



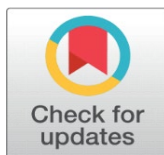
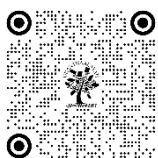


RE-VISIT OF THE FIRE-DAUGHTER -- AN URGENT NEED OF THE PRESENT TIME

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ABSTRACT

The two Indian Women Prototypes are Sita and Draupadi, the female protagonists of the epics, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata*. Both are *ayonijas*, not born of a woman. While Sita was a foundling child from earth, Draupadi was born of fire, and their characters define their birth. Sita was patient, pliant and firm; Draupadi was fiery, proud with an unbending will. The history of both the women relates a saga of suffering and disgrace, but points to their unshakeable determination to establish their individuality. The qualities of both Sita and Draupadi are unquestionably essential for any woman to ascertain her identity. However, the present scenario in India, especially of demeaning and humiliating women and girl-children, demands a volcanic strength in women-kind to face all trials and degradations. Creative writers have brought out many works highlighting the iron-will of these two great women. This paper ventures to focus on Draupadi, the Fire-Daughter and on her thunder-like quality, valour and virtue, which swayed away all the wrongdoers in her fire-stride. The discussion will be mainly based on Subramania Bharathiar's *Pancali Sabadam*, and a few other related texts.

Keywords: Women Prototypes, Draupadi, Fire-Daughter, Present Scenario, *Pancali Sabadam*

1. INTRODUCTION

Great leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln have created a massive revolution in politics. History as well as Mythologies have ever glorified the performances and the achievements of the males whereas females have been neglected. Feminists, of late, are indulged in the process of re-mythification and re-telling of the history, from feminine point of view. A detailed survey of this can be found in Joseph Campbell's works, especially in his *A Hero with Thousand Faces*. He describes the mythical heroes as modern as they are relevant to the present youths in being a source of inspiration to them. A female hero or heroine is selfless who strives to overcome the inner inhibitions and thereby discovers her

“self” to transform into a wholesome personality. The welfare of others is her priority. The theory of Care Ethics is a celebration of this glory in her. [Chakravorty \(1981\)](#)

2. OBJECTIVE

The Indian *itihisas*, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have presented two Female Heroes, Sita and Draupadi respectively, who are considered as the epitomes of womanhood. Both are the products of natural elements, earth, and fire, and not born of a woman. Sita is Earth-born and Draupadi, the Fire-daughter, both revealing the qualities of their respective elements –Sita carries on with patience and perseverance; Draupadi is fiery and fierce and executes action in a powerful way. Draupadi is selfless in her fight against *adharm*. She is a representative of a new era. Creative writers have variously projected this undisputable character in several of their works. This paper focuses on Draupadi’s dynamism portrayed by a few writers, male and female, and investigate the fire-daughter’s performance in their works.

- 1) Uniqueness:** *The Mahabharata* amidst many themes indirectly celebrates the power and the wisdom of women. Chadurvedi Badrinath in his book *The Women of the Mahabharata: The Question of Truth* (2008) [Charturvedi \(2008\)](#) mentions about how each woman character in the epic has a lesson to teach and they highlight the several dimensions of Truth and Goodness. Modern women too are undergoing same predicaments of the mythical women to the extent that they may be considered as the incarnations of mythical heroines. Mythical characters like Kunti and Draupadi are eternal due to their relevance to all places and climes. Time and again they prove that a woman should rely on her inner strength. Such an astuteness and perception should be practiced by the girls/women of today. This is the most urgent need of the contemporary condition.
- 2) The Fire Daughter:** Panchali is called Fire-Daughter not only because of her unique birth out of fire but also because of her unique destiny of being the wife of five husbands and she has to live amidst the fire of envy, pride, revenge and all other evil incarnations. She is called “Krishna” since she is dark-complexioned and “Panchali” as she is the Princess of the Panchala country. King Drupada arranges a spectacular ceremony of *Swayamvara* for his daughter. He designs an archery contest in such a way that Arjuna becomes his son-in-law. The Pandavas now living disguised as brahmins, attend this ‘mahotsava, the great celebration’. Draupadi’s opinion was not considered at all, and she was like an inanimate object gifted to the winner. According to Chaturvedi, the event served as a prologue to the future destiny of Draupadi. The enemies of her husbands present there was a threat to her literally. Her refusal to marry Karna was an insult to him who thirsts for a compensation later. Revenge is personified in the form of Karna and the kauravas. Again, Chaturveti comments that the *swayamvara* predicted and depicted the exact scene of the battle of *Kurukshetra* with the same opponents on either side.

