APPROPRIATION OF MYTH IN MAHASWETA DEVI'S "DRAUPADI" AND NAYAN RAJ PANDEY'S *ULAR*

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ABSTRACT

Myths evolve and transform into new narratives in contemporary times through cultural appropriation as societies treat myths as vantage points to examine and interpret contemporary reality. Creative authors appropriate myths into emerging contexts to pass commentary on the prevailing reality, to derive meaning out of incoherent conditions of the time, and to make emergent situations more intelligible to the world. Popular Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) has employed Draupadi from the *Mahabharata* as the voice of the revolting Santhals from Bengal in the 1970s. Her short fiction "Draupadi" (1978) tells the story of a Naxalite insurgent, who sets out to participate in the armed conflict against the state in order to end economic exploitation and caste-based discrimination in her society. Similarly, Nepali novelist Nayan Raj Pandey (1966-) appropriates the myth of Draupadi by turning her into a Badi woman, sexually serving at the precinct of her society in Nepalgunj in his novella *Ular* [Imbalance] (1996). Devi recontextualizes the mythical Draupadi as an agent who chooses to transform the core of her society, while Pandey's Draupadi dreams of settling in society as a family woman with her lover, Prem Lalwa. By analyzing two works of fiction, this paper explores the political goal of appropriation of certain myths in modern South Asian literature by contextually reading the text in order to explore the political goal of recontextualizing the classical narrative in the modern world. Devi's Draupadi stands at the crossroads of Bengal's socio-cultural transition in the 1970s. The author treats Draupadi as a window to look into her society and critically remark on its course of action at present. Similarly, Pandey shows the impact of the

restoration of democracy in 1990 in Nepal. Draupadi loses her purity and agency in the 1990s in Nepal by letting herself be pushed to the further margins of her society.

Keywords: agency, appropriation, myth, contextual reading, Draupadi, social change

INTRODUCTION

Modern South Asian literature has appropriated the myth of Draupadi from the great epic Mahabharata in order to contextually recreate the historical transitions in the respective society. Bengali author Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) and Nepali novelist Nayan Raj Pandey (1966-) weave the narrative of the historical transition in Bengal in the 1970s and Nepal in the 1990s respectively. Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) appropriates Draupadi as a Santhal rebel of twenty-seven years who takes up arms to end the caste-based discrimination and economic exploitations in Bengal. The politically inspired rebel of the 1970s appears in a different form from that of the Mahabharata where she continuously motivates her men to work towards avenging her loss of dignity and honor. On the other hand, Pandey's *Ular* [Imbalance] (1996) tells the story of how the society loses balance after the restoration of democracy in Nepal in the 1990s. Pandey's Draupadi is a traditionally exploited woman who has accepted the domination in society: she serves her customers, hopes to find a man to take care of her, and dreams of setting up a family of her own. Remodeling Draupadi in a new form, Pandey rewrites the aspirations of women in the Badi community in Nepal. Each creative writer treats the myth as a way of perceiving, rewriting, and critically assessing the impact of social transition in their respective societies.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" and Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular* have been read by various critics to discuss the themes of gender, myth, and the subaltern. The critics have identified the issues of resistance and protest in the historical transitions of Bengal and Nepal in the 1970s and the 1990s. Armed conflict had not yet ensued in Nepal when Pandey came up with the novel in 1996. Both the creative writers employ Draupadi to critically expose the imbalance in social structures that favor certain groups of people over others. This study has used Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak's 1981 English translation of Devi's Bengali fiction "Draupadi." Also, I have read Pandey's *Ular* (1996), and criticism of Sapkota (2018) and B. P. Sharma (2022) on

Ular in Nepali. Whenever necessary, I have translated the extracts from Nepali texts for analysis and illustration of my claim in the paper.

