

Speaking Truth Through Myth: A Feminist Critique of Narrative Justice and Resistance in *Song of Draupadi*

Thendral S^{1*} and Felicita Mary Praba I²

¹Research Scholar; Department of English, Loyola College, Chennai, India

²Research Supervisor; Department of English, Loyola College, Chennai, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

RECEIVED: 18-Mar-25

REVISED: 20-May-25

ACCEPTED: 26-May-25

PUBLISHED: 30-Jun-25

*Corresponding Author

Thendral S

E-mail: thendralsuresh1999@gmail.com

Co-Author(s):

Author 2: Felicita Mary Praba

E-mail: felicitamary@loyolacollege.edu

Citation: Thendral S and Felicita Mary Praba I (2025). Speaking Truth Through Myth: A Feminist Critique of Narrative Justice and Resistance in Song of Draupadi. Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res. 7 (1), 131–139. <https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2025.v7.n1.id1305.p131>



ABSTRACT

Introduction: Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a global issue of grave concern, disproportionately affecting women and often silencing their voices. This violence is rooted in deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural stereotypes that diminish the value of women. In response, feminist reinterpretations of mythology have emerged as powerful tools for challenging oppressive narratives and reclaiming agency for female figures. **Methods:** This study employs a qualitative literary analysis of Song of Draupadi by Ira Mukhoty, examining the text through the lens of narrative justice, the ethical restoration of silenced voices through storytelling—a framework that emphasizes the right to represent one’s experiences, confront trauma, and seek recognition and redress. The analysis focuses on how mythological retellings can critique gender violence and promote empowerment. **Results:** The novel presents a vivid portrayal of the trauma and oppression faced by women, while also celebrating their resilience and acts of defiance. Draupadi, reimagined through a feminist lens, emerges as a symbol of resistance against the social structures that perpetuate violence. The narrative challenges traditional patriarchal interpretations and gives voice to the suppressed experiences of women. **Discussion:** Through the reclamation of mythological characters, feminist retellings like Song of Draupadi not only expose the realities of gender-based violence but also affirm women’s strength and agency. These stories function as acts of narrative justice, allowing for the rearticulation of silenced experiences and contributing to broader discourses on gender equity and empowerment. **Conclusion:** Feminist mythological reinterpretations offer a critical cultural intervention against gender-based violence. By highlighting the novel’s unique reimagining of Draupadi’s voice, this paper plays a significant role in feminist myth criticism and expands the discourse narrative justice in Indian feminist literary retellings. By centring women’s voices and their lived experiences, such narratives foster awareness, resistance, and transformation, advancing the pursuit of justice and equality.

Keywords: Draupadi, Feminist Retelling, Gender-Based Violence, Indian Mythology, Narrative Justice, Patriarchy, Resistance, Women’s Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender based violence (GBV) continues to be a problem and is deeply ingrained in societal beliefs and

cultural stories that frequently silence the individuals affected by it. The World Health Organization (2021) reports that about one, out of every three women globally

has encountered sexual abuse at some point in their lives highlighting the magnitude of this breach of human rights. This form of violence is frequently connected to cultural elements that sustain gender disparities restricting women's independence and perpetuating their exclusion. In this situation reimagined mythological narratives incorporating feminist viewpoints play a crucial role in questioning and reshaping oppressive stories. Through reinterpreting narratives writers can offer insights into women's lives and emphasize their strength in overcoming challenges. Whatever form of the revisionist myth making may be perused, it contests the dominant narratives with an intention of "revaluing the experiences of the marginalized" and therefore giving space to the silenced and in turn reconfiguring their identity (Beena, 2019, p. 13).

Ira Mukhoty is a contemporary Indian author and historian who focuses on unearthing the stories of women often left out of mainstream historical and literary discussions. Her novel, *Song of Draupadi*, offers a bold feminist reinterpretation of the *Mahabharata*, seen through the eyes of women of *Mahabharata* such as Draupadi, Gandhari, Satyawati and others, one of the epic's most intricate and often overlooked misrepresented figures. This paper centers around the intriguing concept of narrative justice, which involves the ethical and political act of reclaiming the voices of marginalized or silenced mythological women characters through storytelling. This act serves to address and correct the historical or literary imbalances that exist. In this framework, resistance is portrayed as both an intellectual and emotional response, where women assert their autonomy by challenging the roles that patriarchal traditions have placed upon them. This study examines how Mukhoty's narrative enacts justice by emphasizing women characters resistance and reclaiming their voice as a means of empowerment.

