

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
PORTRAYAL OF DRAUPADI IN
SOUTH INDIAN FOLK ART AND IN
THE MAHABHARATA**

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the M.A degree in Women's Studies.**

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DECLARATION

I, Namrata Madhu hereby declare that this dissertation entitled *Comparative Analysis of the Portrayal of Draupadi in Folk Art of South India and Mahabharata* is the outcome of my own study undertaken under the guidance of Assistant Professor Audrick D Mello. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this University or of any other institute or University. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me for the preparation of this dissertation.



Namrata Madhu

26 July 2020

Goa University

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation/thesis entitled *Comparative Analysis of the Portrayal of Draupadi in the South Indian Folk Art and the Mahabharata* is the record of the original work done by Namrata Madhu under my guidance and supervision. The results of the research presented in this dissertation/thesis have not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or certificate of this university or any other institute or University.

Research Guide

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.MAHABHARATA AND THE WOMEN IN THE EPIC

Mahabharata as an epic has been integrally embedded in the religious and cultural discourse of India from the earliest times. The epic has also been the front for the cultures of different South and Southeast Asian nations for more than 1 ½ millennia. The epic relates the story of warring cousins in the quest for power. One group of brothers behave with righteousness and follow Dharma, as per the moral concepts at the time while their cousins were said to have adopted all means to assert their rightful claim to the throne of Hastinapur, one of the kingdoms of ancient India.

Mahabharata is said to have been first composed by a mythical figure, Krishna Dwaipayana or Veda Vyasa over three millennia before. The Mahabharata is the longest epic in the world, consisting of over 100,000 verses. It is generally dated to the centuries preceding the common era, even though some layers of its complex narrative could have been in circulation even earlier. The bare bone narration of the epic has been embellished by many writers and over many versions, some known and others documented, both in ancient India (Bharatavarsha) and in other Asian nations. The most famous Indian versions include that of Vyasa himself, the Mahabharata of

Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa by Kisari Mohan Ganguli In the 20th century, BORI Edition or Critical Edition. Chakravarty Rajagopalachary (Rajaji) has in a beautiful text, reinterpreted the epic for a modern and independent India. Besides the main and well-known versions, there exist various narratives amongst the indigenous and tribal people of India. There also exist various regional versions in the native languages of India, in folk art, songs, theatre, and craft. Suffice it to say, this epic along with the other great epic Ramayana not only uniquely identifies itself with the land whose present-day political boundaries align with the Indian nation, but also with the cultural heritage of other nations like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Fiji.

In all religious traditions, sacred narratives have a special hold over people's imagination. They not simply present religious doctrines, but convey teachings through human interactions and moral choices. People can connect with narratives at an emotional level. Further, narratives are told and retold with different interpretations in text and performances. The core stories of the epic originated as oral narratives, which have been seamlessly woven by multiple unknown persons over the ages.

As brought out earlier, the Mahabharata is a simple tale narrating the story of two groups of cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas fighting each other for a kingdom. The ensemble includes several characters, some of them of divine origin and with special powers. Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas and the spouse of Pandu, the king of Hastinapura, before her marriage to Pandu, was

blessed by Surya, the Sun god with a son who would possess divine and warrior-like powers. This incident is narrated differently in different versions of the epic, with one version mentioning that Kunti had physical relations with a god thereby bearing the child. Subsequently, through the god's blessings, Kunti gave birth to three more legitimate sons after her marriage to Pandu. The latter three along with the two sons of Pandu by Madri, his second wife was collectively known as the Pandavas(of Pandu).

Soon after the birth of the five Pandavas, Pandu died and Kunti was widowed. Her co-wife, Madri committed Sati on Pandu's pyre and Kunti herself was prevented from following her because she had to look after the children. The story of Mahabharata was also Kunti's story from her birth, being given away by her father to King Kuntibhoja, marrying Pandu and becoming a widow shortly after because of a curse which afflicted Pandu. Kunti also had to bear the responsibility of bringing up her children and led a difficult life until the eldest son, Yudhishtira has been crowned the king at the end of the Kurukshetra war. Madri's sons, Nakul and Sahadeva were treated the same as their step-brothers by Kunti. Kunti was roundly criticized for abandoning her eldest son Karna, but it needs to be remembered that certain societal mores existed at that time which frowned upon an unwed woman giving birth to a child. She was also criticized for not telling anyone about Karna being her son.

Gandhari was another female character in the epic who had a prominent role in the epic. She was married to Dhritarashtra, the elder brother of Pandu who was born blind. She, proved to be a loyal and devoted wife, even going to the

extent of blindfolding herself and refusing to look at the world. Her act of loyalty to her husband and her marriage to the blind king had sown seeds of discord in her brother Shakuni's mind. He was so upset about the state of affairs that he vowed to end the Kuru empire by poisoning the mind of Gandhari's elder son Duryodhana, who along with his 99 brothers and one sister comprised the Kauravas, the cousins of the Pandavas. Queen Gandhari tried to stop it but to no avail.

The Mahabharata's other main character was Draupadi. It was said that she was born of the sacrificial fire lit for a Yagna being undertaken by King Drupad of Panchala, who was burning with a desire for revenge on Acharya Dronacharya, his childhood friend. The sacrificial fire not only yielded Draupadi otherwise known as Krishnaa (the dark one), but also a son, Dhritadyumna who would ultimately kill Dronacharya in the Kurukshetra war. Draupadi through a *Swayamvara* married Arjuna but was also made to wed all the five Pandavas by Kunti. She proved to be an intelligent woman as proved by her conversations with King Yudhishtira the eldest Pandava about the different statutes of law and Dharma. She was a devoted wife as she followed her husbands in exile after the game of dice.

In the Sanskrit telling of the epic, Draupadi's disrobing in the court of Dhritarashtra has related in great detail Her vows of revenge against the Kauravas for the incident of disrobing were also mentioned. She was also well versed in Dharma, the law as she asked the elders including Bheeshma,

Drona, and Dhritarashtra what Dharma was when she was treated terribly and she was staked after her eldest husband staked himself in the game of dice. Many different versions of the epic try to blame her for causing such bloodshed because she supposedly instigated the war by hurting Duryodhana's ego and hurting his best friend Karna in the *Swayamvara* by saying that she would not marry a sutaputra (a charioteer's son. It may be recalled that after Karna was abandoned as a baby by Kunti, he was brought up by a charioteer as his own son. Karna was also known as Raadheya, the son of Radha). Draupadi was depicted as a woman with immense pride who believed that her husbands would avenge her, one day by killing their cousins who caused them an injustice. Draupadi also sent Bheema to kill Keechaka the brother of King Virata's queen Sudeshna for trying to sexually assault her. Draupadi is a complex woman who was a victim of the patriarchal societal mores of the time and also a feminist as she tried to stand up for herself on several occasions when the need arose.