As a region, Bengal had to observe massive political tension in the 1970s. The people rose against the Pakistan government in quest of a sovereign nation, inspiring people to fight for atrocities and inequalities. After the birth of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971 in Bengal, the tension began to grow in the region in the 1970s. In the backdrop of the formation of a new nation, people were inspired to fight against injustice and atrocities from the state, local feudal lords, and other government agencies in Bengal in the 1970s. The unsettling time gives birth to the characters like Draupadi in Devi's short story. As Mahato (2021) argues that the story brings various adaptations to incorporate "the rhetoric of nationalism and politics within it. Bringing forth burning issues like violence on women and marginalisation, the character Draupadi becomes the main concern in the theatrical performances across geopolitical spaces and time" (p. 54). Her reading presents the story as evidence that documents Bengal's political transition in the 1970s. She analyzes Mahasweta Devi's protagonist as a political figure who works in society to bring about change. She argues that the story was "written against the backdrop of the wild forests of Southern Bengal at the time of political insurgency in 1971" (p. 53). In the like manner, Basak (2020) has also contextually read the text in its historical context of the Naxalite movement of Bengal in which he sees the struggle of the Mundas. He has claimed:

> Still from a distance of many centuries Draupadi remains powerful enough to make her presence felt and force Dopdi to grow under her spell. She is too potent, too canonical to grant a minimal space to Dopdi. So Dopdi has to scrape the 'public memory' hard, not alone Vyasa's text, to make room for herself. (p. 332)

The disrobing of Draupadi is employed in a completely novel way to expose the atrocities of the state upon the fighting Mundas. Similarly, Srinivasan (2018) has also examined the historical context to comment on the use of coercion upon the insurgent's body. As she has written, "I highlight how *Draupadi* becomes an allegory for constitutional injustice by exploring contestations of power in the use of law, voice and deployment of the body" (2018, n. pag.). The seeker of justice faces the atrocities of the state: in the Mahabharata, she fights for the restoration of Dharma and remains insulted. Devi rewrites "Draupadi" as a parallel case.

Basak (2020) has discussed the rejection of the exploited ones in society. On the other hand, Rahman (2021) has interpreted the text as the tale of violence and torture, resulting from the feudal order of the state. Through the Foucauldian lens, he has observed the scene: "Dopdi is sexually exploited repeatedly that night in order to extract information. Her private parts became the site of violence unleashed by state apparatus" (2021, p. 4). Setting the story in the Naxalite movement of the 1970s, Basak and Rahman have read the text to examine the violence of the state on the resisting Adivasis. On the other hand, Jhanjhanodia & Mishra (2016) read the story as the reconstruction of the lost voice of women through the struggle of Draupadi in the modern world. As they have concluded,

> Mahasweta Devi blends mythological context in her story to trace the lost voice of Draupadi. She further establishes Foucault's post-structuralist connotation that it's only through the discourse of power that the exploitation of Marginalized people happens. Relying upon these theoretical frameworks, we can say that Mahasweta Devi wants modern Draupadis to step forward to defend themselves. (2016, p. 45)

The issues of exclusion of people have found special attention in Devi's "Draupadi" when it has been approached from the perspectives of tribal people and gender. Devi has fused both tribal attributes and gender in a single character, Draupadi in order to critique the limitations of the power structure in the contemporary world.

The caste discrimination has also appeared as the issue of prime concern in Devi's short story. Pati (1996) has explored the caste-based discrimination in the text. As she writes, "Mahasweta Devi's depiction of Draupadi and her torture are extended metaphors of the historical subjection and dispossession of the tribal peoples of India by both the Hindus and Western colonizers" (1996, p. 89). The study shows the reproduction of colonial mentality in the local feudal order that employs violence as the basis of control. Furthermore, Sharma (2022) has given a bio-political reading to the text in which he has examined the situation in the following words: "Modern Indian ruling political system exercises bio-political technologies; surveillance, incarceration and killings" (p. 57). Sharma's reading has focused on the troubled relationship between the state and the people. Also, Atiquzzaman (2022) has given a comparative reading to Tagore's *Chandalika* and Devi's "Draupadi." As he has asserted, "The government attempts to subjugate the tribal rebellion through kidnapping, murdering, and raping. At first, they murder Dulna and Dopdi is captured

by Senanayak who instructs the army officers to rape her to get information about the rebel uprising" (2022, p.177). Devi's Draupadi emerges from the margin and revolts against the prevailing conditions in her society. Like Atiquzzaman, Pandey. & Murmu (2021) raise the issue of caste and untouchability in Bengal by critically analyzing Devi's "Draupadi." The critics have focused on the transition from Dopdi to Draupadi in the text as she grows into a full-fledged rebel who can challenge the core of the state. As they have written,

> Draupadi Mejhen's body, which had become the easy target of the corrupt men, finally emerges as her weapon which gives her immense strength and courage to laugh at the masculinity of the officers. She knows that no more harm can be caused to her because the extreme form of punishment she could have received for being a Dalit woman and a rebel has already been implemented on her – rape. Having been easily stripped off her clothes, she has nothing else to be afraid of. (2021, p. 79)

The rebel girl challenges the core of society by defying the authority of both cultural and legal agencies. Even though she has come from an untouchable caste, the officers inflict violence to teach her a lesson. Draupadi's defiance of the state authority exposes the tension between the political structure and the excluded groups in society.