1.1. Theoretical Framework And Methodology

This paper utilizes a blend of theoretical perspectives grounded in intersectional feminism, postcolonial theory, and myth criticism to delve into Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi*. By weaving these frameworks together, the novel emerges as a literary quest for narrative justice and serves as a powerful instrument of feminist myth-making.

This paper adopts a qualitative textual analysis approach, informed by feminist and postcolonial literary criticism. Through close reading of *Song of Draupadi* by Ira Mukhoty, the study explores how narrative strategies and mythic subversions give voice to gendered resistance and reclaim silenced histories. The novel was chosen as a case study for its contemporary reinterpretation of the *Mahabharata* through a feminist lens, offering a fertile ground to examine how mythic retellings can enact what

Rafe McGregor terms "narrative justice" by restoring dignity to marginalized figures like Draupadi, Satyawati, Gandhari and others.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Both scholars and writers have explored how these narratives bridge ancient and contemporary discourses, emphasizing the evolving portrayal of women's agency, defiance, and their resistance to oppression. At the turn of the 21st century, feminist retellings began to flourish, transforming mythological stories to highlight the resilience, strength, and agency of women who had been overlooked in traditional epics. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) represented a notable change, as it presented the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective, portraying her not just as a key character in the epic's narrative but as a woman with her own desires, intellect, and agency. Divakaruni's storytelling reinterprets Draupadi as a confident woman who is acutely aware of her identity and her influence in shaping her fate. Following Divakaruni, Kavita Kane has emerged as a prominent voice in feminist mythological retellings, enriching the genre by focusing on female characters who are often overlooked. In her novel, *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* (2013), offers a deep exploration of Uruvi, Karna's wife, who navigates her role as an outsider while grappling with the ethical dilemmas presented in the epic. Kane's subsequent work, *Ahalya's Awakening* (2019), revisits Ahalya's story from the *Ramayana*, showcasing her path to reclaiming her dignity after enduring an unjust curse. Volga's book, *The Liberation of Sita* (2016), was a significant work that rethought Sita's path to self-discovery by introducing her to characters like Surpanakha and Ahalya. It delved into topics of pain and recovery.

Recent feminist interpretations of myth have opened fresh perspectives for examining how figures like Draupadi are reimagined. Scholars like Mohanty (2003), in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, highlight the need to challenge dominant narratives that often silence women's voices. This aligns with the way *Song of Draupadi* seeks to reclaim Draupadi's agency. Menon (2012), in *Seeing Like a Feminist*, emphasizes the dynamic nature of feminist resistance within the Indian context, a theme that resonates in Mukhoty's depiction of Draupadi's evolving identity. Rajan (1993), in *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*, critiques both symbolic and essentialist representations of women in literature—an issue Mukhoty addresses by portraying Draupadi not merely as a mythic figure but as a complex political and emotional being. While these retellings are empowering, some critics warn against romanticizing

myth without addressing the hierarchies often embedded within it—an ethical challenge this paper thoughtfully navigates.

More recently, Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi* (2020) has carried on this approach, blending old stories with modern feminist ideas. Together, these books question traditional tales, portraying women not as helpless victims but as strong individuals shaping their own lives. They connect the past with current discussions on gender-based violence and women's rights. This discussion can be further studied based on Rafe McGregor's concept of narrative justice which he explored in his seminal work titled *Narrative Justice*, emphasizing key themes such as representation, agency, and empowerment in literary works. This study examines the notion of narrative justice in Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi*, highlighting how this fresh take on a classical myth confronts traditional storytelling methods and amplifies the voices of those who have often been overlooked.

Through reclaiming and reinterpreting Draupadi, Kunti, Amba, Satyawati, Gandhari and other women's stories, Mukhoty not only gives them agency of narrative but also allows for an analysis of them through a critical perspective in relation to gender violence, resistance, and its resolution in classical mythology. It points out that not only does retellings raise consciousness, but also raises challenge to dominant patriarchal narratives, which offers a strong argument for the transformative capacity of feminist retellings. Thus, McGregor's concept of narrative justice is used as the backdrop for the analysis. Narrative justice posits that storytelling can bring about what is called a justice restoration in victims who have been lost in a powerful cultural account of being marginalized or misrepresented. It also used as tool of allowing silenced voices to be heard and challenges historical accounts that have perpetuated inequality or misrepresented in certain groups.

