



# Drōpadī: From Sanskrit Epic to Modern Oḍiā Fiction

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**Abstract**— In the chronicles of Indian culture and literature, Drōpadī transcends her status as a mere mythical figure; she stands as a formidable emblem of women's empowerment and unyielding social defiance. This research treatise delivers a penetrating comparative dissection of the psychological metamorphosis in Drōpadī's character, commencing from Sage Byāsa's primordial Mahābhārata, traversing Śūdrāmuni Sāraḷā Dās's 'Sāraḷā Mahābhārata', and culminating in Pratibhā Rāy's 'Yājñasenī'. Where Byāsa's Drōpadī emerges as an indomitable 'Agnismhabā' (fire-born) warrior who brazenly confronts patriarchal dominion, Sāraḷā Dās weaves her essence into the earthy fabric of Odisha's soil, rustic existence, and profound human sensitivities, bestowing a starkly realistic incarnation. In contemporary times, Dr. Pratibhā Rāy, through her novel 'Yājñasenī', elevates Drōpadī to an autonomous sovereign self, wielding a feminist lens to haul society's entrenched patriarchal ethos into the merciless tribunal of critique. Across epochs, Oḍiā literature has masterfully channelled Drōpadī's archetype to etch the intricate tapestry of women's existential warfare, their awakened claim to sovereignty, and the raw contours of societal realities with exquisite subtlety.



**Keywords**— Byāsa Mahābhārata, Sāraḷā Mahābhārata, Pratibhā Rāy Yājñasenī, Drōpadī, Female Characters, Oḍiā Culture, Patriarchal, Evolution

## Introduction

In the venerable lineage of Indian epic traditions, female archetypes transcend mere foundations of captivating narratives; they serve as unerring mirrors reflecting the contemporaneous society's ethical doctrines, moral imperatives, philosophical underpinnings, and intricate social architectures. Sītā from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Drōpadī from the *Mahābhārata* embody two diametrically opposed pinnacles of Indian feminine ethos, as posited by scholars [6]. Where Sītā epitomises boundless forbearance, selfless devotion, and the paragon of societal virtues, Drōpadī ignites as an unparalleled, incendiary paragon of defiance, unquenchable entitlement, indomitable self-esteem, and radical social insurrection [7]. Particularly within the realm of Oḍiā literature, the maturation and metamorphosis of Drōpadī's persona have charted an extraordinarily distinctive and enthralling trajectory. Ascending beyond her archaic divine incarnation, she progressively emerges as a profoundly human, relatable

figure ravaged by visceral psychological turmoil, thereby immeasurably enriching the tapestry of Oḍiā literary heritage. This transmutation is far from a superficial literary shift; rather, it furnishes irrefutable testimony to the seismic revolutions in women's stature, dignity, and prerogatives within Odisha's socio-cultural paradigm [3,7].

## Drapadi: Indian Culture and the Mahabharata Background:

In the tapestry of Indian culture and the *Mahābhārata*'s epic backdrop, Drōpadī emerges not as a peripheral figure but as the pivotal incendiary force igniting the saga's cataclysmic events. The *Mahābhārata* transcends a mere chronicle of dynastic skirmishes; it unfolds as an unparalleled philosophical compendium delving into the profound abysses of human *dharma*, *karma*, ethics, iniquity, and psyche. Amid this colossal canvas, Drōpadī stands as the paramount catalyst and nexus of the narrative's tumultuous upheavals. Born from the sacrificial altar of Pāñcāḷa's King Dr̥pada, erupting like a blazing inferno,

*Yājñasenī*'s extraordinary genesis harbours a deliberate destiny: to embody the clarion call of vengeance and radical upheaval [8,9]. Thus, in a rigidly conservative patriarchal realm, her advent manifests as a divine, autonomous, and insurgent power, as opined by erudite scholars [7, 9, 21].

In Byāsa's *Mahābhārata*, Drōpadī's multifaceted nomenclature unveils the kaleidoscopic depths of her persona. As the progeny of King Drupada, she is christened 'Drōpadī'; emerging from the hallowed sacrificial pyre, she earns the epithet '*Yājñasenī*'; her mesmerising dusky allure evokes the affectionate moniker 'Kṛṣṇa'; as Pāñcālī's princess, she is hailed as 'Pāñcālī'; and during exile, she cloaks herself as Queen Bīrāta's handmaiden 'Sairandhrī' [8, 9, 18]. Her bond with Lord Kṛṣṇa resonates with profound sanctity and intimacy; she revered him as her sole devotee and cherished confidante, '*Sakhī*' [21].