Draupadi also had a caring side to her; she was also compassionate and caring for the women, their husbands, and children. One such incident was when Jayadratha the husband of Dushala Duryodhana's sister and a friend of Duryodhana once saw her and kidnapped her and after she was rescued she decided to spare his life as she didn't want Dushala to suffer for her husband's crime. She also spared Ashwattama when he killed her sons who were unarmed and sleeping after the war was over.

1.2. ORAL TRADITIONS AND FOLK PERFORMANCES

FEATURING DRAUPADI AS THE CENTRAL CHARACTER

Draupadi was one of the central female characters in the different versions of the Mahabharata. Towards understanding her character, it is advisable not only to look at how her character is portrayed in the epic but also the portrayal in the different folk art of several states. The folk arts could tell a lot about the culture of the state and the community by showing how the characters of the story or the epic portray the beliefs of the people in the state. There were different ways through which the epic was depicted like folk art performances, theatre, dance performing the story, music showing the character of the epic, etc.

In folklore there could be new ideas about the character portrayal of the central characters of the epic and certain parts could be omitted. Some facts could be changed to meet the audience's eyes and depict the society of its time depending upon the time period that people lived in. The actors would wear different colorful costumes and sing music depicting the scenes in the Mahabharata in a dance format.

Different folklore shows different types of stories of Draupadi and her depiction in the epic. This is because each state's folklore is unique in different ways. For instance, Tamil Nadu's folklore on Draupadi is different from Rajasthan's. The story of her enlightenment and her personal life with

the Pandavas are different and different from the Sanskrit telling of the epic, which is supposed to be superior to that of folklore.

1.3. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC

The report is going to theorize upon different folklore that relates the stories in the Mahabharata and the main differences that exist between the stories of the folklore of Draupadi and the Sanskrit telling of the version of the Mahabharata. The differences of the character portrayal will be mentioned and its backstory could also be mentioned in the folklore regarding the female central character of the epic. The thesis is going to look at the folklore of Draupadi from the South Indian perspective and it will discuss some of the differences in the historical framework. It will include some folk theatre that will provide a more detailed outlook at the portrayal of Draupadi in South India. It will provide a detailed literature review of the books and articles researched for the project. There shall be some description of Draupadi in the mainstream Mahabharata and how she stands at the feminist standpoint. It will also provide a proper research methodology used while conducting the thesis as well as provide some detailed output of my findings and my reflections while conducting the dissertation. It will include references of the books and articles referred to while preparing for the dissertation along with a proper conclusion.

1.4. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The main objective of the research is to look upon different folklore about Draupadi from South Indian traditions namely Tamil Nadu and other south Indian states and its major differences from the Sanskrit epic which focused mainly on the male characters of the epic. The dissertation will try to look into different sources to find out information on the character of Draupadi portrayed in the folk dances, art performances, and different stories about Draupadi newly created in their folk dance performances. It will also provide certain findings and conclusions that could arise after the thesis is completed along with personal connections that I would highlight at the end of the project.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This text will contain important information about the books and the articles referred to while writing the thesis. This chapter contains the literature review of the books and the articles that were referred to while researching the character of Draupadi in oral traditions and her character portrayal in the Mahabharata. It will also mention the picturization of some rituals and traditions associated with worshipping Draupadi in south India. It will also try to provide some details of some folk theatre in South India which could help in the portrayal of Draupadi in South India folk tradition.

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the text on ‘Draupadi in Folk Performances and Scriptural Representations’ and the Cult of Draupadi’ Draupadi had been portrayed differently in the folklore of Tamil Nadu as compared to her portrayal in the Mahabharata. The differences between the character construction of Draupadi in Tamil Nadu folklore varies from folklore to folklore. These differences could be pictured in the Draupadi Amman festival that the Tamilians observed

in reverence of the female central character of the epic Mahabharata.

Some of the invocatory songs sung in Tamil Nadu provide information about the character of Draupadi and these praise her as a goddess. She was considered as a Parashakti (Supreme power) by the Tamilians mostly in the Gingee area. The prayer ‘ As you protected the five, my mother, protect these children’ was much used. This is a reference to the belief that Draupadi was the one protecting the Pandavas instead of the Pandavas protecting her. The people of Tamil Nadu would worship her as a goddess and would ask her to protect them and their children well.

The regional beliefs of Tamil Nadu did not look at Draupadi as a woman who married five men. Instead, they equated her as a goddess and would look at her as a goddess who was brought to earth to protect the Pandavas from harm. They looked at her as a woman who married only Arjuna and was considered as a Goddess by the Pandavas.

This invocatory song gives a glimpse of the perspective of the Tamilians.

‘He garlanded you, Mother, by bending the bow,

Vijayan O Mother, Arjuna

By shooting the arrow, Mother,

He garlanded you Kantipan, Arjuna

To all five Pandavas, you are the

Everliving Parashakti’

Pucari is a type of folk song prevalent in certain regions of Tamil Nadu. *Pucari* songs are invocatory songs, a "song of praise", that the dramatists who perform at Draupadi festivals sing at the beginnings and ends of their nightlong dramas. It can also be said that Pucari songs were devotional songs to Draupadi. While some *pucari* songs don't give many references to the disrobing of Draupadi the Tindivanam *pucari* song mentions this incident, but here the description of the incident is transformed from the scene of degradation to anticipation of victory, "With the wicked Duryodhana you played dice and enjoyed it".

There is a folk tale of a very witty and knowledgeable woman, Anjaramma, the daughter of a learned Brahmin in the Chola kingdom. She would regularly go to the court and put the other learned Pandits to shame. One day in an attempt to disgrace her in the public they presented her with a smooth cloth which was very soft and was made in such a way that it would slip right from her waist. Anjaramma understood their intentions and so when she went to the court she wore the cloth in such a way that the cloth wouldn't fall from her waist no matter what happened. Draupadi was compared to her in the tale as it relates to a woman who was disgraced and despised by the officials. Similar to Anjaramma, Draupadi also divined Duryodhana's intention to disrobe her and instead of the popular narrative of Krishna helping her during the disrobing incident, she made her saree long enough to not be disgraced in the public. Such was the belief in the strength of the Devi in Tamil Nadu. People also worshiped Draupadi as an all-knowing Goddess who already knew

beforehand what was going to happen the day before the disrobing. Some people equate Draupadi with Durga, with a lion as her mount, but also more locally in South Indian villages as the mount of several village goddesses

In the Tamil Nadu traditions, the female character Draupadi is given more importance wrt her portrayal in the epic. She is given more agency in these vernacular versions and has divine powers. One of the best examples of these vernacular versions which give so much importance to Draupadi is in the folk traditions of Tamil Nadu. Here the Vanniyar community considers her as a sacred deity and the Draupadi Amman festival is celebrated. During the festival, the Vanniyar community enacts a version of Mahabharata from the point of view of Draupadi whom they considered to be a central goddess. In the Gingee area, the community regarded Draupadi as a mother goddess. The priests sang songs regarding her a beautiful mother goddess who was sent to earth to be the wife of the Pandavas and protect them in the forest. Cattival Cettiyar sings about Draupadi as a Parasakti (Supreme power) who had to marry the five Pandavas. In this form, as a goddess, she is not portrayed in terms of her disrobing incident. That part has been omitted as it did not match the beliefs of the Vanniyar community of Draupadi being a goddess. Even the *Pucari* songs had completely excluded that part. However, only Tindivanam Pucari songs who mentioned the incident of disrobing. However, this version did not mention any feelings of revenge but only the anticipation of victory for the people. Unlike the character of the epic where Draupadi is shown as a

revengeful woman in this folk tradition, she is considered as a compassionate goddess.