3. Rafe McGregor's Concept of Narrative Justice

This concept of narrative justice is particularly relevant to Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi*, as it underscores how storytelling can not only reframe but also empower the characters it portrays. Narrative representations, including mythological retellings, can impart ethical and political knowledge through their narrative structure, regardless of factual accuracy. The stories hold ethical value "in virtue of their narrativity," allowing readers to gain insights into moral issues that might transcend literal truth (McGregor, 2018, p. 42). This idea aligns well with feminist retellings of mythology, where re-imagined narratives invite readers to consider the ethical and political implications of traditional stories. The concept

of narrative justice is introduced in section 19, in the book narrative justice linking narrative sensibility with "the reduction of criminal inhumanity" by presenting moral and ethical perspectives that encourage empathy and understanding (McGregor, 2018, p. 89). In feminist mythological retellings, this approach of narrative justice can be seen as a way of addressing historical gender injustices and reimagining mythological figures as advocates for justice. By evoking an ethical response in readers, these retellings support the study that narrative representations can contribute to both aesthetic education and a deeper moral consciousness.

In mythological retellings, narrative justice is achieved by reinterpreting traditional stories to confront and correct historical wrongs, particularly those affecting marginalized or oppressed individuals. Narrative justice, as a "contemporary rather than traditional thesis of aesthetic education," links aesthetics, ethics, and politics to influence societal values and reduce ideological biases that can fuel crime and injustice (McGregor, 2018, p. 106). Mythological retellings play a crucial role in this process by cultivating narrative sensibility allowing readers to empathize with characters who have traditionally been marginalized, like Draupadi or Sita, often reinterpreted as the characters of defiance, resilience, justice, and resistance.

4. *Song of Draupadi* by Ira Mukhoty

Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi* offers a fresh perspective on the lives of the women from the *Mahabharata*—Satyawati, Kunti, Madri Gandhari, Draupadi, Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika. These women confront the strict patriarchal norms of their society, finding their voices and thereby pursuing justice, and standing up against injustice. The novel showcases their intelligence, determination, and their ability to seek justice and even take revenge when they are wronged. In a society where women are often pressured to conform to submissive roles, the characters in the novel consistently engage in arguments, plead their cases, and use reason to assert their voices. Their expressions are fuelled by a righteous anger, stemming from their fierce determination. The narrative showcases their struggle for agency and their pursuit of just causes, even in the face of oppressive patriarchal structures.

The novel delves into the mystical origins of Ganga, who bears children with King Shantanu, and examines how her divine absence influences the life of Devarata, who is later known as Bhishma. In this way, Ganga is depicted as a formidable presence, and her departure leaves a lasting impact on the lives of those she leaves behind. Satyawati, who comes from humble origin, ascends to power through her unwavering determination and ambition. She ensures

her marriage to Shantanu by insisting that her sons be the heirs to the throne. This demand, driven by her wish to never again be at the mercy of fate, showcases her resilience and strategic mindset. Her earlier meeting with the sage Parashar, where she sought strength and power, marks a significant turning point, transforming her into a formidable figure. Ultimately, Satyawati's decisions lead to Devarata's heart-wrenching vow of celibacy, a crucial moment in the *Mahabharata*.

The abduction of the Kashi princesses—Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika—by Devarata during their swayamvara is a stark display of patriarchal dominance. Devarata defends his actions by referencing his clan's long-standing honour and the perceived insult of being excluded from the swayamvara. Amba's profound affection for Salva and the violent disruption of her life marked the beginning of a series of tragic events. This is marked by the ill treatment of Amba which becomes the first act of injustice leading to unfortunate events in the epic. On the other hand, the novel also seems to emphasize the rage and vengeance that Amba harbours as an indication of the impending war, therefore, due to such reasons she becomes the focal point of the novel's feminine defiance and oppression. The next chapters focus on the Hastinapur's legacy, driven by Satyawati's determination to secure an heir. After the death of her son Vichitravirya, Satyawati takes a pragmatic step by invoking the practice of *Niyoga* to ensure the dynasty's survival. She calls upon her son Vyasa, a sage, to father children with her widowed daughters-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika, even though they initially experience shame and reluctance. Ambika, finding it hard to tolerate Vyasa's harsh nature, persuades her maid to step in for her. This decision leads to the births of three sons: Dhritarashtra (who is visually challenged), Pandu (who is pale yet strong), and Vidura (born of the maidservant, wise and intelligent but excluded from ruling due to his lower caste). The three boys grow up united as brothers in the palace of Hastinapur, enjoying a brief, golden childhood filled with happiness, friendship, and the simple joys of life.