As per the instructions of Kunti, who dictates them to share the alms, the five brothers share Draupadi. The *bhikshaor* alms that day happens to be Draupadi and now Kunti is in a fix. The decision is left to Yudhishtira, who afraid of disunity among brothers, quickly resolves to obey the dictum of his mother. Chaturvedi intervenes here and is caustic in his remarks as how Draupadi had been treated as an object and all had proved indifferent to her feelings. Her permission has not been sought.

Perhaps, she has silently accepted her condition as vassal, since her father has earlier announced her as trophy to the winner of the archery contest and later, she is presented by Arjuna and Bhima *asbhikshato* their mother. Draupadi is the only case of polyandry in the human history. She turns the mother of the five sons. Only Bhima is empathetic towards Draupadi and the other four, never ever regret for their attitude towards her. Lal (2005)

Whether it is the Mahabharata days or the present day, such an attitude defines typically the male-chauvinism prevalent at all times and in all climes. Woman is just brushed aside as a meek, dumb object and thus is forced to break her silence, become vociferous to challenge the injustice meted out to her. This is what happens in the case of Draupadi in the Hastinapur court. The court scene after the Dice game portrays how vociferous Draupadi can be. Bhattacharya (2004)

3. DRAUPADI'S RHETORIC

Draupadi's disrobing is, in fact the fulcrum of the great Kurukshetra War in which the entire Kuru dynasty is decimated. Duryodana attends the *Rajasuya* sacrifice performed by Yudhishtira, gets ashamed of Bhima's ridicule when he accidentally falls down, wants to wreak vengeance, his uncle Shakuni knowing Yudhishtira's weakness for gambling provokes his nephew to invite him and his brothers for a friendly Dice game. Yudhishtira accepts the invitation, plays, and stakes all his wealth, his kingdom, then one by one his brothers and at last his own self. Prompted by Shakuni, he stakes Draupadi also. Much to the dismay of all those assembled in the court, Yudhishtira loses this game also, meaning that he has lost his holy wedded wife. Duryodana quickly sends one of his attendants, Pratikami, to inform Draupadi that she is now the 'slave' of Duryodana, and so must report to him. The shocked Draupadi questions him and asks him to convey her message to the court. Chaturvedi quotes from the *Mahabharata*, Book 2, *Sabha Parva* (67, 7-8):

Go back to the Assembly, and ask the Gambler King (Yudhishtira): '*whom did you lose first: your own self or me?*'

It is only after I know the answer to this weak and helpless woman will come to the Assembly. (210)

When Pratikami informs, Yudhishtira sits numb and lifeless, the arrogant Duryodana tells him: "Let Draupadi come here and ask him that question herself, so that all who are here may hear his answer" (67.12). Poor Pratikami goes back only to return with Draupadi's angry words that "she would seek the guidance of the elders as to what she should do in that circumstance, and she would act accordingly. They know what *dharma* is" (211). The infuriated Duryodana sends his brother Duhssasana to bring her; he acts rudely catching hold of her long hair and dragging her to the Assembly Hall. Draupadi tells him that she is menstruating, has on her a single garment and it is improper to appear thus before the elders. But, the haughty Duhssasana proudly replies:

Yajnaseni! Whether you are menstruating, or clad in one garment only, or naked, we have won you in that game of dice, and you are now our slave. Hereafter you shall live like our slave and act on our bidding. (67. 34)

