equal" (16). Unlike Satya Yuga, in Treta Yuga and Dwarpa Yuga intellectual women were not respected and they were looked down upon by me (238). The practice of keeping women and the outcasts from reading the Holy Scripture made sure that they should remain oblivious of their real status and rights mentioned in the *Vedic Scriptures*. Intellectual women have been a threat to patriarchy, since the inception of times. These women are learned and know what is right and what is wrong and questions the hegemonic designs of patriarchy. That is why Draupadi states that Krishna is the only man who respects her intelligence and with whom she talks for hours about politics and philosophy. Nagpal's Draupadi is different from Vyasa's Draupadi who only knows how to be in the good books of the men of her family and who never argues with anyone.

In *Mahabharata* when Dhushasana[74] attempts to disrobe Draupadi, she only questions her husbands and the elders sitting in the assembly; however, she does not disrespect the royal court of Hastinapur; however, Nagpal's Draupadi as an abject self not only disrespects the royal court but also questions the elders. She says, "This court of Hastinapur is not a council of wisdom. It is a nest of sin! The elders do not condemn what is wrong. They do not uphold what is virtuous" (48). As a subversive, she cannot withstand her insult in the royal court of Hastinapur where she is dragged in one cloth, maligned and called a prostitute in assembly full of people. In the epic, Draupadi questions her husband and the elders but her tone remains humble and her words are not bitter. Nonetheless, in Nagpal's novel, Draupadi uses foul words for the council and calls it as a nest of sin showing "perverseness" (4) of an abjected individual.

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[74]Dhushasana (Sanskrit: दुःशासन), was the second son of the blind king Dhritrarashtra and Gandhari.

All three novels highlight the character of Draupadi as an abject self who subverts and transgress the boundaries laid out by patriarchy. However, studying her character in the light of Kristeva's concept of abjection cannot be completed without taking into perspective the three traits of abjection. This study analyzes Draupadi's character in the light of abjection and its three traits: abjection as a psychic space, abjection as something out of subject/object dichotomy and abjection as seductive/destructive state. One by one all traits are utilized to analyze the character of Draupadi under the theoretical lens of Kristeva.

5.2.1 Abjection as a Psychic Space

Kristeva discusses different traits of abjection in her *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. The first of which is psychic space in which a person views himself/herself as a body. Kristeva exemplifies this state with that of a corpse that is both an object of disgust as well as reminiscence of life. It is an embodiment of life getting infected by death, hence an abject. As per the trait, an abjected individual is caught between the living and the dead. He/she has physical appearance of a human being, but the soul that gives a person identity is missing. Applying this concept on the selected novels, it can be examined that Draupadi as an abjected individual creates a psychic space in her mind that serves as a space providing escape from reality for the characters in the novel.

The character of Draupadi as portrayed by Pratibha Ray in *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* in her ways of doing things and in her dialogues exhibits a behaviour that is more befitting to a corpse as described by Kristeva. Draupadi appears as a corpse that remains the reminiscence of life, which prevents her from categorizing herself in a particular dichotomy either alive or dead; consequently remaining confused about her identity. Ray's Draupadi has been maltreated in the epic where she only acts as a pawn in the hands of patriarchy.

Ray's novel begins with Draupadi's death scene where she is lying helpless on the way to Mahaprasthana[75]. She is in a state of life-in-death. Falling off the cliffs of Himalaya, she articulates: "The long-drawn tale of life brimming with tears and laughter

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[75]Mahaprasthana (Sanskrit: महाप्रस्थानिक) is the place where heaven and earth meet.

lies fluttering like a blank scroll on the breast of inexorable Time" (1). She is lying on the icy-cold Mountains of Himalaya thinking of her life that has been a mixture of tears and laughter. At this point of time when she awaits death and she has some life left in her, she appears to be a corpse that is caught between living and dead. Draupadi, as an abjected individual, introspects while "getting infected by death". *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* reflects on the life of Draupadi in her death scene that she has never had the liberty to execute her plans according to her wish despite being a strong female character. She lives life of a corpse that is neither alive nor dead.

Draupadi further points out that she has always been under control of men in her life. She has not lived life of a free individual though she desires to live life like a free bird. As a subversive, she, on the one hand, never accepts the boundaries and spit out her hatred for patriarchy, yet, on the other hand, she has to embrace the reality that she is unable to do anything without the support of her father, brother and husbands. This places her in turmoil of doing something that she wants and unable to do anything because of the restrictions imposed on her. Kristeva's analogy appears relevant here that Draupadi is neither fully alive as she is made to be a pawn in the hands of destiny and nor fully dead. However, she is slowly getting "infected by death". She, as an ignorant infant, should play with "whatever toy my master placed in my hand, be happy, and go on living" (24). This explains her dilemma that even in difficult situations that she may come across many a times in her life and she has to stay contended with whatever is given to her. In this way, Draupadi only becomes a "reminiscence of life", as Kristeva proposes, who is not fully alive.

Draupadi does not enjoy any autonomy in her life, as she is only a pawn in the hands of gods who have already chalked out her destiny and she has no say in it. She does not come out of fire out of her choice. Moreover, she has not chosen Arjuna out of her wish and does not agree on marrying all five Pandavas. Ray's Draupadi introspects and goes on a journey of self-discovery where she finds out that she was naive in her approach that she enjoyed a fair amount of authority in her life. However, when she is made to accept the Pandavas as her husbands, it is only there and then when reality hits her hard that she is not only marrying five men but has to adjust herself according to their wishes and live

five different lives. She states: "All events of my life were similarly dramatic. From that day till the last instant of my life, I would have to appear in five roles" (63). For a woman to adjust according to the whims and wishes of five different men is difficult. Nonetheless, she has to do it as that is her destiny. When individuals get bereft of their freedom and not given a choice in life then a line between life and death fades out.