The enactment also shows how Draupadi was the mother goddess who saved the Pandavas when they were in exile. Her polyandrous marriage was not considered such a huge problem in these communities as these types of marriages used to occur in their communities. As in Vyasa's text of the Mahabharata, which was a patriarchal text in a way where a woman's virginity and her sexuality had to be frequently monitored, the people of these communities did not have to provide any reason for Draupadi's marriage to five brothers.

There is a myth of the south Indian goddess Virapanchali who was a divine form of goddess Draupadi who used to control her sexual urges by drinking blood and the fact that maturity helped in domesticating her. According to a myth, Bhima one of the Pandavas had told Lord Krishna that he was not able to sexually satisfy Draupadi to which Krishna replied that his wife was the mother goddess Adi Maya Shakti. One night when the Pandavas could not find Draupadi in the house they were shocked to see her running naked, wild and free, and drinking the blood of goats and buffaloes. When she saw her husbands she ran towards them, intending to eat them. So the Pandavas ran back into the hut and only allowed her entry if she promised not to eat them. When she agreed to this condition, Bhima's hand opened the door and so she pierced his skin and a few drops of blood fell on the floor from where the

children came and hearing their cries she became calm again. These incidents are not mentioned in the Mahabharata of Vyasa.

During their exile in the forest, Draupadi was said to have abstained from having sex with her husband. So according to the Draupadi cult, she was a chaste wife and compared to the epic she was also considered to be a virgin goddess which gave her a high position in the folklore. The narration when she walked in the fire to restore her chastity after each year had passed to move on to her next husband was considered as a sign of chastity in the epic. However, in the folklore it was also a sign of purity and her powers could make the red hot coals as cool as flowers. Sometimes she would drape her hair with red hot coals and it would be as cool as flowers. These sorts of powers gave people the belief to go closer to Draupadi by walking on the fire. This ritual was also considered as a means for people to rid away their sins by being close to the Mother goddess. The Vanniyar community have ritualized the step of walking into the fire by Draupadi and considered it to be sign of purity. They have also decided to walk on fire to show their respect to Draupadi and to please the goddess. This concept of walking on fire is called the Thimithi festival in Tamil Nadu.

2.3.DRAUPADI AMMAN FESTIVAL AND THIMITHI FESTIVAL

In Tamil Nadu, Draupadi was re-imagined as a guardian of not only the Pandavas but also of the people in the community. For a thousand years, the

worshippers of Draupadi worshiped her as an avatar of the primordial goddess Kaliamman. The worshippers of Draupadi had also interpreted her as a divinity inaccessible to Arjuna and they had their interpretation of the epic as per their customs and beliefs. As their community had different beliefs compared to the rest of India Draupadi was not given such special emphasis as a wife of five men. Draupadi was considered as a virgin chaste woman like Arundhati, untainted by polyandry, and was considered as a primal Shakti. She was also all-knowing as she seemed to know the fate of herself and her country before her disrobing incident. It was implied that she was reborn here to help Sunatan a local king to kill a demon who was stalking the woods. Due to his doubts, he pulled a bit of her hair, and there emerged a bruise on her head, and as a result, he was blinded by the goddess. Such was the powers of the goddess.

Some songs that people sang were about Draupadi as a Mother goddess with a lion as her mount as though she was the warrior goddess Durga in disguise. Many people in the community also considered Draupadi as Lord Vishnu's sister as her representation as a goddess. In Tamil mythology, it was pretty common for Lord Vishnu to have a sister. The *Pucari* songs also identify Draupadi having a sibling relationship with Lord Krishna. Indian mythology or Mahabharata does not make such claims about Draupadi.

In the Draupadi Amman festival in Tamil Nadu, the myth which is a part of the ritual worship is dramatized into a stage performance termed as

Terukkuttu. This is a form of folk theatre and it is now restricted to only a few places in Tamil Nadu such as the areas of Dharmapuri, North and South Arcot, and roughly in the area where there is a strong Draupadi cult traditionally known as Thondaimandalam. The festival is of 21 days duration whereas the different incidents of the Kurukshetra war occurred for 18 days. Terrukkuttu plays a major role in the Draupadi Amman festival and certain episodes are modified to pay homage to Goddess Draupadi. Instead of Dusshasan pulling her hair in the play, he calls Draupadi Amman(mother) and pulls a rope that is tied to her hair. The Mahabharata does not identify Draupadi as a goddess to be respected and worshiped as much as South Indian traditions worship her. Terukkuttu also had no qualms in portraying the fact that Draupadi was also a Destroyer and the one who ended the war of the Kurus. Bheema also agreed to keep the secret that she killed and ate animals like demons and in return, she would have to protect the Pandavas.

During the colonial time there had been an emergence of another cult termed Paratiyar cult where the people used to worship Draupadi according to the terms of the modern Tamil poet C Subramania Bharati widely recognized as Paratiyar. He was widely recognized for sheer beauty and innovation in his poetry. He also wrote an adaptation of the Mahabharata which became popular for the Tamilians at the region. Mainly he wrote an adaptation of Draupadi's vastra haran episode. This episode had various adaptations by different artists of the area but it was striking for Paratiyar to convey the message of political freedom in the country. While Kamban's work on

Ramayana was considered to be an important part of Tamil literature it was mostly for upper caste and class people and did not appeal to the lower class people. The Paratam cult showed plays of the unique blend of the classicist epic versions and the local vital elements of the village Hinduism in the Tamil area. While the major deity was Draupadi in the form of amman (goddess) or Tiraupataiyamman it also deals with epic and local figures. All these gods were worshipped, propitiated and appeased through the ritual enactment of the Paratam in three ways : temple ritual, poetic recitations termed as Piracankam and all night performances of the Therukkuttu.

Such facts were modified according to the beliefs of the community. As the community was mostly martial they had no qualms treating Draupadi as the mother goddess. They were also mostly non-vegetarian so they had no problems in sacrificing non-vegetarian food to the gods as they believed that the gods were also non-vegetarian. They believed in the ritualization of these goddesses in folk traditions. The oral traditions of Draupadi in Tamil Nadu were also influenced by the socio-cultural beliefs of the community.

As mentioned below, women were regarded in high esteem in folklore tradition and Draupadi had high precedence as a mother goddess as compared to her portrayal in the epic Mahabharata. Tamil Nadu traditions present the Mahabharata as a cultural ethos and so their portrayal of the story is also told from the perspective of the Mother Goddess. Tamil Nadu's historical period was much after the Mahabharata and so there were South Indian preferences

in their perspectives and during the Chola period when the Mahabharata spread to other south Indian.