Even the postcolonial readings have revealed new meaning in the text by exposing the remnants of the empire even after India's independence in 1947. Chakraborty (2019) has explored the impact of imperial rule on the native administration: "Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* follows such a trend in depicting the experiences of a tribal woman who is the by-product of class struggle in postcolonial tribal India" (p.195). As the other name of resistance, Draupadi stands tall as a symbol in the quest for justice and equality in Bengal. Mandal (2019) has given contrapuntal reading to Devi's "Draupadi" in order to see how the text subscribes to the ideology of the past and rewrites it. The critic has applied the Saidian postcolonial approach to reading a text to see how it refers to what it resists at through contrapuntal reading. As Mandal (2019) has argued,

> Mahasweta Devi departs as we find that in the epic Draupadi legitimized pluralization as a wife among husband in singularity is used to demonstrate the glory. She questions the singularity by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rapes. (p. 14)

The postcolonial approach and context have revealed new meanings from Devi's short fiction as Draupadi defies the authority of patriarchy as much as she resists the uncritical ways in the mythical times. As Silva (2018) has stated, "By referring repeatedly to male voices, leadership and commands in Devi's story, the narrator deconstructs the revolutionary rhetoric by foregrounding its phallocentricity" (p. 58). The gendered perspective has also revealed the play of power as the goal of writing the story. Read from various points of view, the critics have approached the story to examine the relationship between the state and the individual, the activation of agency in individuals, and the exercise of discipline to control the activities of the insurgents in the modern state.

Like Devi's story, Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular* (1996) tells the story of a minority group in the farthest corner of Nepal. Phuyal (2012) has found out that the fiction has presented the people in a state of utter confusion after the restoration of democracy in 1990. As Phuyal has argued that "the subaltern's voice is measured on the scale of how the West understands it: the failure of representation of the subaltern for Spivak turns silencing of the entire social class" (2012, p. 65). Sharma (2022) appears very close to Phuyal's reading of marginality. Sharma analyzes the text for the ways people are presented as dependent on other classes. Consequently, such dependence dehumanizes the position of people like Prem Lalwa, Kaluwa, or Draupadi in Nepalgunj (Sharma, 2022, p. 143). The studies have highlighted the lives of people at the margin in Nepal. Sapkota (2018) further discusses the elements of regionalism in the novella. The regional elements generally include cultural, geographical, and socio-political factors as the major aspects in writing of texts. He has concluded that the regional aspects have played a vital role in the story as he has stated, "Nayan Raj Pandey's *Ular* is a regional novel. Regional novels have various specific political, economic, and linguistic features of a particular geography, culture, society, and the like" (124). His study has focused on the minor details that have contributed to the formation of regionality in the text. The major studies on Devi's "Draupadi" and Pandey's *Ular* have not discussed the appropriation of myth. The present study has contextually read the text to interpret appropriation and its political goal in modern South Asian literature.

Departure

The existing critical scholarship primarily attempts to interpret Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) as a text dealing with a voice against injustice

and discrimination. Various critics have also discussed caste, class, gender, regionalism, and the like as the layers of discrimination in Bengal to uncover how Draupadi has to undergo torture from state agencies. While discussing Pandey's *Ular* (1996), critics have primarily focused on the issue of subaltern, marginalization, and regionalism. The hitherto existing critical scholarship has not been able to address the issues of appropriation of myth in modern South Asian literature that seeks to reexamine the emerging socio-political and historical circumstances through the lenses of myth. Both Devi and Pandey have employed the myth of Draupadi in order to reexamine the emergent context of their society: Devi's Draupadi emerges as the politically awakened self who questions the authority and sets out to rewrite it through an armed struggle, while Pandey's Draupadi attempts to assimilate herself in the existing order in search of happiness of family life with Prem Lalwa.