Ray's feminist rewriting also projects Draupadi as an abject self and takes to fore the idea that she lives her life like a corpse that has no feelings and emotions and patriarchy has full authority over her to play with her life. It establishes the fact that being merely a ploy, Draupadi resembles a corpse that remains static and has no right to react on the injustice and violence she has to go through all her life. She articulates in the novel, "Full of anguish and anger I was thinking: was a woman merely man's movable or immovable property?" (235). After facing injustice and indifference from her husbands, she realizes that a woman is merely an object that is movable or immovable property of a man who has every right to impose on a woman. Reducing a woman as a property, it surfaces that property has no human emotions so it can be dragged and sold in whatever way a man wants. Ray's Draupadi goes through different phases in life and introspects that she has been lived a life of a corpse that is only the "reminiscence of life".

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, the second selected novel, in the later part of the novel through the character of Draupadi exhibits a behaviour that is more like a corpse. In the beginning of the novel and towards the middle, she thinks that she is the subject and she controls all her actions. Moreover, she is solely responsible for all her choices that she has to make for herself in life. However, little does she know that her life after marriage will take a different turn where all her hopes are going to dash down to the ground. Before her marriage, as projected by Divakaruni, she spends most of her time with her brother, Dhrishtradumnya. This makes her unruly and stubborn like men and she continues to think like a man does until she comes across adverse situations in her life. Post-marriage, Draupadi has to accept the patriarchal norms and she is pushed to a subservient position. Kristeva's notion of abjected individual as corpse is relevant to discuss.

The time Draupadi gets married truth dawns on her that she is only an object of men's sexual desire and a domestic animal that is controlled by her husbands. She propagates, "And I? Each day thought less and less like the women around me. Each day I moved further into a dusky solitude" (26). She distances herself from the women around her. Though she conforms to the patriarchal norms but her abject self creates a psychic space for her where she retires to imagine the unimaginable for the women of her clan. She disguises as a corpse that has no emotions and showcases servility. Having said that, her psychic space pushes her into a dusky solitude where she flies to the unrealistic world. Unlike women around her, being an abjected individual she remains in isolation and imagines what is unreachable for her.

Psychic space is an abode created by the abjected individuals in their minds to escape reality. This space sucks out life from the abject self and renders her dead. The abjected individuals who create this psychic space appear only as "reminiscence of life" that have got "infected with death". This connotes that Draupadi remains unmindful of what goes around her and only as half dead and half alive person lives in her psychic space as niche of possibilities. Draupadi voices, "I, too, would cross the bounds of what was allowed to women?" (51). This points to the notion that she despite being reduced to a status of an object, through her psychic space, rejects the patriarchal boundaries chalked out by men and wishes to transgress these boundaries. However, in reality, it is next to impossible task to go beyond the boundaries but in her psychic space, impossible becomes possible. As an escapist, she retires to an isolated world where she imagines herself as a free bird.

Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* delineates Dwapara Yuga that is the epoch where men rule and women serve. Arch-patriarchal notions of hyper-masculinity govern this age. Draupadi suffers in the hands of patriarchy, as she asserts: "In the world that I knew, men just happened to have more of it" (52). For instance, Draupadi gets married to the Pandavas and remains loyal to all five husbands irrespective of the fact that she loves Karna. Contrarily, Yudhishtra, Arjuna, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva have other wives and with them they enjoy conjugal pleasure too. It points to the fact that Draupadi embraces this reality that in the age of men, women have to suffer. Keeping these

injustices in view, Draupadi distances herself from everyone and like an abjected individual escapes to her psychic space that lands her as half-alive and half-dead person who has nothing to do with the reality and builds her unreal world in her imaginary world.

The most critical juncture of time for Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions* comes when she is disrobed in the royal court of Hastinapur. Draupadi, who is menstruating and clad in one cloth in the women's chamber, is maltreated by Dhushasana and is dragged to the assembly without her consent. Draupadi in her psychic space imagines that nothing can harm her as her husbands and elders of Kuru clan are present in the assembly. Moreover, in their presence no one can even point a finger on her. Contrarily, men of her family wrong her as she is not only dragged in the assembly but also Dhushasana attempts to disrobe her in a court full of men. She says, "In thinking this, I was mistaken. In what happened next, the laws of men would not save me" (191). Reality dawns on her that for her husbands and the elders their dharma is more important than to save her from disrespect in the court. Alluding to this event, she refers that she is mistaken in thinking that the laws of men will save me. A woman is a woman and disrespecting her in the royal court is not a matter for the men. Divakaruni's Draupadi escapes to her psychic space where she thinks as an idealist that is totally opposite of what reality holds in store for her. Divakaruni's character of Draupadi is repositioned as abjected individual that desires to transgress the laws and rules of men; however, when she is unable to accomplish her whims and wishes, she retires herself to an isolated psychic space where everything appears possible.

Like Ray's and Divakaruni's narrative, Saraswati Nagpal's novel *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* projects Draupadi's character in light of abjection, as she appears only as a "reminiscence of life" (4) and as the one who has never lived her life fully. In addition, Nagpal's Draupadi creates her own psychic space by distancing herself from people around her. Though she remains surrounded by many people throughout the narrative, yet she isolates herself from the world to escape to her psychic space that is a world of possibilities to her. The fact remains that she is maltreated by the patriarchal society and her whims and wishes have not been catered for; therefore, she creates her

own world. Her escapism makes her appear dead or as a corpse to the outside world. As she does not react much to what happens in the harsh patriarchal world. In a way, the psychic space gives her energy to put up with the adverse situations that she has to brave in the real world. Furthermore, submitting to the will of her men makes her takes the life from her.

In the beginning of Nagpal's narrative, Draupadi is projected as naive and self-obsessed. She, as a princess of Panchal, does not care about the world. She is unleashed as assertive, unruly and stubborn princess in the beginning of the novel. It seems that Divakaruni's Panchaali and Nagpal's Draupadi in the beginning share the same personality treats as both are unruly, adamant and fierce. However, when the plot matures, Nagpal's Draupadi has to come to terms with the patriarchal laws and rules that have to be adhered to. In the initial chapters of *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, Draupadi shows immense courage that she can change the world and the mindset of the people vis-a-vis how patriarchy should treat women. In her conversation with Krishna before swayamvara, she exchanges her views with him that she will live an independent life ahead and she will choose her husband out of her choice, while Krishna explains that in traditional society women have no choices of their own. It points to the psychic space that she has created to escape from the bitter realities of life. Nevertheless, later, she has to swallow the bitter pills when reality hits her. She states: "How true his words were! How naive I was about myself and my life" (16). When nobody asks for her consent in the matter of marrying the five Pandavas instead of only Arujna only then she realizes that a woman has no say in the patriarchal society. At this point of the narrative, Draupadi exhibits behaviour of a lifeless body with no soul which represented her identity. She showcases this behaviour because she has lost her will to live in a captivating world where men rule and women serve.