2.4. RITUALS ASSOCIATED TO DRAUPADI AMMAN FESTIVAL

- Flag hoisting
- The sowing of the 'nine' grains'
- The beginning of the narration of parts of the Mahabharata
- The birth of Draupadi (a day time drama)
- The arrival of the Terrukkuttu troupe of players to embark on their eighteen night cycle of drama
- The Terrikkuttu drama 'The Marriage of Draupadi' (to Arjuna) on about the third night of dramas.
- The tying of kappu wristlets (turmeric-dyed amulets) on temple officiants and images of deities (sometimes combined with flag hoisting)
- The dressing of Draupadi's processional image, with its hair loose
- The Firewalking , usually on Sunday morning after the completion of the eighteenth Terrukkuttu drama 'Eighteenth'.

Flag hoisting : Many temples begin their festival with a ceremony where the flag of the goddess depicting her vehicle , the lion is hoisted outside her temple. Many Draupadi temples in India do not have permanent flag poles, so that new ones have to be cut and erected each year.

Sowing of the nine grains: The sowing of the grains is also known as 'navadhanya' and it is usually done at the festival's opening ceremony (flag hoisting), so that the grains could sprout and grow over the entire period of festival. At other temples it coincides with the drama depicting Draupadi's wedding. The grains are usually placed in the temple, either in the sanctuary itself or immediately outside it. At the end of the festival the sprouts are discarded or otherwise disposed of. According to the 'nine grains ritual' to the incident from the Mahabharata, when the Pandavas and Draupadi lived in hiding in the forest without food. Duryodhana wanted to ensure that the Pandavas did not have grain for food so he gave everyone who came begging for grain roasted grain. Draupadi in the guise of a gypsy was able to get some roasted grain which Krishna with his magic was able to make the roasted grains grow. This episode is preserved in the Draupadi cult in the Terrukkuttu drama known as 'Draupadi the Gypsy'. This grain ritual could actually symbolize the birth and death of Draupadi's children as the grains are also discarded just like Draupadi's children died prematurely after the battle.

Terrukkuttu: This ritual has been described in length at the section of the Draupadi Amman festival where Terrukkuttu is a stage of plays denoting the story of Draupadi in folk art. Terrukkuttu is also termed as the street dance of Tamil Nadu. These dramas are based on the Tamil version of the Mahabharata. The origin of the Terrukkuttu was traced back to 1600 BCE. However the earliest authentic documentation of Terrukkuttu plays was traced during the early nineteenth century with the connection of the eighteen day Draupadi

festival at Dindigal Tamil Nadu where eighteen separate dramas were performed as part of the street procession. Terrukkuttu was always performed at night usually outdoors at the temple precincts with each separate drama lasting throughout the entire night and ending at the day break.

Tying of Kappu Wristlets : These wristlets consists of yellow string with a lump of turmeric attached to it which is tied around the right wrist of all participants in the festival. The tying of the kappu to the temple officiants usually precedes that of the larger group of the participants and is often done at the flag hoisting. Wristlets are first tied to all the deities in the temple, then to the officiants and finally to the binding cords of the main drum to be used for the festival. There are three main meanings of the kappu : first it initiates all the participants into very intimate contact with the deity, secondly , it commits those who intend to participate in the festival, and particularly firewalk to a state of sexual and general ritual purity and lastly it assures the participants of the Goddess's protection.

The Tamilians celebrated a festival called Thimithi which contains a ritualistic act of walking in fire. There is a culmination of rituals that re enacts certain important and auspicious moments of the Mahabharata. Thimithi denotes the victory of war in the Mahabharata that took place between the Pandavas and the Kauravas with the former gaining victory. At present days there is a symbolic representation of how Draupadi is being tested anew following tribulations. The walking of the Pandaram (chief priest) across the

fire with the karagam (the sacred pot) is the symbolic depiction of Draupadi.

This ritual is widely celebrated not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa and other countries with a large South Indian population. This festival is mainly celebrated a week before Diwali during the month of Aipasi according to the month of the Tamil calendar. Aipasi is referred to the month from mid October to mid November at the Tamil calendar. It was believed by many that Draupadi herself had to walk on a bed of burning coals and come out unscathed at the end of the Mahabharata war to prove her innocence. Draupadi was worshipped as Draupadi Ammana by a community of Tamilians known as Draupadi Amman cult. They consider her as a village goddess and the rituals and festivals commemorated to the goddess is strictly observed. One such village in Tamil Nadu is Kondal in Nagapattinam district. Tamilians worshiped Draupadi as their *kula devata* during the festival. Apart from Kondal there are several Draupadi temples spread across Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They also believed that walking on the fire is a way of purifying their souls of sins and this act can be performed by both men and women and sometimes even children. There are certain rituals that were conducted during the festival. Some of these rituals are :

Reading of the Mahabharata :The Thimithi cycle starts from the first Monday of the Tamil month of Aadi which falls from July-August. In order to immortalize this event a flag containing the picture of Lord Hanuman the Monkey God is hoisted at Sri Marriamman Temple. From this day the Tamil

version of the Mahabharata are recited every night until two days after the Thimithi ritual. The entire festival of Thimithi and other related events commences and concludes at Sri Marriamman temple. Daily prayers and fasting are needed up to three weeks before the Thimithi ritual which is a purification and a cleansing ritual for the devotees.

Aravan Puja: On the first Monday before the new moon in the Tamil month of Purattasi which falls between the months of September and October the Tamilians carry out the Aravan puja or 'prayers for Aravan'. There prayers were organized for the son of Arjuna who sacrificed himself to Goddess Kali to ensure victory for the Pandavas. He was Arjuna's son from his Naga wife Uloopi. He is also named as Iravan. The head of Aravan is usually displayed to represent the sacrifice and a trident is placed near the shrine of Aravan to represent the battle of Kurukshetra.

Battle of Kurukshetra: This event honours the 18 day battle that concludes at the Pandavas victory. At the last stages of the war Lord Krishna who was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu who is the Preserver of the universe became Arjuna's charioteer. In order to mark this juncture on the Friday and Saturday prior to Thimithi a chariot procession takes place around Telok Blangah and Bukit Merah.

Keesaka Samharam : This ritual is held almost a month before the Thimithi ritual. This ritual portray the slaying of Keesaka who was the commander in

chief of the king of Matya which was a kingdom of ancient India. In his attempt to seduce Draupadi Keesaka is slayed by Bhima who was one of the Pandavas brothers.

Preparation before the Thimithi festival : 10 days before the firewalking ceremony, devotees offer their prayers by holding milk pots and the women perform kumbiduthandam (act of prostrating after walking three steps). The Angaprathatchanam (worship by rolling one's body) is also performed but this is done by male devotees only. For the Angaprathatchanam the men strip down to their dhoti (a traditional garment worn by male Hindus which comprises a long piece of material tied around the waist and extending to cover most of the legs) and roll across the grounds of Sri Marriamman Temple circling the area for one to three laps of 150 m per round.