The subsequent chapters explore a deeply moving re-imagination of Gandhari's arrival in Hastinapur. It portrays the emotional upheaval and betrayal she faces upon realizing that her marriage is to Dhritarashtra, who is visually challenged—a fact that was kept hidden from her family during the negotiations. This narrative intricately blends themes of agency, loyalty to family, and the politics surrounding marriage alliances in a patriarchal context. In the next chapters Mukhoty explores Kunti's life, originally named Pritha, was adopted by Kunti Bhoja and was renowned for her remarkable devotion and strong character. As a young girl, she caught the attention

of the sage Durvasa, who bestowed upon her a powerful mantra that could summon any deity and bless her with a child. Driven by youthful curiosity, she decided to test the mantra and gave birth to a son, Karna, through Surya, the Sun god. However, due to societal pressures, she was forced to abandon him, a choice that would haunt her for the rest of her life. Kunti eventually married Pandu, king of Hastinapur. Pandu also took Madri, the princess of Madra, as his wife, which created a complication between the two queens. Although Kunti was the elder, her status was frequently tested by Madri's youthful charm. Due to a curse from a sage that foretold his death if he engaged in intimacy, Pandu chose to give up the throne and moved to the forest with Kunti and Madri.

In the forest, Pandu's desperation for heirs led him to convince Kunti to use a divine mantra to conceive children. His wife initially resisted the idea but finally yielded to the advice of her husband. Kunti gave birth to Yudhishtir, Bheem, and Arjun. Madri, who also desired children, similarly used the mantra and bore twins, Nakul and Sahadev. Kunti's relationship with her sister-in-law, Gandhari, was marked by mutual respect but underlying tension. Gandhari, the mother of the hundred Kauravas, saw Kunti's sons, the Pandavas, as rivals, which created a complicated relationship between the two families. Their fierce loyalty to their sons often put them at odds with each other. The death of Pandu was a tragic event, he fell victim to his curse after being unable to resist Madri. Stricken with guilt, Madri chose to end her life by self-immolation, leaving Kunti to raise all five Pandavas alone. Kunti's journey became a powerful story of resilience, sacrifice, and devotion as she navigated the personal losses and the political and familial struggles of her time. The following chapters highlights key events like the swayamvara of Draupadi, where Arjuna triumphantly wins her hand. The Pandavas subsequently builds their magnificent capital, Indraprastha, reflecting their increasing influence. When Duryodhana visits Indraprastha, he is consumed by jealousy at its splendour and faces humiliation in the ceremonial hall after accidentally stumbling into an illusionary waterbody. Draupadi's laughter at his blunder strikes a deep blow to his pride, leaving him seething over her boldness as a woman married to five men. Shakuni, always the manipulator, proposes a dice game to lure the Pandavas, setting the stage for their ruin. The notorious game unfolds, resulting in Yudhishtira losing everything, including Draupadi, to the Kauravas. This leads to Draupadi's public humiliation in Hastinapur, where she delivers a powerful curse against Duryodhana and Dushasana. The Pandavas' subsequent exile and Draupadi's unwavering determination pave the way for the impending Kurukshetra war, which serves as the epic's

climax. Mukhoty's retelling emphasizes the strength and dignity of the female characters in the face of injustice, highlighting their crucial role in shaping the narrative of the *Mahabharata*.