After her marriage to the Pandavas, she has to face adversity at another critical juncture of her life. Kauravas invite Pandavas and Draupadi to Hastinapur to play a game of dice with Duryodhana. Yudhishtra loses everyone along with Draupadi in the game. Duryodhana orders his brother, Dhushasana, to drag Draupadi to the court while she is menstruating and clad in one cloth. Moreover, when she is dragged to the assembly, he

orders him to disrobe her in the royal court full of men. Draupadi articulates: "I am a woman with five husbands. Yet I stand here stripped of all my dignity, and not one of you rises to protect me". As an abjected individual, she in her psychic space, has idealized her husband and thinks that they would protect her in the assembly. Contrary to her expectation, none of her husbands protects her. According to their dharma as slaves, they must not question their master. Therefore, they do not say anything. Draupadi questions their dharma that they are also her husbands who are bound to protect her. But her idealism does not materialize into reality. She realizes that her husbands are only blind followers of their dharma and have forgotten their dharma as her husbands to protect her.

Nagpal, like Ray and Divakaruni, refers to a romantic relationship between Draupadi and Karna. She alludes to swayamvara when she is asked to choose only Arjuna as her husband and not Karna. She asserts: "I had been born to marry Arjuna, and my destiny, pulsing in my blood, made me spit out cruel words" (36). Following the patriarchal norms by hook or by crook reduces her to a corpse who has no feeling and emotions and she has to maintain sobriety to show that she is a graceful woman who never wrongs men of her family. As a corpse, she only has a body but the soul that gives an individual identity is missing. Kristeva's comparison of abjected self and corpse dip into the character of Draupadi.

Towards the end of Nagpal's narrative, Draupadi introspects and discovers her real status in the men's world. She feels that in the male-heroism of her husbands, she has been lost. She articulates, "My husbands are warriors; they are meant for greater things! And I—was I born just to weep over my humiliations?" (57). The process of self-actualization enables her to see her life in a broader perspective and to embrace the reality that women are only domestic animals who are born to be humiliated all their lives. However, men are warriors and they should always be positioned in the centre. This reality makes her realize that women play only supportive roles in the life of the great warriors where their menial chores can never be compared to men's heroism. Divakaruni's Draupadi rightly asserts that women are men's moveable and unmoveable

property. Nagpal's Draupadi realizes that she is only an object, a corpse, whose emotions have no value and who has to follow the men in her life in every way.

The selected feminist renarrativizations of *Mahabharata* project the character of Draupadi as having a psychic space in her head which makes her confused about her identity. Draupadi remains perplexed in the selected narratives about who she is and what she wants, exhibits a corpse like behaviour where she appears to be tangled between the imaginary world and the real world. However, she does not belong to any one of them in the present. This abject psychic space of Draupadi serves as a barrier that makes her ambivalent about her sense of self, creating a vague and ambiguous sense of other.

5.2.2 Abjection as Something Out of Subject/Object Dichotomy

One of the distinctive features of abjection, as Kristeva theorized, is that abject lies at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy. Abject self cannot differentiate between self and other. Consequently, the abjected individual remains confused and unclear pertaining to his/her identity that makes him/her exhibit weird behaviour unacceptable by the society (25). Selected feminist rewritings based on the character of Draupadi peeps deep into her character that unfolds as an abject self. She remains confused about her identity. Moreover, she sails between the two dichotomies: subject and object, yet becomes a part of none. This confusion can be traced out in the selected women's writings.

In *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Ray projects the confused state of mind specifically after her marriage. Before marriage, Draupadi thinks of herself as a subject who is an important figure in her household. She is self-obsessed and takes pride in being a princess of Panchal. Nonetheless, after getting married, she realizes that she is not the subject but rather an object. She swallows the bitter pills and accepts patriarchal norms. But right after Dhushasana's attempt at disrobing her in the royal court of Hastinapur, she starts to exhibit a behaviour that is peculiar. In the assembly where Kauravas insult her, she states: "Was I a lifeless statue?" (157). At this critical juncture, she becomes neither a subject nor an object rather she places herself outside or at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy. This disrespect brings her to a point where she is unable to

differentiate between the self and the 'other'. It brings her to a state of abject where she is unsure and unclear about her identity that is why she articulates that "was I a lifeless statue?" (57). Deep down, she is questioning her identity that who is she?

Moreover, Draupadi takes into consideration the special conjugal arrangement in the later part of the novel that she not only marries five Pandavas but has to appear in five different roles that she has to maintain all her life. In playing different roles all her life, she becomes an abjected individual who has to place herself at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy. She opines: "All events of my life were similarly dramatic. From that day till the last day of my life I would have to appear in five roles" (63). Draupadi alludes to her birth, swayamvara and her marriage that her life has been dramatic. In addition, she points to her marriage that divides her into many parts and makes her play different roles. Marrying five different individuals, for a woman, means adjusting herself according to five different minds where her sense of identity comes to the halt of confusion as she is pushed to a state of the abject where the thin line between self and the other fades away. In playing five different roles, the insurmountable confusion where Draupadi appears unsure about her own identity.

While introspecting, Draupadi in a state of abject feels that everything around her is confusing. To be more specific, she loses her sense of identity with the adverse situations that she faces with the passage of time. In a way, her quest to identify her being makes her more abject. She puts it her perspective, "The long-drawn tale of life brimming with tears and laughter lies fluttering like a blank scroll on the breast of inexorable time" (1). She refers to the events that happen in her life. She highlights that her life has been an admixture of both sorrow and happiness where no feeling remains dominating. Ray unfolds her cognitive state on the periphery of dichotomies. As an abjected individual, Draupadi remains unsure and unclear about her identity that swings between self and the other. In the same way, her life has also been a mixture where she has never been more happy or sorrowful.