Thimithi ceremony: A fire pit evaluating approximately 3m in length is dug inside the compound of Sri Mariamman temple. At the end of the pit which holds the burning coals, a smaller pit is also dug for the milk to be poured into. The priest is the one who lights the fire pit with the help of sandalwood pieces. After the initial prayers a yellow string with some turmeric and a spray of the margosa or neem leaf is tied to the wrists of all the people who are taking part in the firewalking ceremony. The firewalkers exclusively men do a customary 5 km walk from the Sri Srinivasa Perumal temple on Serangoon Road to the Sri Mariamman temple on South Bridge Road. Before there was a penance ritual involving the use of Chaatai (whip) during which the firewalkers hands

would be beaten before they proceeded to Sri Mariamman temple for the firewalk, but this practice has since been prohibited.

At Sri Mariamman temple firewood arranged in pits specially dug out for the firewalk are lit. Thereafter the fire is sustained , sometimes reaching such high temperatures that the temple walls need to be cooled with water. The Thimithi ceremony begins with the chief priest traversing the fire pit with the karagam balanced on his head. The devotees follow across the 3m long pit and then cool their feet in a pool of cow's milk at the end of the walk. The fire in the pit is later extinguished with milk and water sprayed from a firehose. After the firewalking ceremony, there will be a silver procession of Sri Draupadi Amman in the evening that stops at the following places for devotees to offer prayers. Although firewalking is the climax of the whole ceremony , the Thimithi cycle only ends 2 days later. On this day the final chapter of the Mahabharata is read and the victory of the war is depicted by the lowering of the battle flag and the crowning of Yudhishtira the eldest of the Pandava brothers.

The festival is followed by enacting the excerpts of the Mahabharata where Draupadi walked down the fire to confirm her prowess and chastity by sticking to the path of Dharma. India had celebrated the festival for more than 2000 years. Apart from this story the actual point of this festival is to understand the sanctity of fire or how it cleanses the ones who walk on it. Locally Thimithi is referred to as Poo Methipoo as the color of coal resembles heaps of orange flowers. Poo in Tamil is flowers and Methipoo in Tamil is

referred to Orange color. This ritual could be performed by both men and women. In Tamil Nadu, numerous villages conduct the annual event regularly right in front of the Goddess Mariamman temple. Devotees begin their ritual as early as 4 am and it ends at 11 am. There is a strong belief that if they are truly devoted to Draupadi they will walk through the fire unscathed.

2.5. KARAGA FESTIVAL

In Karnataka, the people consider Draupadi as a form of Shakti and they worship her the same way they worship the village goddesses. There is a festival called the Karaga festival which is connected with the Karaga a folk dance dedicated to Draupadi known as Droupthamma in these parts.

The celebration of the Karaga tradition could be traced back to five centuries. It was believed that the festival originated in the Tigala community, a Tamil speaking community of gardeners in Southern Karnataka. Members of this community referred to themselves as Vanihikula Kshatriyas. Some members claim the fact that the Tigala community are the descendants of the Veerakumars, the members of the mythological army that helped Draupadi defeat the demon. Some people also believe that the community could be traced back to the lions of Angirasa, the sage whose offsprings founded most of the dynasties who ruled South India. Some people also believe that the Tigala community are descendants of Agni the god of fire in Indian mythology. According to the Puranas Draupadi was considered to be an ideal

woman whereas the Tigalas worship Draupadi as their community deity. The festival is celebrated in the honour of Draupadi.

According to this dance, a ritual pot filled with water and adorned with certain decorations is balanced by the carrier's head and the surrounding people would hold their swords high as a tradition. The performers would perform various acrobatic feats while performing the procession accompanied by a few musical instruments like the 'Thavi', 'Nadeswaram', 'Muni', 'Udukka' and Panba. Though the Karaga festival is celebrated across Karnataka the Bengaluru Karaga was the festival that attracted thousands of artists. It was believed that in the 17th century , the Mysore king invited scholars to establish the scriptural basis of the Karaga performance and they derived a conclusion that the word Kara means hand and ga means “ that which is held” Since the Karaga which refers to the water pot in Kannada- is carried in the left hand of the priest on the day of its “ birth” the festival is called Karaga.

2.6. PREPARATION OF THE RITUALS OF THE KARAGA FESTIVAL

The preparation of the festival began of fortnight before the full moon night of Chaitra with the hosting of the temple flag on the banks of the Sampangi tank ,amidst the chanting of mantras. Draupadi is propitiated on the sixth day through a special puja. On the 7th day the impure Karaga or hasi karaga is brought from a salt water pond nearby as per the tradition. The Veerakumars

are selected from the Tigala community three days prior to the festival. The chosen few are given deeksha at the temple and they remain pure and chaste till the festival gets over. The ninth day is selected for fire walking ritual .On this day the temple Veerakumaras wear dhotis and carry swords in their hands. They dance over live charcoals and in their excitement they hit their bare chests with the blades of their swords. Then they start running over the charcoals . This is the moment when the karaga places itself automatically on the head on the carrier which who remains in seclusion . The area surrounding the temple is occupied by 500 beautifully decorated chariots that arrive from temple from all over the city for the celebration of the festival. The carrier has to undergo a rigorous ritual before he carries the pot symbolising the goddess of power .He leaves home and arrives at the temple to lead a life of seclusion before the festival. His wife assumes the form of a widow and does not see him as the procession. She hands over her mangalsutra and bangles to her husband .When the festival is concluded, the couple is then remarried. The bearer is confined to the temple premises and undertakes several preparatory rituals. He then has a diet of milk and fruits till the festival is over

2.7. CELEBRATION OF THE KARAGA FESTIVAL

The Karaga festival is celebrated with some spectacular rituals And an amazing procession.The karaga is an earthen pot that supports a floral pyramid and a small figure of the goddess with a small silver umbrella on top of that. The karaga is carried on the head without touching it.

The exact contents of the Potter mystery till date but it is believed that the pot contains items like lemon, vermillion, Tamarind etc The karaga carrier wears a woman's attire in saffron hues and puts vermillion on his forehead. He wears her bangles and mangalsutra too. He then places the karaga on his head and the procession start from the Dharmaraya Swamy temple around midnight.

The carrier of the karaga is surrounded by hundreds of turbaned , bare chested and dhoti clad Veerakumaras carrying uncovered swords. The swords are significant for the carrier of the karaga because if he loses the balance and allows the karaga to fall , the Veerakumars accompanying him are supposed to stab him with the swords. However till date such a misfortune has never befallen anyone .