5. Reclaiming Justice Through Narrative Justice: Transformative Power of Narrative in Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi*

5.1. Satyawati: Submissive Daughter to Powerful Matriarch

Satyavati from Submissive Daughter to Powerful Matriarch Mukhoty reinterprets her as a woman whose strategic thinking and practicality influence the events of the *Mahabharata*. Satyawati is depicted as a character who rises above her past vulnerabilities, using her intelligence and determination to carve out a future filled with power and agency. Her father's initial request to King Shantanu, "My daughter desires that any son born of her should be raja after you" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 62), serves as a crucial moment that underscores her resolve to overcome the limitations of her fate and ensure the security of her lineage, despite the patriarchal constraints of her era. Satyawati's character can be examined through the concept of narrative justice, as she confronts the injustices and constraints placed upon her by society. Her history, filled with weakness and vulnerability, fuels her quest for strength and control over her future. Her dialogue when she states, "if she is strong now, it is because once she was weak." (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 63), by having her encounter with Sadhu Parashar which results in birth of her first son Vyasa in mind highlights her evolution from a woman at the mercy of fate to one who seizes her destiny. Her request to the sage Parashar, "Bless me so that I find a strong and powerful husband. Bless me so that I'm the mother of rajas, never again subject to the random whim of fate" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 64), reveals her longing not just for personal empowerment but also for influence over her children's futures and, consequently, the political dynamics of Hastinapur.

Through Satyawati's story, Mukhoty delves into the idea of justice in a way that is both personal and political. Satyawati's choices, while at times morally questionable, is justified within the context of her struggle for power and security in a patriarchal society. By drawing on her past experiences of vulnerability as a catalyst for change, Satyawati's character represents the idea of narrative justice—she reshapes the story of her life by making strategic choices that give her and her descendants a greater claim to authority. In doing so, she redefines her own narrative, highlighting the power of women to shape their own destinies through calculated decisions in a world that often denies them agency.

The concept of narrative sensibility, as described in the theory, can "develop ethical understanding" (McGregor, 2018, p. 103) and this is evident in how Mukhoty's portrayal of Satyawati's choices encourages readers to view her actions through the ethical lens of her era. Satyawati's transformation, from a vulnerable woman requesting the sage to bless her, "never again subject to the random whim of fate" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 64) into a formidable strategist who secures her legacy. This transformation highlights how a character can embody both virtue and ethical compromise. The narrative justice in this case draws a link between exemplary narratives and ethical value, as Satyawati's pragmatic decisions reflect an ethical struggle for survival and agency in a system that would otherwise leave her powerless.

5.2. Amba's Rage: Symbol of Defiance and Resilience

Amba's plight, defiance, and quest for revenge in Song of Draupadi exemplify the concept of narrative justice in several ways. The abduction of Amba, her sisters, and her subsequent humiliation at the hands of Devavrata (Bheeshma) and Salva are pivotal events that set the stage for her moral and emotional unravelling. Her journey questions the conventional ideas of justice within the epic's patriarchal context, where women's voices and independence are frequently overlooked. Amba's traumatic experiences start with her swayamvara where she is forcefully taken away by Devavrata, who states that "my clan, ancient and prestigious, was not given the honour of an invitation to this swayamvara, so I owe Kshiraj no explanation and his daughters no chivalry. But know this I take these rajkumari's as brides by force" (Mukhoty, 2021, p.78) resulting in the trauma that will set off Amba's life. And thus begins her story, which turns into a spiral of violations and oppression, that completely ignores her agency. Her feeling of love for Salva and the shame when he rejects her, allows her lingering regret become wrathful vengeance. Such incidents as her abduction, Salva's rejection and Devavrata's dismissal of her request are the turning points that serve as "catalyst, a foreboding, of the cataclysmic events to come" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 81).

From the moment Amba is stripped of her agency, her narrative can be seen as one of victimization and of resilience. When Salva turns her away, Amba, a proud rajkumari of Kashi, falls into despair, yet she refuses to accept her fate. She continues to seek refuge with Devavrata, only to face further humiliation. His cold response "I have not besmirched my Kshatriya honour. I claimed you and your sisters as brides for my brother, not for myself" (Mukhoty, 2021, p.88) intensifies her feelings of dispossession. The harshness of her situation is

worsened by Devavrata's refusal to marry her or provide her with sanctuary, instead suggesting she "seek asylum in the forest" (Mukhoty, 2021, p.88). This act of rejection lays the emotional and psychological foundation for Amba's future actions.