Contextual Reading of Text

Contextual reading aims at placing the text in its context to make sense of it. As such reading digs into the social and political factors involved in making the texts, the historical forces play a significant role in the interpretations. As I have approached myth from the point of view of appropriation in this study, I have applied critical insights into the appropriation of myths from Townsend (1972) and Khan (1998) in order to interpret the texts in the historical context. As Townsend (1972) argues,

> Myth does not define words or give etymologies to support this wider use of language, though mythological etymologies do exist. But when language is pushed to its limits, when it has exhausted its signs and its informational capacity and still wants to say something, it tells a story or creates a parable. At that point, it becomes a myth. (1972, p. 201-202)

As modern South Asian literature has invented certain types of narratives that parallel the ancient story of Draupadi, it is pertinent to inquire into the mode of use of classical resources in modern literature. Khan (1998) has also taken the narratives from the Mahabharata to discuss them in the historical backdrop to analyze and see how such narratives give meaning (p. 176). Such interpretations examine the appropriation of myth by measuring how the new interpretation has deviated from the original one. Even though this paper does not mention Foucault's texts as such, my interpretations of the texts have followed Foucauldian ways of new historicism. The contextual reading incorporates the material and immaterial conditions

into consideration while interpreting the texts to analyze the issue of appropriation of myth along the new historicist lines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Modern South Asian literature employs Draupadi in search of critical sensibility in a time of historical transition. The authors have found the voice for change in Draupadi as a myth that helps to examine the prevailing situations. The partition of India had prepared the ground for the tension as early as 1947 by dividing Bengal into East Pakistan and West Bengal. The separation of East Pakistan into an independent nation in 1971 and the uprising of the Adivasi movement in the 1970s mark the socio-political transformation that Bengal was undergoing at the time. In such context, Mahasweta Devi picks Draupadi in her 1978 short fiction "Draupadi" from the Mahabharata as a tribal girl participating most powerfully in her quest for justice. Likewise, Nayan Raj Pandey's Draupadi in *Ular* (1996) loves a lowly Tonga driver, while she works as a sexual worker at the vicinity of Nepalgunj. Devi and Pandey appropriate the spirit in the local context and weave the narrative in their own way.

Devi and Pandey appropriate the tale of Draupadi in their creative writings to refer to the socio-political reality of their societies. Draupadi begins to assume the history of Bengal and Nepal in the respective texts. In the mid-1990s, Nepal was going through a state of political confusion, while Bengal had already undergone hard times in the 1970s. In the Naxalite movement of Bengal, the appropriation of the myth of the Mahabharat provides with a tribal insurgent who attempts to rewrite the rule of caste and economic exploitations. Devi appropriates Draupadi in her context:

> Dulna and Dopdi worked at harvests, *rotating* between Birbhum, Burdwan, Murshidabad, and Bankura. In 1971, in the famous *Operation* Bakuli, when three villages were *cordoned* off and *machine gunned*, they too lay on the ground, faking dead. In fact, they were the main culprits. Murdering Surja Sahu and his son, occupying the upper-case wells and tubewells during the drought, not surrendering those three young men to the police. (1978, p. 392)

The casteism functions as the rule of the game that promotes inequality in Bengal. Devi sets her insurgents against inequality as the evil of the time. On the other hand, Pandey has invented a very meek voice in his Draupadi in *Ular*: she is a local sex worker in the vicinity of Nepalgunj in the 1990s.

She was called Sita by her mother; however, she was transformed into Draupadi later on. Pandey narrates:

> Draupadi has her father. She has her mother. She has a nine-ten years old daughter. She does not know the father of the daughter. Sometimes, she thinks that her daughter's face resembles ASI Krishna Bahadur. On other occasion she thinks it's ASI Jagat Man, or former village chief Harka Man. As she cannot arrive at any conclusions, she has stopped thinking about the question of the father to her daughter. She has given her daughter her own old name -Sita! (1996, p. 20)

By expelling the pure women from their bodies, the pure women become Draupadi in Pandey's world of the Badi community in Nepalgunj. As a seller of her body in the flesh trade, she begins to serve the whole community.