The procession passes through many lanes and bylanes of the city and reaches the temple in the early hours of the next day. Before the procession returns to the temple it halts at the Dargah-e -Sharif of Hazrat Tawkal Mastan, a Muslim saint of the 18th century. As per legend, the saint was a good friend of the Hindu priest. The Saint had wished on his death bed that the karaga should halt at Dargah or mausoleum after leaving the temple. The tradition has been kept alive by the Tigala community even after 300 years of the Saints demise. The procession is accompanied by the sound of drum beats and display of sword plays. Several devotees carry pots decorated with Flowers on their heads in order to test the strength of their character. After

the procession returns to the temple, devotees end the festivities by splashing turmeric water on each other. On the next day the karaga is immersed on the salt water pond from which it was brought. The karaga carrier ends his fast.

During the dance, the carrier cannot drop the karaga or the ritual pot or he would be executed. This tradition is supposed to celebrate womanhood and femininity. However, it could also be seen as a way to mock Yudhishtira for failing to save his wife from the disrobing incident. Usually, a man would be dressed as a woman and carry the heavy karaga pot and he is considered as a temporary avatar of Draupadi. A man is usually selected for this feat since it required the strength of a man to carry the Karaga. Here a man is selected from the Acharya Pujari sect of the Tigala community as it required the physical strength of a man to carry the Karaga. The Karaga priest would perform austerities since six months and he wears his wife's mangalsutra who gets it back by the marriage ceremony on the 10th day. He also wears a sari and smears his forehead with vermilion as is the mark of a married woman. He also wears thick black bangles during this event. She will not be seeing her husband from the time of Vijaydashami who will reside in the temple till the Karaga is over. So when the Karaga procession stops in front of her house, she, unlike the other devotees couldn't come to be blessed. On the lines of Vijaydashami celebration of Dussehra or Dasara, so also on the final day it's the triumph of good that the Karaga celebrates. During the 11 day festival cooked rice mixed with various spices are offered to the people free of cost.

Bengalaru Karage festival

The Bengaluru Karaga is usually celebrated at the Dharmaraya Swamy temple in Nararathpete. The jatre (procession) is started at the Dharmaraya Swami temple and it is also the starting point of the jatre. Here the priest is dressed like a woman and she carries the Karaga (a three feet tall pot symbolizing Draupadi). There is a legend that the jatre once stopped in front of the Hazrat Tawakkul Mastan dargah and moved only when Mastan Baba, a patron saint tied a thread on the foot of the priest carrying the karaga. The procession had also stopped at temples dedicated to Mariamma, Muthyalamma and Yellamma who Draupadi had considered as siblings.

The Karaga festival is celebrated throughout Karnataka but there are small variations in rituals and traditions. For instance in Madikeri four Karagas known as Shakti Devtas from four prominent Mariyamma temples take part in the festival. The festival is celebrated on the Vijaydashami day in Mysore. The celebration of festival first began in 1924 and is celebrated for four days.

There is, in fact, a story that relates Draupadi's valour and courage where she created an army of soldiers called the Veerakumaras to kill a demon called Timrasura, without whom the Pandavas wouldn't have won the war. When it was time for Draupadi to leave earth her soldiers begged her not to go. Since she couldn't stay with them she promised them that she would visit the Veerakumaras every year on the full moon of the first month of the Hindu

calendar. To celebrate her coming to meet them the people of Karnataka celebrated the festival where she is also worshiped as Adi shakti.

YAKSHAGANA

Yakshagana is not a festival in Karnataka but a form of folk theatre which derives its themes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and other mythological tales. There is a play titled Draupadi Pratapa which is important to understand the portrayal of Draupadi in folk theatre. The play does not show Draupadi as an ordinary woman who became the wife of the Pandavas but as the incarnation of the supreme goddess Chandi. According to the play she established her supremacy by defeating the demon Kaundilya who was a barrier to Pradyumna and Rati's marriage. This was seen as part of Krishna's leela so as to teach the Pandavas to be humble and to mend the pride of the Pandavas on purpose. The folk tradition seemed to relegate divine supreme powers to Draupadi that no masculine power could destroy her as she was the incarnation of the goddess Chandi. This play stands testimony to the fact that there could be no man who could defeat her and the powers attributed to Draupadi was superior to the Pandavas and the men would themselves ask for her help if they were in trouble. The society during this time were matrilinear and matriarchal in nature and it was not considered weird if women had more than one husband. Since they themselves had non vegetarian food they did not find it uncanny to serve non vegetarian food to the gods and goddesses.

ALUGU UTSAVAM

In Andhra Pradesh, a festival called Alugu Utsavam is celebrated for worshipping Draupadi. She is worshiped as goddess Shakti and an 18-day Brahmotsavalu is organized during July- August after the Varalakshmi Vratam. There is a Draupadi-Dharmajula Swami temple at Puttur the last three days of the festival with the events of Alugu Utsavam and Agnigunda Pravesam, Rathotsavam are the most important days of the Alugu Utsavam. A lot of devotees usually arrive from the Tamil speaking belt of Puttur, Nagari, Nagalapuram and the bordering villages of Tamil Nadu reach Puttur to take part in special pujas. She is worshipped as a form of Shakti taking the form of a six-foot-high sword that was consecrated with its pointed edge poised on the floor inside the temple in Draupadi Dharmarajula Swami Temple in Puttur. Draupadi was worshipped as a form of Shakti in the form of a mighty sword. This spectacle shall be celebrated on Friday, followed by Varalakshmi Vratam. On Saturday the deity shall be taken on a grand procession through the arterial roads on a giant chariot. The mind blowing part of the procession is that soon after the ritual draws to a close, the giant sword which remains balanced in the pointed edge slightly tilts towards the sanctum sanctorum.

On the Saturday night, the event will be concluded with the Agnigunda Pravesam where the devout would walk on embers to fulfill their vows. There is a legend that when people were afflicted by a mysterious disease the people on the advice of a sage found an idol of Draupadi in an old well and

built a small temple to worship her. Gradually people became cured and in later years a full-fledged temple was built in the area. In the cult of Draupadi there was also a belief that Draupadi was an incarnation of Kali who was born to assist Krishna in a bid to destroy evil in the world. Since Shakti was considered to be the sister of Krishna Draupadi was considered to be like a sister to Krishna. She was considered as a goddess Kali for her fiery disposition.

Such were the depictions of Draupadi as a goddess in the oral literature of South India.