Narrative justice sheds light on the cruelty faced by Amba at the hands of certain characters. It effectively clarifies the inhumanity by illustrating how Amba becomes engulfed in her feelings of rage and the thirst for revenge. As she travels from one place to another, her emotions shift from anger and yearning to an unwavering focus on retribution. She "cherishes and nurtures her thoughts of revenge, to the exception of all else" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 90). This change in Amba, from a shattered individual to one driven by vengeance, not only highlights the injustices inflicted upon her but also explores the underlying psychology of that cruelty. Narrative justice, in this context, highlights the ethical intricacies of the characters' choices and their repercussions. Devavrata's commitment to his vow of *brahmacharya* is portrayed not as a noble deed but as a rejection of Amba's humanity. His decision to neither marry her nor offer her sanctuary turns his "Kshatriya honour" into a moral failing. This narrative perspective enables readers to grasp that while Devavrata's actions may appear morally acceptable in societal terms, they raise ethical concerns due to the trauma they inflict on Amba. This complexity allows readers to connect with Amba's suffering, even as her subsequent actions lean towards revenge.

The development of narrative sensibility in Amba's story highlights how stories can express phenomenological ethical knowledge (McGregor, 2018, p. 103) essentially, the understanding of emotional and ethical states through the characters' experiences. Amba's struggle is not just a personal tragedy, it also serves as a broader commentary on the moral decay within the oppressive system surrounding her. As she pursues revenge, the narrative does not support her quest for vengeance but instead illustrates how her emotional pain skews her sense of justice. Her demand for Bheeshma's head "give me Bheeshma the Terrible's head in my lap and I will be free" (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 91) symbolizes the peak of her suffering and her conviction that justice can only be attained through violence, a tragic outcome of the systemic cruelty she endures.

The narrative sensibility that shapes Amba's story can also be seen as a means for ethical reflection. By showcasing her suffering and her response to injustice, the narrative compels the reader to face the ethical consequences of actions and the emotional costs of those decisions. Through Amba's journey, the reader is not only a witness to the vicious side of the narrative but is also challenged to grapple with its ethical implications. In this

way, narrative justice serves as a means of linking the narrative's ethical value with the inhumanity portrayed, providing an explanation of the responsibility for this inhumanity while fostering a greater understanding of its psychological underpinnings. Ultimately, Amba's defiance, her transformation into a symbol of rage, and her pursuit of revenge underscore the destructive impact of unresolved injustice. The story neither excuses the characters who harmed her nor fully condemns her reaction. It compels readers to contemplate the intricacies of justice and the emotional chaos that can emerge when justice is denied. By cultivating narrative sensibility, readers can have a deeper understanding of the ethical and psychological dimensions of Amba's tragic plight, while recognizing the potential of narrative justice to reveal the consequences of inhumanity.

5.3. Gandhari: Blindfolding and protest

The text highlights Gauri's (Gandhari) betrayal as a significant injustice. Misled by the envoys of Hastinapur regarding Dhritarashtra's blindness, Gauri and her family find themselves caught in a political scheme devised by Bhishma and Satyawati. The line, "They just want me to be a slave, Lata. They want me to be Dhritarashtra's guide and servant. They were not looking for a woman for him to marry, just a pair of eyes. That is all I am to them and all I ever will be," (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 114) expresses her pain in being reduced to bare instrument that drift outside of her self-will and dignity. This reflects a systemic injustice rooted in patriarchy and political manipulation. The themes of narrative justice and defiance are illustrated through Gandhari's symbolic actions and expressions. In this context, narrative justice pertains to Gandhari's deliberate decision to assert control over her own life by confronting the societal expectations imposed upon her. Her choice to blindfold herself serves as an act of defiance, representing her rejection of being diminished to a mere object or "commodity" within her marriage.

By stating, "I will not be his eyes, or his guide, or whatever commodity they have decided I must be. They will not be able to hold my sight against me," (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 115) Gandhari asserts her autonomy, rejecting the idea that her abilities, particularly her vision, can be used as leverage or justification for subjugation which in turn aligning with the aspect of narrative justice, which posits that stories have the power to "instigate and sustain the reduction of and desistance from ideologically motivated harmful action" (McGregor, 2018, p.22). She turns the symbolic tables by using the blindfold as both a literal and metaphorical shield against exploitation, thereby creating her justice within the narrative. Gandhari's actions and expressions serve as a manifestation of her defiance against oppressive systems, allowing her to reclaim her

dignity and assert that her story is shaped by her own decisions rather than imposed by external forces. These statements emphasize her resilience and evolution, positioning her as an active agent in determining her destiny instead of a mere victim.