Devi presents her Draupadi as a voice of change who resists the prevailing structure. On the other hand, Pandey's characters seek assimilation in the mainstream flow of society. The mid-1990s appears to be the time of political transition in Nepal in which both Prem and Draupadi seek a settlement in the unsettled society. Fighting against the society, Devi's insurgents have always wanted complete annihilation of unequal social structure. As Devi states, "Annihilation at sight of any and all practitioners of such warfare is the sacred duty of every soldier. Dopdi and Dulna belong to the *category* of such fighter, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow, etc" (1978, p. 394). Dulna Majhi is shot in the head by an army informer Dukhiram while Dulna is drinking water. The twenty-seven-year-old girl has lost her husband to the war between the insurgents and the state: there is a pamphlet announcing that the one assisting to arrest Dopi would be rewarded one hundred rupees (1978, p. 392). She has caused trouble to the security personnel in the area –Captain Arjan Singh's level of diabetes increased because of the Adivasi movement in the area.

The tension in the Bay of Bengal serves as the context for Devi's story in the 1970s. Though Pandey shows the loss of agency and a state of utter confusion in Nepal, the armed conflict had not yet begun in Nepal. His lower-class lovers do not even dream of opposing the flow of life. *Ular* depicts the people seeking assimilation in society. Simultaneously telling the story of local feudal lords like Shanti Raja and Rajendra Babu, Pandey has woven a narrative of Draupadi. She has a daughter from one of her customers. Her mother has died of syphilis. Her deaf father lives on her earnings. Defeat resides at the core of the narrative: it begins with Rajendra Raj's defeat in the election to Shanti Raja. With the victory procession, all

the trouble of Prem Lalwa begins: his Tonga faces *ular* [imbalance]. Later the horse dies (p.37). Prem stands as a subject who has been created to go around in a maze as Phuyal (2012) has stated: "The dominant group as represented by Rajendra Raj and Shanti Raja (later minister) always wants to put people like Prem Lalwa at their service and continuously exploit them" (p. 66). Still, Prem and Draupadi cannot even think of raising voices against the local elites. The obedient subalterns continue to suffer and tolerate the humiliation they receive in society.

Likewise, the Munda people fall prey to casteism and local feudal order in Devi's "Draupadi." One of the compassionate daughters, Draupadi stands against discrimination, takes up arms to fight the evil in her society, and pleads to liberate her society. In Bakuli, Surja Sahu digs up two tube wells during a drought. He does not allow the untouchables to draw water from the tube wells. As Devi narrates:

> Surja Sahu's house was surrounded at night. Surja Sahu had brought out his gun. Surja was tied up with cow rope. His whitish eyeballs turned and turned, he was incontinent again and again. Dulna had said, I'll have the first blow, brothers. My great grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labor to repay the debt. (1978, p.398)

The failure of the state forces individuals to decide what is justice for themselves. The violence is the way of resistance on the part of the Mundas. In return, Draupadi prepares herself to bear the torture: "Dopdi knows, has learned by hearing so often and so long, how one can come to terms with torture. If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue" (p. 397). She has committed herself to rescuing her people from the oppression of the upper-class people and feudal lords in her society.

However, Pandey presents his people as devoid of critical sensibility. They earn a few pennies from trifling jobs, visit prostitutes, and dream about physical union. Prem sees Draupadi in his dream and finds her sleeping with Nanakau:

> He was very sad at Draupadi's rude treatment. He was also worried. He was restless. And then, he began to cry. Draupadi went to sleep with Nanakau in his presence. The whole night, Nanakau played with Draupadi like a *madal* [traditional Nepali drum], and he listened to the sound of the music, sobbing. (Pandey, 1996, pp. 10-11).

In the Badi community, prostitution is a traditional way of earning a living. Pandey names the prostitutes Sabitri, Sita, and Draupadi to capture

the decaying ethos of his age. When Prem Lalwa knows that Kaluwa has visited the prostitutes, he inquires if he went to Draupadi (Pandey, 1996, p. 12). Though it implies that Prem Lalwa truly loves Draupadi, it also points out how Prem Lalwa has developed values regarding the possession of a woman as a wife. The ordinary pleasures of life have kept them at bay from understanding the condition of their life and the necessity to enforce intervention in it.

Pandey rewrites a scene that shows a sort of honor to Draupadi. She feels nothing in front of her customer but she confesses that Prem's presence makes a difference in her perception of shame. As Prem inquires her about her feelings, she confesses that only Prem makes a difference in her life. Pandey has stated:

> He decided to ask the same question to Draupadi. After he was sure about it, he said, 'How do you feel when you sleep with others?'
>
> 'I feel nothing,' Draupadi spoke just this much.
>
> 'With me?' He asked again.
>
> 'I can't say exactly what it is. I can't speak it out.' Draupadi fell silent after these words. Then she thought for a while and said, 'Shall I tell you the truth? I feel really ashamed when you ask me to unclothe myself.' (p. 27)

Pandey's Draupadi never realizes any possibility of turning herself into agency and bringing about change in society. They just dream of settling into a family.