Again referring to her disrobing in the royal court, Draupadi holds that "I became the subtle thread for keeping the five flowers bound together, whom no one would see; whose pain and anguish no one would know; word of whose torment would reach none"

(68). She sheds light on her plight that no one would see the amount of pains that she goes through, her plight and her suffering. Being an abject self, she can neither be a subject nor be an object that further baffles her situation. As she lies at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy, she exhibits a behaviour that is peculiar and does not belong to any of the socially constructed categories. This underscores her state of abject in which everything to her is confusing.

In the same vein, Draupadi discusses that dealing with crossroads in life is never simple. She refers to her trials and tribulations at the hands of patriarchy. She is of the view that in times of suffering that she goes through since she is born to the time she dies, Maya keeps her in bondage. She asserts, "It was Maya that had kept me in bondage" (395). Maya is a supernatural power that is wielded by gods and demons. However, Maya, in the life of Draupadi is her state of abjection that makes her transgress boundaries in her head and this abjected self prevents her from categorizing herself in a patriarchal dichotomy where either an individual remains as a subject or object. However, Draupadi neither becomes the subject not an object; on the contrary she lies outside this dichotomy. Though the abject state brings baffles one's identity but at the same time it empowers by not conforming to the patriarchal dichotomy.

The abovementioned arguments projects Draupadi's identity as something out of the subject/object dichotomy in Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*. The narrative repositions Draupadi in a state of the abject where she confronts confusion and exhibits a peculiar behaviour by not adhering to the patriarchal dichotomies and her rejection of not belonging to the socially constructed categories. The aforementioned instances from Ray's narrative brings to light that Draupadi's remains unsure and unclear about her identity.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* also sheds light on the instances present in her novel where Draupadi as an abjected individual is unable to differentiate between the self and the other. A common thread of the state of abjection can be traced in the selected novels. Divakaruni's narrative discusses the confused cognitive state of Draupadi that lies at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy. In the beginning chapters of Divakaruni's narrative, Draupadi as a fire-born celestial being comes out of

the fire knowing nothing about how the concept of gender operates in the patriarchal world where she has to live till her death. As a biological female sex, she slowly comes to terms with the distinctions between the male and the female gender. However, as she spends most of her time with Dhri (Dhristradumnya), she acts like a man and starts to think that she is the subject. Later, when she gets married and experience life practically in adverse situations only then she realizes that she is not a subject. On the other hand, as abjected individual she does not become an object—the binary opposite of subject. She chooses not to be a part of patriarchal dichotomies: subject and object. Draupadi, in the state of abject, neither becomes a subject nor an object rather her identity lies outside this dichotomy.

Divakaruni's Draupadi, with the passage of time, and after observing the turn of events realizes that she cannot adhere to the patriarchal dichotomies. She quests for a liberating space that she gets in the state of abject as in this state as abjected individual does not have to conform to the binaries rather falling outside the subject and object dichotomy liberates. As mentioned above, Draupadi's abject self creates a liberating psychic space where she finds escape from the patriarchal norms that order women to remain in the gendered boundaries. This subversion, though, brings confusion, yet it liberates her being. Draupadi articulates: "And I? Each day I thought less and less like the people around me. Each day I moved further from them in a dusky solitude" (26). In this excerpt from The Palace of Illusions, Draupadi points to the idea that men and women around her are allocated different socially constructed categories according to patriarchal dichotomies, subject and object. However, Draupadi, being in a state of abject, does not succumb to these binaries chalked out by patriarchy, so she, as the time elapsed, cannot relate with people around her as her cognitive state is different to that of other people around her. Hence she distances from people and finds solace in the dusky solitude of her created psychic space where she escapes from the harsh realities of life.

Furthermore, Draupadi's own confusions about her identity land her in trouble perceiving the world clearly. Draupadi finds it difficult to locate herself in the world where everything operates within the boundaries and binaries and those who transgress them find no acceptance in it. Divakaruni's Draupadi hates the labels given by patriarchy;

therefore, she finds it an uphill task to locate herself in the world of patriarchal dichotomies. In the novel when the sorceress, who teaches her home management and seduction, asks her this question that where she locates herself in the world. She propounds: "It is a strange feeling to locate myself for the first times in this world" (65). But she answers this question towards to the end of the novel in a soliloquy, "Where do I locate myself? I don't belong to this world" (204). Draupadi is projected as a subversive as those who subvert norms and conventions of a society are made to step out of the social order. In Kristeva's words, she defines abjected individuals as perverse who deny laws and rules. Draupadi also falls in this category as she remains fierce to adhere to the patriarchal codes.

The abjected individuals like Draupadi who live in a state of abject, according to Kristeva, live at the periphery that is outside the subject and object dichotomy. They are called names by the society as "perverts", "transgressors" and "outcasts". Their abject self never gets any appreciation from the society and this state of abject is then defined as "misleading" and "corrupting". Like other abjected individuals, Draupadi also not gets any recognition in the patriarchal society. She holds, "No one had invited me into his life. No one had been so eager to find a place for me in his house" (125). She refers to the incidents of her life to project that she has been ever "unwelcomed" and "uninvited" in the lives of other people. She points to her birth where her father only wants a son and also gets Draupadi too as a catalyst who would turn the wheels of history. Here, as a daughter, she is not welcomed and invited. In the same way, in her swayamvara, she wishes to marry Karna; nevertheless, keeping political reasons in his mind Drupad asks her to marry Arjuna. Then again after marriage, she comes to know that she is a wife to five Pandavas, yet her husbands have other wives too. Moreover, in Hastinapur when she is disrespected and disrobed, none of her husbands saves her. Lastly, in on their way to Mahaprasthana, she falls off the cliff and her husbands do not bother to turn and in five husbands none is her protector. She, as an abjected individual, is not invited and welcomed in the patriarchal world and in the desire of transcending the boundaries set by patriarchy she falls out of the subject and object dichotomy.