5.4. Draupadi's Defiance and Quest for Retribution

The incident of Draupadi's humiliation in the Kauravas court captures the depth of gendered violence and injustice inherent in patriarchal traditions. Following Yudhishtir's loss of Draupadi in a dice game, where he stakes his brothers and himself, Draupadi's outrage emphasizes her understanding of dharma, as she questions, "Did you lose yourself first, or me?" (Mukhoty, 2021, p.216) This inquiry unsettles the assembly, highlighting the moral contradictions within their adherence to tradition. Despite her reasoning, she is met with ridicule and dehumanization, labelled a "whore" by Karna, who justifies her humiliation due to her polyandrous marriage. Karna's harsh words, "She is a whore, I say, and she has no claims to modesty at all," (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 217) exemplify the deeply ingrained misogyny in the male-dominated court.

The cultivation of narrative sensibility allows readers to engage with such episodes at a deeper ethical level, emphasizing the phenomenological knowledge conveyed through Draupadi's story. Her defiance grows as she declares, "I am Draupadi, daughter of a raja and sister of a Yuvraj, wife to five warriors, and rani of Indraprastha." (Mukhoty, 2021, p. 218). This assertion of identity challenges the ethical boundaries of the assembly and invites reflection on the complicity of those who failed to act. Her fierce vow, "My hair, which has been sullied by this beast, shall remain as it is now, untied and unwashed, till the day I can wash it in his blood," (Mukhoty, 2021, p.218) transforms her humiliation into a narrative of resilience and agency. Mukhoty in her book titled *Heroines: Powerful Women from Indian Myth and History* (2017) says "She wrests from fate and from an intimidating array of men her right to be restored as the dharma queen. Her heroism is her fearlessness in demanding justice even though this means challenging the status quo and, more pertinently, challenging every male figure in her life; her husbands, her father-in-law and king, and her gurus" (p.12).

As highlighted by the concept of narrative justice, "If narrative justice provides a convincing explanation of inhumanity or a convincing series of explanations then it has the potential to reduce criminal inhumanity" (McGregor, 2018, p. 105). Mukhoty, through her reimagining of Draupadi and other women in the epic, reveals how their actions, though at times ethically

complex, reflect the deep-seated societal and patriarchal pressures that force them into specific roles.

6. CONCLUSION

Literature fundamentally revolves around the exploration of ideas and their profound impact on human existence, shaping thoughts and guiding actions. The notion of narrative justice in literature emphasizes that storytelling not only mirrors societal values but also possesses the capacity to question and alter them. Narrative justice has the potential to enhance the responsiveness of readers while avoiding the encouragement of unethical reactions. By offering a detailed depiction of Satyawati, Gandhari, Amba and Draupadi, Mukhoty prompts readers to contemplate the intricate relationships among power, survival, and justice. The narrative justice concept refrains from demanding a clear-cut judgment instead showcasing the moral challenges encountered by the characters, thereby inviting readers to engage in a more profound examination of justice, the ramifications of personal choices, and the wider social frameworks that shape individual behaviour.

In *Song of Draupadi*, narrative justice functions as a means to comprehend the depths of injustice, violence and inhumanity while also serving as a catalyst for ethical contemplation. By highlighting the moral and psychological intricacies of characters Mukhoty's narrative illustrates how storytelling, through its composition and depiction of human conflicts, can foster an appreciation of justice and mitigate inhumanity by encouraging readers to confront the complex dimensions of human experience.

According to Alicia Ostriker in her work *The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and the Revisionist Mythmaking* (1982) "Whenever a writer employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by culture, the writer is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual writer but ultimately making cultural change possible" (p. 73). Thus, *Song of Draupadi* by Ira Mukhoty reinterprets the classic narrative of the *Mahabharata* by centering the attention on female characters, granting them agency, voice, and the power to determine their own fates. Viewed through the prism of narrative justice, the novel illustrates how concepts such as justice, defiance, and retribution can challenge oppressive power dynamics and pave the way for empowerment. By depicting the women's pursuit of justice and their resistance against gender-based violence, Mukhoty's narrative underscores the transformative ability of literature to not only

highlight societal injustices but also to act as a catalyst for envisioning and advocating for change. This act of storytelling serves as a vehicle for reinterpreting history and fostering a more equitable future.