The episode of shame, loss of honor, and dignity appear in the disrobing of Draupadi in the great epic Mahabharata. Pandey does not delve elaborately into the scene. However, Devi rewrites the disrobing into the most powerful episode in her story. Devi's protagonist completely throws away her clothes and walks out of the camp, naked. As Devi narrates,

> Senanayak walks out surprised and sees Draupadi, naked, walking toward him in the bright sunlight with her head held high. The nervous guards trail behind.
>
> What is this? He is about to cry, but stops.
>
> Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breast, two wounds. (p. 402)

Repeatedly raped the whole night at the camp, she knows that she has nothing to lose. Furthermore, "the effectiveness of Dopdi's resistance is

not the refusal to act, but the refusal to act predictably. She redefines the construct of sexual honor of a woman when she comes out naked and confronts Senanayak" (Goswami, 2015, p. 114). In the Mahabharata, Draupadi struggles to preserve her honor by keeping herself in a sari. Pandey's Draupadi is a public sexual worker, dreaming of settlement in regular society. Unlike Pandey's Draupadi, Devi makes her protagonist reject everything, challenging the authority of the Senanayak:

> She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my clothes on me. What more can you do? Come, *encounter* me –come on, *encounter* me—? (1978, p. 402)

Draupadi realizes that she does not have anything further to lose from her life: she challenges the authority of Bengal, modeled after the colonial masters. Her native challenges straight away hit the core of the elitist authority and shatter it asunder.

Pandey's Draupadi and Devi's Draupadi have two contrasting ways of searching for dignity and honor in their respective society. In the mid-1990s, Pandey sees no possibility for the excluded groups of people to have justice and equality. Since they are devoid of critical sensibility of their own political condition, the people just try to find a secure position in society. Pandey's Draupadi does not know that she can challenge the authority of her traditional society, break it into pieces, and bring all the broken pieces together to formulate it anew. On the other hand, Devi's Draupadi has mentally prepared herself to sacrifice herself for the cause of her society. She knows she cannot live a life without honor. As a politically awakened self, she challenges the people and structures alike, holds the courage to dismantle them, and knows that a just society can be set up at the ruin of the old. Hence, Devi models her Draupadi as a more vibrant and dynamic character than that of Pandey.

CONCLUSION

The myth of Draupadi has served South Asian literature as one of the prominent windows to look into societies in times of historical transition. The creative authors have often appropriated the myth and its protagonist to make political statements about society. For instance, Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) appropriates the character and myth by subverting the

middle-class value of shame and honor. Devi's leftist turn allows her to ignite agency in the Adivasi youth who prepares herself for sacrifice for the cause of her people. Through the myth of Draupadi, Devi weaves the narrative of the Bengali transition in the 1970s: East Bengal was fighting to establish itself as an independent nation, while people were fighting against caste-based discrimination and economic exploitation in West Bengal. Likewise, Pandey's Nepali novella *Ular* [Imbalance] implicitly claims that the social structure has lost power even after the restoration of democracy in 1990 in Nepal. As a political dream, democracy had promised to exercise equality and justice in society; however, only a few members of the elite class could enjoy the promises of the system. His Draupadi has not politically awakened herself to understand her rights and equality: she wants to assimilate into the mainstream of the society that rather pushes Draupadi and Prem Lalwa further to the edge of the margin.

Draupadi's return makes political statements in Bengal and Nepal in the 1970s and the 1990s respectively. Creative writers apply classical resources like myth in their own contexts to rewrite new narratives to address the challenges emerging in society. In the process of reworking on myth, powerful characters like Draupadi are employed as a vantage point to observe and make sense of the world. The appropriation of myth helps understand the nature of the political transition that a society is going through at the moment of production of such text. Each of the aspects of the myth of Draupadi gains prominence in South Asian literature because they turn into a vantage point to reflect on society. Her stoic life becomes an example to the people to tolerate disgrace, dishonor, insult, and slander. As the rebel persona in myth, she inspires people to patiently wait for their turn and patiently work to achieve one's goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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