Divakaruni—towards the end of the novel—underscores that Draupadi's confusion about subject and object patriarchal categorization leads her towards the abject state where she positions herself as a transgressor and locates her identity outside the patriarchal binary system. Draupadi articulates in the last chapter of *The Palace of Illusions*, "I am buoyant and expansive and uncontainable—but I always was so, only I never knew it. I am beyond name and gender and the imprisoning patterns of ego" (360). In the list lines of the novel, Divakaruni's Draupadi summarizes who she is. She, in clear words, projects that she is an abjected individual who is in a state of abject. She points to her reality that "she always was so, only I never knew it" (360). As a subversive, throughout the novel, she remains an iconoclast who never accepts the boundaries lay out by patriarchy and creates her own psychic space where she has autonomy to think and act independently. Moreover, she also refers to the fact that "I am beyond name, gender and the imprisoning patterns of ego" (360). This establishes that her being lies at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy and she as a "pervert" never conforms to the patriarchal categorizations.

Like Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, Saraswati Nagpal's feminist renarrativization *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* also highlights the character of Draupadi in the light of abjection. The narrative delineates her character as an abjected individual who falls outside the subject/object dichotomy and fails to be a part of patriarchal categorization. The novel begins with the death scene of Draupadi who falls from the cliffs of Himalaya and is waiting for death to come and to take her to the other world meanwhile she recalls the story of her life. She mentions that how much adverse situations she braved and reflects on what does it mean to be Draupadi. Nagpal's narrative does not follow a chronological series of event rather it moves to and fro in the form of flashbacks to entice the reading through its gripping character of Draupadi.

Falling off the cliff, Draupadi reflects back on her life that how different incidents in her life have shaped her. She recalls her very isolated life. She asserts, "All my life I have been surrounded with people. Yet,strangely, I have always felt alone" (6). In this excerpt the confused and shaded identity of Draupadi comes to surface. Throughout the novel,

she has been projected as a subversive female character that takes bold steps in life, yet lives a very lonely life even being surrounded by many people all her life. The reason behind her loneliness is her state of abject that fails her in the patriarchal world. As mentioned earlier, Draupadi is a fierce female character who never succumbs to the patriarchal rules and tries her utmost to transgress all boundaries chalked out by the male chauvinistic society. By doing this, she falls out of the patriarchal order that makes a woman adhere to her role as an object in a society. As an abjected individual, she lies at the periphery of the subject and object dichotomy. Keeping this in view, she is of the view that despite being surrounded by people all her life, she has felt lonely.

Nagpal sheds light on Draupadi's confused identity. Though the narrative also chronicles the same events that happen in *Mahabharata* and Draupadi is shown as one following her destiny, yet Draupadi's is projected as autonomous in few situations. For instance, the way she behaves and the little choices she makes in her life delineate her character as autonomous. It should be noticed that here only minor choices are being mentioned. Draupadi, in a state of abject, exhibits a peculiar behaviour as she remains confused and unclear in approach because of her state. She makes confused choices in life; whatever minor choices she has to take other than big decisions of her life that have already been taken by the gods. She asserts: "My choices may never be understood by the world" (43). It can be deduced that being an abjected individual, who does not follow the limits set by patriarchy and lies at the periphery of the patriarchal categorization, Draupadi remains confused about her identity, her behaviour and the little choices that she makes in her life. Thus, she claims that her choices will never be understood by the world.

Draupadi further states, "My own feelings were like volcano, waiting to explode. My life was a series of strange events, and I was a victim in several of them" (67). Her point of view can be understood keeping in view her identity as abjected individual. It is mentioned above as well that those who live in the state of abject not only cut off all their connections from the real world but also create their own psychic space in their mind to escape the bitter realities of life. Moreover, these abjected individuals also deliberately remain outside the subject and object dichotomy to bypass the restraints of a society. That

is why society calls them transgressors. In the same way, Draupadi explains that her feelings are like volcano, yet she cannot express her feelings to people around her and rather has to retire to her "dusky isolation" (16) as normal human beings can never understand how abject self feels like. Further, she refers to her status as victim. In Nagpal's novel, Draupadi remains in the phase of being object by the times she is disrespected in the royal court of Hastinapur; nevertheless, when she observes that no one is her protector (not even her husbands) then she turns to the abject state and comes out of the phase of being object and reclaims her identity as abjected individual. The inability of Draupadi to understand and resort to one end of the binary for most part causes her to remain ambivalent about herself and her behaviour. The abject property of being something outside the subject/object dichotomy causes Draupadi to develop an ambivalent notion of identity.

5.2.3 Abject as Seductive/Destructive Space

According to Kristeva, the third trait of abjection is the seductive/destructive space. Draupadi is unable to adjust in the patriarchal society due to this seductive and destructive space of abjection that lands her as a confused identity. Draupadi remains confused about her own identity. Due to the dichotomy of abjection as a space of seduction and destruction, she finds herself tangled in two different worlds, where at times the patriarchal world appears to her as a seductive force; however, yet at the same time it appears as a destructive force. The selected women's writings focus on Draupadi's cognitive state that remains confused and her identity that is tangled between the two forces of seduction and destruction as her response to the patriarchal world around her.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* projects the character of Draupadi as someone who is tangled between two totally different worlds, where on the one hand the same world serves as a seductive space and yet on the other hand it appears as a destructive space and due to her abject state she cannot adjust in a patriarchal society. Escaping to the psychic, that serves both as seductive and destructive, Draupadi sails between the two different worlds yet becoming part of none of them. For Ray's Draupadi the patriarchal world where she dwells retains both qualities of being seductive and destructive to her. It is destructive because Draupadi is in state of abjection and it

appears seductive sometimes when she becomes hopeful of being guarded by Lord Krishna. In the beginning chapters of the novel, Draupadi is being informed about her destiny by Lord Krishna that she would have to put up with innumerable adverse situations in her life. Moreover, she also observes that in the male-dominating society women do not live easy life. Therefore, she requests Krishna: "O' Lord! If my birth is for preserving dharma on earth then give me all the insults and calumny that are to come, but also give me strength to bear all of them" (8). This excerpts points to Draupadi's taking the patriarchal world as a seductive space, as she has faith in Lord Krishna that he will never abandon her and will protect her in difficult times. However, being an abjected individual, she is not fully sure that she would be able to withstand difficult situations in her life that is why she states that "give me strength to bear all of them" (8). Here the world serves as a source of joyance—the seductive space.