It is at this setting that Draupadi is described as *nathavati anathavata* (67.31), meaning "husbanded-yet-husbandless", a phrase applied to Draupadi that rightly depicts the condition of the countless women in the world. Understanding that her husbands cannot come to her rescue, Draupadi decides to challenge the Assembly and the Kuru elders, hurls at them her resilient rhetoric to force her moral indictment. She questions: "Was I won in accordance with *dharma*? The elders of the

Kuru-family here have sons and daughters-in-law. Let them reflect on my question and answer it justly" (67.44). Bhishma, the eldest Kuru leader accepts that he cannot answer her question since the nature of *dharma* is quite subtle. Vikarna counters this by supporting Draupadi giving reasons: "I do not regard Draupadi as won in accordance with justice and fair play" (68. 19-24). Chaturvedi writes:

What was required, even more than answering Draupadi's question, was the assembly exercising its authority to stop Duhshasana's ignoble conduct towards her first. It did not. . . all men of immense authority, remained silent spectators of a woman degradation and humiliation. they were men of authority, yet morally impotent in the present situation. (214)

4. DISROBING EVENT

Encouraged by this disgraceful situation, Karna begins to heap upon Draupadi insult after insult calling her a whore as she is under the control of several husbands. He addresses Duhssasana and tells him, "Pay no heed to what this fool Vikarna says. Take away the clothes of Pandavas and of Draupadi" (68.38). In the open Assembly Duhssasana starts disrobing Draupadi. In utter desperation, as Draupadi prays to Krishna, a miracle happens. Whatever the garment that Duhssasana removes, there appears a new one to cover Draupadi. (68. 41-48) Duhssasana, totally exhausted falls on the very pile of garments that he has removed from Draupadi's person. Bhima reacts strongly, takes two vows. Vidura warns King Dhritarashtra of ill consequences since his sons have violated every tenet of the *kshatriya dharma*. Now the king realizes the serious mistakes, asks Draupadi to state any wish of her. She asks the King to release Yudhishtira from slavery. The King then asks her to state a second wish and Draupadi asks for the release of the four brothers and restoring of their weapons. When the King offers her yet another wish, she calmly replies: "One should not be greedy. What you have granted is sufficient. They will now do the rest" (71. 34-36). Karna, who called her in filthy terms, now speaks admiringly: "Of all the names of beautiful women I have heard, I have never heard of anyone achieving such a remarkable thing" (217). Draupadi's amazing feat in the Kaurava court that validates her individuality and identity has been recognized by the present-day writers to re-read the *Mahabharata* that lead to thematic diversions. [Campbell \(1968\)](#)

5. PANCHALI SABADAM

Panchali Sabadam, the magnum opus of Mahakavi Subramania Bharathiar written in the Epic mode, takes up the Dice-game and the subsequent Court scene as its subject-matter.

Subramania Bharathiar (11 December 1882 - 11 September 1921) is considered to be one of the greatest Tamil poets of the modern era. Most of his works are on religious, political, and social themes. His deep faith in Hindu spirituality and nationalism made him see beyond the social taboos and superstitions of the orthodox Indian society. Sister Nivedita inspired him to recognize the privileges of women and their emancipation. He visualized the 'new woman' as an emanation of Shakti. He was up against the British ruling over India and the society's abuse of the down-trodden. His poetry with its reformist ideal, combining classical and contemporary elements and bearing splendid imagery and vigour, is a forerunner of the forceful modern Tamil poetry. Bharathiar the visionary, envisages the modern Indian woman as the vanguard of society who can construct a new India. [Ramesh \(2018\)](#)

Panchali Sabadam is divided into two major parts and is further sub-divided into five sarukkam or chapter. The five chapters are:

- 1) *Suzhcchi-carukkam* - Plotting Chapter
- 2) *Suudhatta-carukkam* - Gambling Chapter
- 3) *Adimai-carukkam* - Slavery Chapter
- 4) *Thugilurithal Sarukkam* - Harassment Chapter
- 5) *Sabatha-carukkam* - Vow Chapter.