THE MAHABHARATA BY VEDA VYAS

The Mahabharata was written by Veda Vyasa translated by Pratap Chandra Roy also gave high esteem to Draupadi but they did not revere her a goddess. She was not considered as a primordial goddess and was not given a very strong role to play before her disrobing. The Mahabharata described her as a woman of a fiery nature because she was born from the fire but the epic did not denote her nature till her disrobing incident. Draupadi was reportedly shamed for having wed five men and they narrated a background story of why she should marry five men. The book did not depict her nature of killing men or animals for food like demons in the forest. She had to depend on her husbands to kill the men or go to war for her instead of starting and ending the war as mentioned in the oral traditions. Draupadi was not a goddess and

she did not divine Duryodhana's intentions during the time of the disrobing. She was not considered as a virgin goddess and after her forest interval, she was considered as a normal wife. During the time of Mahabharata, she lived in a patriarchal country and her historic background showed her as not a goddess but strong enough to hold her own and save the Pandavas from slavery but not physically strong enough as shown at vernacular versions of the epic. The Mahabharata did not mention her role in creating the Veerakumaras for killing the demon Timrasura. In fact in a few instances in the Mahabharata, the Pandavas protected her. The epic did not depict her as a goddess and she didn't walk on the coals after the warlike what the oral traditions stated. Draupadi was a victim of the patriarchal society around her and she suffered a lot of injustices before she emerged as a victor. She had to undergo so much injustices for the glory of men. She was considered as a property of men as other women were during the period. Even at her own swayamvara her personal choice was not considered and an archery contest was held by her father to find out who would win the hand of Draupadi. Draupadi also had to agree to this contest for her hand in marriage. This was part of the patriarchal structure where contrary to the name Swayamvara a woman's personal choice had to be decided by her father. Another way she was looked upon as a property was when she was staked during the game of dice and she was dragged by her hair to the court. She scolded everyone at the court asking them why they didn't say anything when she was dragged at the court when Yudhishtira staked himself before Draupadi was staked at the court. This event was not discussed at length by the south Indian oral

tradition. The epic also denoted of how Draupadi was a loyal wife where inspite of the injustices meted upon her by the Kauravas she stayed with the Pandavas during the Van Vaas and stayed with them and looked after the birth of her children. Such details were not mentioned by the south Indian epics where they denoted her as more of a virgin goddess than the wife of the five Pandavas. She was also highly humiliated by the men and the society around her when they kept calling her a whore and a prostitute. She did not want to marry five men but then he had to compromise and marry the five men to honour the word of the mother of the Pandavas so she was not given any word on the matter. Despite this with her will and courage she was able to emerge as a victor in the epic of the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata was developed at a period of time when the men were given much prominence and women hardly had any rights and they lived in a patriarchal society. Draupadi was not remembered for her fierce and independent woman as she was but for her beauty and for being the wife of the five brothers. She was considered to be the main cause of war for instigating her husbands to fight the war against the Kauravas. It is one of the prime examples of how a woman's beauty can be blamed for unrighteous behavior and the males in the society could not take responsibility for their actions in the society. She was also famous for her disrobing incident and had to be saved by Krishna. This is a prime example of how Draupadi had been looked upon as a damsel of distress. However one needs to note that she was also a fierce woman who knew how to stand up for herself. She had a prime mission and she knew how to assert herself and use her intelligence when time required it. She was well

versed and she questioned the royal elders in the assembly for tolerating injustice meted to her and not standing up for her. As a woman she had to assert herself and use whatever tools he had to have some control over the patriarchal structures. So for trying to manipulate the structures so that she also had some degree of control she was considered to be wily and cunning. Moreover the Mahabharata was written by male sages who gave the perspective through the male lens and did not fully understand the female psyche. So that is the reason that Draupadi was written in such a manner in the Mahabharata.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

To complete a thesis or a dissertation, there should be a technique or some method. The research method has to be stated by the author of the dissertation to make it more authentic and prevalent. The method that could be used while conducting research can be either qualitative or quantitative. This chapter will discuss the research methodology used while conducting research. It will also provide information on the technique used for conducting research, the process for collecting information, the limitation of the dissertation along with the ethical issues faced while conducting research.

3.2. TECHNIQUE USED FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH

The thesis mostly used qualitative methods of conducting research namely comparative analysis by point to point. There are some differences between qualitative data and quantitative research. Quantitative research relies more on numbers than qualitative data for research. It mainly deals with statistics and numbers while collecting information. Qualitative research method mainly deals with words and meanings while one is collecting and analyzing data. Quantitative data is mainly conducted for collecting numerative data and

it is expressed in numbers and graphs. This method is used to generalize the facts regarding any situation. The qualitative research method is mainly used for social scientists and it is used to understand concepts, thoughts or experiences and helps one gain a thorough knowledge about some topics not properly understood. This qualitative research technique tried to bring out some major differences between the portrayal of Draupadi in oral traditions in South India namely Tamil Nadu and the character of Draupadi in the epic Mahabharata. This technique looked at the book *Cult of Draupadi* by Alf Hielebettel and the original Mahabharata and tries to question, how and why such differences were evident in these versions, by looking into their historical background and also the culture of that time -period and place where the people give their interpretation on the Goddess.

The technique used to compare the character Draupadi from the Mahabharata and the oral tradition in Tamil Nadu was comparative analysis. The comparative analysis technique is a technique to compare two texts by analyzing them, comparing them in different ways, and deriving conclusions through them. It is used to properly understand how Draupadi is understood and examined from different historical backgrounds and in different places. The other research technique used for the thesis is record keeping which is keeping a record of everything and getting information for the thesis. The thesis also provides information on how certain passages are mentioned to differentiate between Draupadi's character in the oral traditions such as like in play and dramas or dances and in songs in Tamil Nadu and her character

portrayal in the text of Mahabharata and how the influence of the writer and the characters of the epic and the culture help in different portrayals of Draupadi.

3.3. PROCESS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION

Research is used in such a way as there were no primary data was available and one had to rely on secondary sources to gain information about Draupadi from the Mahabharat and her portrayal from the oral traditions. The process that I used for collecting information was through books like Cult of Draupadi by Alf Hielebettel who worked extensively on the topic and the Mahabharata by Veda Vyasa. I have also looked at certain articles mentioning and describing the oral traditions of Draupadi in south India I have looked at different oral traditions that were described in articles related to Draupadi Amman festival, the Karaga festival as well as Alugu Utsavam. I have also looked at how Draupadi is looked at a feminist analysis according to the mainstream Mahabharata. I have also looked at certain rituals and dramas being conducted while celebrating different Draupadi festivals across south India and how South India reveres Draupadi as a goddess. I have also described some symbolism in different rituals and how it connects with the mainstream Mahabharata written by Veda Vyasa by looking at a few scholarly articles such as jstor etc. In addition to the books. I used comparative analysis for analyzing these books for the portrayal of Draupadi. I used comparative analysis by paragraphs and not by point by point.

3.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE THESIS

The limitation of this thesis is that it doesn't contain much information on how the character of Draupadi in the regional versions and the Mahabharata are similar or different and how the historical background of the characters was different. It also does not showcase how the character of Draupadi is depicted in the other states of South India or North Indian oral traditions. It does not examine the difference in how Draupadi is portrayed as influenced by the culture of the place and on why it is portrayed in that way. It does not show differences between how the people of Tamil Nadu and other South Indian states portray Draupadi and the reason why they pray to and worship Draupadi. This report does not give any information or knowledge about the portrayal of Draupadi from different ethnic communities in India. The dissertation hardly provides an intersectional outlook on Draupadi. The thesis did not give an account of the process of Brahmanization and the spread of the mainstream Hindu deities replacing the local deities of the south Indian temples. It does not provide the information of the south Indian cult during the present as well as how the traditions were at the past and how the customs, rituals and traditions vary according to the era and age. It does not mention the colonial influences or the Muslim colonization influence while adapting a few plays of the Mahabharata. This report does not seem to provide information of whether women were involved in the rituals or traditions.