Contrary to her abovementioned experience of "joyance" in the patriarchal world, the incident of Arjuna getting married to Subhadra turns it into a destructive space. Ray mentions: "She stood up in revolt against the laws of the abode of gods, according to which one man can accept many women as he wished" (92). This excerpt from the novel refers to the marriage of Arjuna with Krishna's sister Subhadra. Draupadi underscores the injustices meted out on the female gender where she refers to the fact that polygamy is justified because the religion approves it but if a woman gets to have some extra marital relationship with other men then why is she called a fallen woman? Keeping the duality and hypocrisy of the patriarchal world in view, the world becomes a destructive space for her. She, in a state of abject, cannot conform to the patriarchal laws and rules. Thus, she wishes to escape to her psychic space where patriarchal norms hardly matter.

Kristeva's state of abjection is a state where the abjected individuals like Draupadi cannot conform to the boundaries laid out by patriarchy. This gives birth to her adjustment problems in a society and confusion about her ambivalent identity. As abjected individual she has her abjected space that is caught between the two worlds where one serves as a seductive force and the other serves as the destructive force for her. Ray's narrative questions the female dependency on men where a woman only gets basic amenities of live and is expected to be contended with it. Draupadi questions this

practice: "Can anyone just live on getting food, clothing and a roof? For living, it is necessary to have a social status" (153). At this point, the world to Draupadi serves as a destructive force that expects women to remain silent and should never crop up the debate of having respect and social status in the society. On seeing sheer injustice of the chauvinistic society, the world turns out to be a destructive space wherein women remain invisible for men.

We can find the same thread of abject being a seductive and a destructive space in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*. Through Draupadi's character, the state of abject can be traced out. Like Ray's narrative, Banerjee also decodes the character of Draupadi as abjected individual who in a state of abjection sails between forces of seduction and destruction. From the beginning of the novel till the end, Draupadi faces problems adjusting in the patriarchal world as she is a celestial being and comes nubile of the sacrificial fire so her identity remains ambivalent. Moreover, her abject self never adheres to what boundaries the men have set for the female gender that makes the patriarchal world appears to her as destructive and she escapes to her psychic space to believe that she can do what she wants to. She articulates: "I, too, would cross the bounds of what was allowed to women?" (51). Here her abjected state comes to surface. Abjected individuals always reject the rules and laws prevalent in their societies. In the excerpt, Draupadi is pointing to Shikandi, her sister, who crosses the patriarchal boundaries and lives a life of a hermit. Her abject state makes this world as destructive where she is unable to follow her whims and wishes; however, her psychic space appears appealing where she can easily enjoy autonomy.

The destructive property of abjection dominates in Divakaruni's narrative as Draupadi has bitter experiences in the world she dwells; therefore, in her abjected space, she is caught in a world that serves as a destructive force. She mentions, "I was an outsider" (143). The abjected space is the psychic space, a confused state, where reality blurs out. She says that she is an outsider because she has never internalized the norms of patriarchal world, therefore, she feels like a loner and an outsider. The tragedies that hit her time and again push her to the psychic space where as an escapist she liberates herself

from the bitter realities of life. In addition, in the process of transgressing the societal bounds, the world serves as a destructive force.

The Palace of Illusions reflects on Draupadi's psyche by reaching out to deepest recesses of her mind decoding her abject self and seeping into her ambivalent identity. The world for an abjected individual, in an abject space, serves as both attractive and repulsive place. However, the patriarchal world serves as a repulsive force for Draupadi where she never comes to terms with the hypocritical norms. She pinpoints the idea that a woman should remain loyal to her husband, whereas her husband has every right to marry as many women as he can. She says: "I didn't win all my battles. My husbands too other wives too...out of male desire" (151). Her abject self, when faced with adverse situations and is unable to swallow the bitter pills, retires to the psychic space where she finds relief. She only enjoys a "state of joyance" in psychic space. Divakaruni's Draupadi lies at the periphery of subject and object dichotomy where patriarchal categorizations reduced her to the status of 'other'. In addition, in this state of abjection, her ambivalent identity makes her sail through destructive and seductive space.

As discussed above, Draupadi is an abjected individual who knows no boundaries. The subversive nature of Draupadi is further explored by Saraswati Nagpal in her novel *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*. Nagpal's narrative, like Ray's and Divakaruni's, explores the abjected state of Draupadi. The seductive and destructive trait of abject comes to the forefront when Draupadi suffers at the hands of patriarchy. She thinks of the world she dwells as destructive that only beings adversity, yet she desires for the seductive space i.e. her psychic space as her abject self cannot conform to the patriarchal codes. This attraction and repulsion to two different worlds makes her a confused identity, or ambivalent identity. Nagpal's Draupadi also unfolds this trait of abject that is both seductive and destructive.

Draupadi, in the beginning of the novel, questions herself: "Why did I, a fire-born princess, live such a lonely life?" (7). Nagpal's narrative does not follow a sequence of plot as it moves to and fro so the novel begins with the death of Draupadi who is lying on the foothills of Himalaya and is waiting for her death. Here she introspects and self-actualizes that why she has a lonely life. Kristeva's concept of abject remains quite

relevant here. Draupadi, being an abjected individual, lives at the margins of society, for a patriarchal society like hers never accepts a woman who questions and transgresses the limits set by men, the custodians of a society. She refuses to adhere to the toxic norms of stubbornly patriarchal society. Thus, she distances herself from people around her and sails through both destructive and seductive worlds. She feels like she is a part of none of the worlds.

Draupadi sailing in between the destructive and seductive spaces, questions: "This is not the life I had chosen for myself" (47). As mentioned earlier, Draupadi in all three selected women's writing has been projected as enjoying freedom in maiden phase of her life. Therefore, she thinks herself as a subject. However, later, after her marriage, she has to acclimatize herself in a male-dominating society where women are chided at every point of time and only pliant women are accepted in patriarchy. She pushes herself to the abject state where her identity becomes ambivalent. Moreover, as she is not habitual of living as a subordinate woman, she escapes to her psychic space—the seductive space— that appeals to her and the real world, to her, becomes a seductive space. Being abjected, she cannot be a resident of any of them.