7. Recommendations and Limitations of the Study

This study suggests diving deeper into the often-overlooked women characters in Indian mythology, using the frameworks of narrative justice and feminist literary criticism. Future research could broaden the scope to include other mythological retellings by contemporary authors like Kavita Kane or Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, examining how various writers reinterpret female voices and agency. Incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives such as trauma theory, postcolonial feminism, or cognitive poetics could also enhance our understanding of the emotional and ethical aspects of these narratives. It's important for educators and literary scholars to include these feminist retellings in their academic syllabi to encourage critical thinking about gender, power, and cultural memory.

A key limitation of this study is it concentrates solely on the novel *Song of Draupadi*, which might not encompass the full array of feminist reinterpretations within Indian mythology. Conducting a comparative analysis with traditional narratives or popular adaptations could offer a richer perspective, showcasing the transformative power of feminist retellings.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express their gratitude to the editors and editorial staff of JHSSR for their assistance during publication period.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. This article is the sole work of the author and has not been presented or published elsewhere.

References

- Amin, A. (2020, August 31). *Why We Need a Feminist Retelling of Hindu Mythology • The Ladies Compartment*. The Ladies Compartment. <https://theladiescompartment.co/why-we-need-a-feminist-retelling-of-hindu-mythology/>
- Beena G. (2019). *VISION and RE-VISION: Revisiting Mythologies, Rethinking Women*. Notion Press. <https://scroll.in/article/828515/indian-mythology-is-a-new-medium-of-choice-for-feminist-narratives-and-its-working>
- McGregor, R. (2018). *Narrative justice*. Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.
- Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan.
- Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
- Mukhoty, I. (2017). *Heroines: Powerful Indian Women of Myth & History*. Rupa Publications.
- Mukhoty, I. (2021). *Song of Draupadi: A Novel*. Aleph Book Company.
- Ostriker, A. (1982). The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8(1), 68–90. https://www.academia.edu/70039716/The_Thieves_of_Language_Women_Poets_and_Revisionist_Mythmaking
- Rajan, R. S. (1993). *Real and imagined women: Gender, culture and postcolonialism*. Routledge.
- Singh, V. (2017). Reclaiming Female Identity: Feminist Retellings of the Hindu Epics. In *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*. <https://www.the-criterion.com/V8/n2/IN46.pdf>
- Urmi Chanda-Vaz. (2017, February 5). *Indian mythology is a new medium of choice for feminist narratives (and it's working)*. Scroll.in; Scroll.in. <https://scroll.in/article/828515/indian-mythology-is-a-new-medium-of-choice-for-feminist-narratives-and-its-working>

Biographical Statement of Author(s)

S. Thendral is a doctoral candidate in English Literature at Loyola College, Chennai, India. She holds a Master's degree in English from the same institution. Her current research examines feminist retellings of mythology in Indian literature, with a particular focus on the representation and agency of female figures in epic narratives. Her broader academic interests encompass gender justice, narrative theory, and the reconfiguration of women's roles in canonical texts.

Her engagement with the subject of this article is informed by a sustained critical interest in literature as a medium for justice, collective memory, and the reimagining of historical narratives.

Ms. S. Thendral

Department of English
Loyola College
Chennai, India

E-mail: thendralsuresh1999@gmail.com



Dr. I. Felicita Mary Praba

is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Loyola College, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. She is a recognized research supervisor for doctoral scholars affiliated with the University of Madras. Dr. Praba has actively organized academic conferences and has served as the Convenor for both national and international seminars. She has edited academic volumes and journal issues, and has published numerous research articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals. In addition, she has presented papers at various national and international conferences.

Her research interests include Diasporic Writings, Postcolonial Literature, Refugee Narratives, Subaltern Studies, and American Literature.

Dr. I. Felicita Mary Praba

Assistant Professor
Department of English
Loyola College
Chennai, India

Email: felicitamary@loyolacollege.edu