3.5. ETHICAL ISSUES

As the dissertation was mainly from secondary sources such as books and articles and there were no primary sources like surveys involved while getting information so there were no ethical issues involved while getting and writing the information for the thesis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: DRAUPADI IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Draupadi was a central character in Indian mythology and one of the most endearing female characters in south Indian oral traditions. This part is going to describe my findings and my thoughts on the subject of Draupadi in the Mahabharata and why I selected her for my dissertation. I will also try to give my connection about Draupadi and my opinion on the subject. I would also try to highlight what other information related to Draupadi relating to the topic can be useful and could be found out in books.

PERSONAL CONNECT WITH THE DISSERTATION

I have a personal connection with the topic of my dissertation. From my childhood, I have been listening to my grandmother's stories on Indian mythology including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. I have also read several books on Indian mythology and continue to maintain a keen interest in the myths. Since the topic of the dissertation is related to mythology, it interests me in finding out more about the female central character of Mahabharata, Draupadi and therefore I decided to embark on this project. Mahabharata has been deeply enriched in Indian culture and it is one of the most fascinating parts of literature. It also fascinated me to find out that there

were oral traditions relating to Draupadi from South India which showed stark differences in the character's portrayal in the Mahabharata from the socio-economic context.

PERSONAL OPINIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

In my opinion, Draupadi is a major and one of the most dynamic and interesting characters in Indian mythology. As the main heroine of the epic, she has a long legacy and had been reinterpreted in books, folklore, myths and, TV serials. My dissertation gives a short review of some of the oral traditions in South India where there still exists a strong Bhagavati cult and their understanding of Draupadi according to their beliefs. The thesis could provide some of the essential elements of how Draupadi was portrayed and how their socio-economic situation influenced them the way they thought of Draupadi. There could also be another way to understand the reason as to why the south Indian portrayed Draupadi as a goddess. Since Draupadi was not born in a natural manner and instead had emerged as an adult in the Mahabharata from the yagna conducted by king Drupada and the priests and was foretold that she would help provide revenge to King Drupada she was not considered a an ordinary woman but was equated as a goddess. Since these were the times when women did not get much education on various subjects like politics , economics and art she made sure that she learned a lot and got proper education on these subjects. She made use of her education for her marital life and helped her husbands take proper political decisions for the

welfare of the subjects. As she was a woman living at patriarchal society she had to manipulate the patriarchal situation as to get some power and control over the patriarchal system. She had to use her husbands love for getting justice by killing the Kauravas for humiliating in the public.

While researching Draupadi in the Mahabharata and the oral traditions of South India it has come to my notice that Draupadi in the Mahabharata did not have much of an agency and was portrayed as a catalyst for the war in the Mahabharata. She did not bat an eye when she was told to marry the five Pandavas or how her agency was not portrayed when she was looked upon as property and her fate was shown as a property to be won after a warrior would shoot the arrow at a revolving fish. However, she had intelligence and she was portrayed as a revengeful woman

Draupadi in the South Indian cult had more agency and she was portrayed as a goddess quite like how Krishna was portrayed as a god in the epic. She was portrayed as Shakti and could be fierce and feisty when needed who would only be pacified by the blood of the animals. The forest Draupadi was worshipped in this manner who would protect the Pandavas from harm and she was also looked upon as a strong woman as a virgin goddess. She was portrayed as a psychic and who could save herself from the disrobing incident and who could divine the intentions of her enemies. This portrayal is directly attributed to the socio-cultural features of the region and culture of the South Indians.

MY OBSERVATION ON THE TOPIC

My findings and opinion are elaborated in the following paragraphs. While Draupadi is looked upon as a fierce female character who would try to persuade the Pandavas to fight a war against the Kauravas, she was still a demure and feminine character, because of the patriarchal situation of India at the time when Mahabharata was written. In the South India cult where she was worshipped as a goddess and was looked upon as a Shakti who had immense powers and agency. She was referred to as a Grama Devta or the village goddess. Draupadi was not looked upon as a real woman or an ordinary woman who could try to fight the system in whichever way she could, what were her fears, how she could overtake them, her frustrations or her experiences were not portrayed in either the epic or were not depicted in the south Indian cult. The justification of why Draupadi had to be married to the five Pandavas had to be provided whereas such justification was not required by the South Indian cult. I have also concluded that since the times of the Mahabharata and the south Indian cult were different it had influenced the portrayal of Draupadi and in South India along with the socio-economic context of that time. I have also noticed that certain rituals and traditions associated with the Draupadi cult had some sort of inner meaning or symbolism to certain incident of the Mahabharata involving Draupadi.

INFORMATION THAT COULD BE PROVIDED

There is a lot that could be done to make this dissertation better. Due to the lack of much information, this dissertation may not succeed in providing complete information on the portrayal of Draupadi in oral traditions and the Mahabharata. Some sources provided information on the oral traditions of Draupadi but there are unfortunately limited or not easy to access. It would be insightful to learn more about the historical period and why the south Indian culture looked at Draupadi differently from others and why the socio-political background was different during that period. It would also be interesting to know more about the Draupadi cult in Kerala. It would also be insightful to learn about the Brahminization of local south Indian tribal deities and how did the process of Brahmanization slowly take root to the south Indian culture and influence the social situation of the area. It would also be interesting to get an overview of the situation of the south Indian cult at the present. It would be interesting to know a woman's perspective while they conducted the rituals and traditions to worship Draupadi, of how they were actively involved during the entire process etc.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation provides information about Draupadi from different points of time from the oral traditions of South India as well as from Mahabharata. It provides information about the research that was conducted on the oral traditions of South India on Draupadi as well as from the original Mahabharata by Veda Vyasa. The dissertation talked in brief about the other important female characters of the epic and Draupadi the central female character from the Mahabharata. It mentioned the objectives of the dissertation and then gave a literature review done to research the comparative analysis of the character of Draupadi from the epic and the oral traditions on Draupadi from South India. The traditions and important festivals are also included in the way that the South Indians portray Draupadi. It gave a short review of her character portrayal in the epic and her portrayal in the oral traditions of South India. It described the rituals and traditions of different Draupadi related festivals in detail. It also looked at how folk theatre depicted the society of South India during that time. So, it was possible to find out the economy or the political situation of South India during that period. There was a research methodology that analyzed the technique that was used while conducting research. The use of a qualitative method i.e. comparative analysis that was used was discussed in the chapter along with the process of collecting information along with the ethical issues that were faced while conducting research. The next chapter provided information on my connection with the topic, why I selected the topic, and my observation

and findings that I have come across while conducting research. It also a section that mentioned the information that could have helped but couldn't come across while conducting information.

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