Draupadi lies on the peripheries of the subject and object dichotomy. She in a state of abjection experiences memories of joyance that are seductive; however, the joy of seductive temptations at the same time is destructive for her when she is compelled to live in the patriarchal world. Memories of psychic space on the one hand provide relief, whereas on the other hand, these memories make her oblivious of what lies at present making the seductive memories destructive in nature.

5.3 Conclusion

In the selected women's writings, Draupadi suffers from the disease of abject, where she tries to live a normal life but despite her efforts there are instances, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, where she breaks down and becomes oblivious of her present and reverts to her psychic space that provides her comfort. She is affected by this feeling which makes her ambivalent about her identity—abject. Due to the impacts of the strong psychic space, Draupadi remains confused in whether she should remain the self,

or remain other in the dichotomy and her confusion reflects clearly in her behaviour. Ultimately she sails between seductive and destructive forces of the patriarchal world and her psychic space, reinforcing her state of abject. This abjected state of her mind serves as the sole reason behind her ambivalent identity making her exhibit a behaviour that is both acceptable and unacceptable in a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

"A story is a slippery thing, for a story gains power with retelling".

(Divakaruni 20)

I embarked upon this study with the basic premise that Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Saraswati Nagpal's *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* subverted the phallogocentric metanarrative of Ved Vyasa's *Mahabharata* that has relegated the feminine self into an abject position. I have examined that these novels, as petit récits, in explorably Lyotardian terms, have taken a postmodernist stance for retrieving the *Vedic* concept of feminine self by using abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy. The selected Anglophone Indian fiction as feminist revisitations has recast the Indian epic *Mahabharata* from the female perspective of Draupadi. This study has traced out the representation of Draupadi in the selected Indian feminist rewritings as petit récits that has attempted to subvert the Puranic Indian Patriarchal literature and the phallogocentric idealism deeply entrenched in *Mahabharata*. The aforementioned novels are feminist re-writings of *Mahabharata* that reclaims Vedic feminine self by dipping deep into the character of Draupadi to highlight the incredulity of the patriarchal metanarrative of the respective epic.

The selected women's writings have repositioned Draupadi as abjected individual who rejects the societal conventions and boundaries. Along with the multifaceted postmodern theories, *Vedic* feminism has also been taken into perspective. In *Rigvedic* part of the *Vedas,* female emancipation is highlighted and it has also brought forth the concept of gender equality which is later denied in the post-*Sutra* period by the poets of Treta Yuga and Dvapara Yugain *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. This study has investigated the patriarchal bases of *Mahabharata* and attempted to retrieve *Vedic* concept of feminine self in the contemporary Anglophone feminist retellings of *Mahabharata.*

While carrying out analysis of the selected Indian feminist rewritings, I have attempted to seek answers to my research questions with which I began this study in the first place. The research questions have assisted me to direct my analysis in a more systematic way. In addition, my research questions have kept the focus of the thesis in place. Firstly, I have been concerned with exploring out how the selected feminist rewritings as petit recits counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. Secondly, I have been interested in finding out how the selected texts map out the subjectivity of Draupadi. Lastly, I have sought to investigate that how abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy plays out in the selected women's writings.

I have used multifaceted postmodern theories to analyze the selected works. I have found Lyotard's idea of petit récit as a potent tool to counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. His postmodernist concept of petit récit highlights the incredulity of the patriarchal metanarratives. He rejects the hegemony of cultural metanarratives and theorizes petit recits which do not claim to legitimize or establish any monolithic reality. Since I have been concerned to investigate *Mahabharata* as a phallogocentric metanarrative and the feminist rewritings as petit recits, I have chosen Lyotard's postmodernist idea of petit récit to analyze my primary texts.

Additionally, I have used Ostriker's concept of revisionist mythmaking, as my sub-lens, and Cixous's framework of ecriture feminine to analyze the subjectivity of Draupadi. Cixousian idea of ecriture feminine helped me to examine the Indian rewritings as feminist texts that aim to project the female perspective of Draupadi. With Cixousian post-feminist stance, I have used Kristeva's idea of abjection and its three traits to analyze the character of Draupadi as an abject self who rejects the boundaries chalked out by patriarchy. These three feminist theories have helped me to explore the feminine subjectivity of Draupadi.

In the analysis of *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, *The Palace of Illusions* and *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess*, I have been primarily concerned with the representation of Draupadi as an object in Vyasa's *Mahabharata* and the depiction of Draupadi's character as a subject in the feminist rewritings that attempt to counter the patriarchal metanarrative. Moreover, this study has also been concerned with the idea that

the selected texts reclaim the *Vedic* concept of feminism that propagates gender equality. I have dedicated the major portion of my analysis to highlight that how the primary texts as petit recits have countered the metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. In addition, it has also been examined at length in the analysis that how the ecriture feminine of the selected female writers have mapped out the subjectivity of Draupadi. What is more, a separate chapter has been written on highlighting Draupadi as an abject self in order to discuss her character in Kristeva's idea of abjection and its three traits.

I have already summarized the main points of my analysis of the primary texts, but I am now going to discuss each one of the findings under the following heading to make this study systematic for the readers.

6.1 Findings

As this study is exploratory in nature, I have used qualitative research methodology in it. Hence, the findings of this research are likely to be ungeneralizable. Keeping the research questions in mind, in chapter 4 of analysis entitled, "Voices of Dissent: Countering the Phallogocentric Metanarrative of *Mahabharata*" it may be noted that the selected texts counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. The feminist rewritings rearticulate the *Vedic* concept of empowered feminine subjectivity that has been eclipsed in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. The study attempts to counter the metanarrative by bringing into perspective Lyotard's idea of petit recits. By analyzing the selected text through Lyotardian postmodernist perspective, this study counters the phallogocentric idealism deeply entrenched in the epic with Draupadi's female perspective. After analyzing the representation of Draupadi in *Mahabharata* and the feminist counter narrative of *Mahabharata*, this thesis illustrates.