Bharathiar dedicates his work to the later immortal poets, who will bestow life and light to Tamil language with their lyrics, and also to the supporting philanthropists -- a rare dedication indeed, not seen in any other text. He has also given a brief "Introduction" in Tamil. He says:

Today, a poet who composes an epic with simple vocabulary, style and with easily understandable prosody, is the one who gives fresh life to our mother tongue. . . . The task is very big, my ability is very small. Because of my craving, I am writing this and publishing -- not as a paradigm, but as a pointer. In this work, I have shown Dhritarashtra as a noble-minded person, one who has no interest in gambling, who dislikes Duryodhana. . . . My portrayal adapts the view of Vyasa *Bharatam*, can even be considered as its translation. In the imaginative structure, there is not much of my personal intervention. I am responsible for the Tamil prosody alone. I hope that our people would like this style as I am provoked to undertake this task by the Supreme Shakti, Parasakthi, who has resolved to give new life to the community. Om Vande Mataram. (*Bharathiar Kavithaikal*, 414-15) [Bharathiar \(1987\)](#)

Part 1 of the text, as per the convention commences with the Invocation to the Supreme One identified as the *pranavam* "OM" and is followed by the prayer to Goddess Saraswathi, the embodiment of Wisdom. The first chapter (*Suzhcchi-carukkam*) - Plotting Chapter, also noted as *Azhaippu-Carukkam* or Inviting chapter, after covering the several incidents ends with the Pandavas leaving for Hastinapur accepting the invitation of the King. The notable point not found in Vyasa's *Mahabharatham*, is the *Gayatri Mantra* prayer translated into Tamil. Chapter 2 also begins with a brief prayer of the poet to Saraswathi, focuses partly on the Dice-Game and ends with Yudhishtira losing his kingdom. Part II of the text commences with the Invocation to Parasakthi and Saraswathi, and presents the next three chapters. In Chapter 3, *Adimai-carukkam*- Slavery Chapter, Yudhishtira stakes his four brothers, then himself and loses everyone including himself. Shakuni provokes him to place Panchali as a pawn and play. Chapter 4 *Thugilurithal Sarukkam*) - Harassment Chapter, the most hurting chapter, records Bharathiar's intense agony that is revealed in the poetic lines loaded with apt images. Bharathiar echoes Vyasa in the chapter 5, *Sabatha-carukkam* - Vow Chapter but in a heavy, grief-laden tone. However, the chapter gives an opportunity to the poet to pen the heart-rending prayer of Panchali to Lord Krishna that celebrates the Divine Performance of the Lord. Vyasa's prayer is simple and direct. The chapter ends with the vows of Bhima, Arjuna, and Panchali. The Fiery daughter takes a blistering pledge in the name of Devi Parasakthi that she will smear her hair with the blood of Duhssasana and Duryodana like the scented oil, comb and braid her hair. And before that event happens, she would not tie her hair. The poet concludes the narration that all the five elements pronounce "OM" affirming Panchali's sabadam. [Gannon \(1983\)](#)

Panchali Sabadam has been translated into English, *The Vow of Panchali* by Ha. Ki. Valam and *Panchali's Pledge* by Usha Rajagopalan. Both the translators have tried to retain the spirit of the original text. To catch the belligerent outburst of the

protagonist, the reader must read the Tamil version. Bharathiar prefers to call his Female-Hero, "Panchali", as she is the daughter of the Panchala Kingdom, thus metaphorically identifying her with Bharatha Matha. He also seems to identify her voice as the voice of every Indian woman, now and always. Panchali, the Female-Hero with cleverness and courage carries on her course alone, wins all the obstacles and frees herself and her warrior-husbands. K. Nandhakumar in, "Portrayal of Postcolonial Voices in Subramania Bharati's Panchali *Sapatham*" writes:

The deceived Pandavas and disgraced Panchali are used as symbols in the work, which represent the mother of the nation and its indigenous people. The resentful Panchali is being personified as the Bharata Matha (Mother of India), because she was also humiliated, strangulated, oppressed, and plundered by her enemies (Britishers). The words that are uttered by Panchali in the work are seemed to be spoken by the Bharata Matha herself against her perpetrators. It is Panchali's vow which is very significant among the Pandavas's vow because, it is the voice of oppressed and subaltern women who still suffer a lot in the male-chauvinistic society deprived of social, economic and cultural independence. . . . Moreover, she voices not only against the colonial rule but also against the every socio political inequality, injustice, caste and gender discrimination, capitalism, and exploitation of both human and natural resources prevailing in the society. Ultimately, she speaks as the universal consciousness of oppressed women for their emancipation from the perennial oppression. (345-46) [Nandhakumar \(2018\)](#)

6. DRAUPADI

Queen Draupadi, brought up in a princely status, vociferously demands justice in the open court. Dopdi, the low-born illiterate tribal woman could also claim justice in a bizarre way through her shocking action. Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), the well-known Bengali writer and activist devoted herself for the growth of the tribal people. She has created such an unusual Female-Hero in her short-story, *Draupadi* which appeared first in 'Agnigarbha' ("womb o Fire"), a collection of political narratives. Draupadi or Dopdi Mejhhen the protagonist, a tribal insurgent is arrested by the government. Her husband Dulna Majhi is already dead, and she is a widow. Both husband and wife had served as the informers to the rebels, but both were working as servants at the house of the landlords. Both had a vow to kill all the unjust rich, the police personnels and the *marwadis* and hence to remain without family and children. After her husband was shot dead, she has been captured, made nude and gang raped throughout the night by several knaves. She was expected to name the rebels. But she was stubborn and when she was offered water to drink, she refused and when a piece of cloth was thrown on her, she refused to hide her body which was full of bruises and blood. She walked nudely towards the officer - in-charge with her mangled breasts and spit the blood on him. She yelled at him and challenged him and the rapists to clothe her. They could strip her but not clothe her. The officer and the rapists, for the first time, stood puzzled and afraid of a marginalised woman. The employer Surya Sahu's wife christens her tribal servant 'Dopdi', resembling the name of the Fiery-Daughter Draupadi. Both have rebelled against patriarchy as sub-alterns. The only difference is Dopdi is husbandless whereas Draupadi was husbanded, yet husbandless. Any other woman in their place would not have withstood such a crisis. Such Dopdis and Draupadis are the urgent need for the Indian Society today. [Festino and Marins \(2021\)](#)

7. CONCLUSION

The enigmatic Draupadi entices the scholars and writers to write about her blazing self and her infinite variety transmits messages to mankind. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his *Saga of Seven Mothers - Satisaptakam* (1991) Iyengar (1991) takes up Draupadi's tale along with the tales of six other sati-heroines that can be viewed "as a Rainbow Arc of the Eternal Feminine, an ensemble of Sati-images that are no doubt reminiscentially 'old world', Itihasic and Puranic, yet not lacking in perennial as well as pointedly contemporaneous appeal." He does not miss to mention about her scorching outburst in the court hall, "the trapped predicament without precedent in which Draupadi finds herself, and the reverberant defiance she hurls at the perpetrators of the outrage against her in the sabha" (*Saga* Introduction xxiv). In *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni gives voice to Panchali, the fire-born heroine of *Mahabharata* and constructs a vibrant retelling of the ancient epic. She looks at Draupadi in various angles as she unfolds the story. Draupadi talks about the atrocious act performed at the court and the vow she announced in chapter 25, "Sari" that runs from page 188-196. The critiques are endless. But, what is needed to the Indian society today is the Bharathiar's adage in his *Puthiya Aathichoodi: Roudram pazhagu*, "Practice Fury" (301), as the Fire-daughter does. The present scenario in India with an arrogant patriarchal society, the political audacity and the scandalous injustice meted out to girls and women, is highly threatening. To weed out these life-killing thorns, women must practice fury. The re-visit of Fire-daughter in varied ways is absolutely essential to motivate womankind. Let us all shout "Vandematharam", implant her fiery spirit within us and send forth the sparks to burn out the unwanted growth. Divakaruni (2008)

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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