Chapter 4 has examined the feminist rewritings as their petit recits to counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* by dividing the chapter into different headings to discuss how these feminist rewritings have reclaimed Vedic concept of feminine self and countered the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. Under the first heading of this chapter, "*Mahabharata* as a Phallogocentric Cultural Metanarrative" the representation of Draupadi has been examined that how Vyasa has projected

Draupadi as a mere object of male desire. Focusing on all sections of *Mahabharata* where Draupadi is mentioned including marriage section, the sabha part, the forest, the court of Virata, prior to war and after the war in order to analyze the objectification of Draupadi in Vyasa's narrative. Through close reading of the text focusing on the character of Draupadi, it has been seen that Draupadi is merely projected as a submissive woman throughout the narrative. In the same chapter, under the heading of "*Vedic* concept of Feminine Self", I have examined that the selected feminist rewritings have reclaimed the *Vedic* concept of feminism in their women's writings. The selected women's writings have focused on the Vedic concept of empowered female subjectivity. Through the close reading of the feminist rewritings, I have inferred that these rewritings highlight *Vedic* feminism and paint a true picture of Hindu feminism that has been eclipsed by Vyasa's *Mahabharata*.

Furthermore, in the same chapter, under the heading of "Selected Feminist Rewriting as Petit Recits", this study has examined how the feminist rewritings have empowered petit recits of Draupadi and a major portion of this chapter has been allotted to the textual analysis of the selected rewritings to examine the petit recits as the counter-argument of the patriarchal metanarrative of *Mahabharata*. Chapter 4 has addressed the research questions undertaken by the researcher and has found out that the selected feminist rewritings as petit recits reclaim the *Vedic* concept of feminine self and counter the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* through women's writings based on the character of Draupadi.

Chapter 5 entitled, "Abjection as a Subversive Retrieval Strategy" has been divided into different headings that discuss Draupadi as abjected individual. Under the heading of "Draupadi as an Abject Self", it has been analyzed that how Draupadi suffers from the disease of abjection and tries to shun away from the patriarchal norms by subverting the rules and laws of patriarchy. Abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy allows Draupadi to subvert the patriarchal mindset. Furthermore, in the same chapter under the heading of "Abjection as a Psychic Space", I have examined that Draupadi, when faces bitter realities of life, breaks down and becomes oblivious of her present and

reverts to her psychic space that provides her comfort. The psychic space, for her, acts as an escape from patriarchy.

Moreover, this chapter under the heading of "Abjection as Something out of Subject/Object Dichotomy" has also highlighted that Draupadi is affected by this feeling which makes her ambivalent about her identity. Due to the impacts of the strong psychic space, Draupadi is not able to decide whether she should remain the self or become the other in the dichotomy. The manifestation of her confusion reflects clearly in her behaviour. The same chapter has also discussed the seductive/destructive trait of abjection under the heading of "Abject as Seductive/Destructive Space" to unfold that Draupadi remains in between the seductive and destructive forces of the patriarchal world and her psychic space, reinforcing her state of abject. This abjected state of her mind serves as the sole reason behind her ambivalent identity making her exhibit a behaviour that is both acceptable and unacceptable in a patriarchal society.

Chapter 5 has responded to the undertaken research question that how does abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy play out in the selected women's writings. I have explored the character of Draupadi as an abject self who uses abjection, in the selected women's writings, as a subversive retrieval strategy to subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*.

The exhaustive textual analysis of Ray's, Divakaruni's and Nagpal's feminist rewritings in the light of the theoretical underpinnings of Jean Francois Lyotard, Alicia Suskin Ostriker, Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva demonstrates that the selected texts— *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, *The Palace of Illusions* and *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* subvert the phallogocentric metanarrative of *Mahabharata* retrieving the Vedic concept of feminine self. Furthermore, these feminist rewritings of *Mahabharata*, having been analyzed through the multifaceted postmodern theories exhibit Draupadi's character as an abjected individual by using abjection as a subversive retrieval strategy.

6.2 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has enabled me to recommend to future researchers to explore postmodernist feminist renarrativizations from multiple perspectives. The selected

women Indian writers, as mythological fiction writers, have also written novels on *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* from the viewpoint of other female minor and major characters in the epic. Like Divakaruni's recent novel *The Forest of Enchantment* (2019) that tells the story of Ram from Sita's female vantage point. In the novel, Divakaruni's retelling places the character of Sita at the centre of the novel. This text also evinces postmodernist tendencies, as it is a petit récit that refutes the phallogocentric idealism of *Ramayana*, and, therefore, researchers may find it interesting to carry out a postmodernist reading of the text. Moreover, since Divakaruni's work portrays a psychoanalytic exploration of Sita's character by digging deep into the recesses of her mind, it would be quite useful to look at it from a psychoanalytical perspective. Furthermore, keeping the textual analysis of the selected feminist revisitations in mind, I am able to suggest deconstructionist reading of the selected texts—that I have not focused in my research—which explores the male dominance in the epic and can foreground suppressed female voices.

The Liberation of Sita (2016) by Samhita Arni, as a feminist retelling of *Ramayana* from Sita's perspective, takes to surface a unique female perspective that does not project women in need of protection and women as trophies for winning wars; instead, the subversiveness of Sita's character is highlighted who is projected as a warrior of Mithila. Moreover, we can look at Sita's character in Arni's narrative as an abject self that crosses the Lakshmana rekha and subvert patriarchal laws and propagates that heroism is not merely constrained to men all alone. Similarly, Karthika Nair's *Until the Lions: Echoes from the Mahabharata* (2015) sheds light on the minor female subversive characters of the *Mahabharata* like Hidimba, Ulupi and Amba who as abjected individual live on the periphery of the subject/object binary chalked out by patriarchy. Nair's novel can be explored through the theory of abjection.

Kavita Kane's novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcasts Queen*, appears as a petit récit that unfolds the story of Uruvi, the wife of Karna, who is one of the lesser-known female characters of Vyasa's *Mahabharata.* This novel can be seen under the theoretical framework of ecriture feminine that aims to empower women through women's writings. Kane's narrative, as ecriture feminine, can be analyzed from gynocritical perspective.

Hence, it would be interesting for the future researchers to analyze feminist mythological fiction through the lens of ecriture feminine.

The abovementioned suggestions for the future researcher in the area of mythological feminist fiction can broaden their horizon to see different feminist retellings from eclectic theoretical forays. These recommendations can help researchers to explore the contemporary mythological Indian literature from multiple perspectives.

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