Within the *Mahābhārata*'s grand opus, Drōpadī's stature is labyrinthine and contentious. Wedded to the five Pandavas, she embraced with unwavering fidelity a practice deemed intricate and socially anathema by contemporaneous norms [8, 10]. During the infamous dice game in the *Kuru* court, when wagered as mere chattel or spoils, she refused passive silence unlike ordinary women; instead, she interrogated the King assembly's (Rāja Darabāra) venerable elders and sages with piercing legal and moral quandaries [1,7]. Could Yudhishtira stake her after forfeiting himself? This query endures as a cornerstone in feminist jurisprudential discourse even today [1]. Far from a mere victim or frail damsel, she can be hailed as the inaugural feminine vanguard in Indian culture who thundered against patriarchal tyranny [8,9].

Byāsa portrays her not as a fragile ingenue but as a living emblem of audacity, *dharma*, and justice. His Drōpadī is unyielding, retribution-driven, and a stern mentor who relentlessly spurs her husbands toward righteous duty [7,21]. In anonymity at Bīrāta's court, when the mighty kicaka cast his predatory gaze upon her, she neither wept nor begged for succour. Boldly confronting King *Bīrāta* and *Dharmarāja* Yudhishtira, she demanded royal jurisprudence, legal entitlements, and ethical rectitude [19, 20]. This intrepidity attests that in no circumstance did she compromise her self-respect; rather, she wielded a resolute voice against injustice.

Indian culture and mythological lore enshrine her among the '*Pañcakanyā*' (Ahalyā, Drōpadī, Kuntī, Tārā, Mandodari), whose mere invocation purportedly absolves humanity's sins in devout belief [7, 8]. Beyond this, as Indraprastha's empress, she was no ornamental consort adorning the throne; she was profoundly erudite, masterfully stewarding the royal exchequer and economy with triumphant acumen [1, 19]. This underscores her exalted administrative

proWess, political sagacity, and societal eminence [9]. Byāsa's Drōpadī radiates as a luminous paragon of self-dignity and valour, unflinching in confronting any adversary for justice, with every stride governed by *dharma* and obligation [7, 10].

### Oḍiā Soil's Drōpadī: Humanity and Social Revolt

In the fifteenth century, the primordial bard *Śūdrāmuni* Sāraḷā Dās forged a colossal *Mahābhārata* in the Oḍiā tongue, not as a slavish facsimile of Byāsa's Sanskrit opus, but as an audacious, inventive reimagining that mirrored the pulsating essence of Odisha's folk existence [3]. Infusing his poetic vision with the vibrant alchemy of local lore, he conjured narratives that resonated profoundly with Oḍiā hearts [22, 38]. The chasms between Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* and *Sāraḷā*'s rendition transcend mere plot alterations; they herald a seismic philosophical upheaval. To dissect Drōpadī's archetype, Sāraḷā Dās birthed innovative, unprecedented sub-narratives absent from the primal Sanskrit epic [3,6,37]. He liberated her from Byāsa's ethereal divine veneer, anchoring her to Odisha's soil, waters, and winds, sculpting her as a corporeal, fallible paragon of the quintessential Oḍiā woman [22, 26].

Foremost among these is the pivotal and contentious "*Satya Āmba*" *Upākhyāna* (Saga/episode) [3]. This saga, amid societal obsessions with feminine corporeal and psychic purity—or the so-called "*satī*"—unveils Drōpadī's brazen confession of allure toward another man (Karnṇa or Arjjuna's favouritism) despite her five exalted spouses, etching a stark, audacious portrait of a woman's repressed psyche [3, 36]. In *Sāraḷā*'s ethos, no mortal—however exalted—escapes imperfection. Drōpadī's unflinching public avowal of her human frailties, while adhering to societal edicts, attests to her boundless fidelity to truth and indomitable mental fortitude. Thus, Sāraḷā Dās exposes the subterranean conflicts of the feminine subconscious, obliquely unmasking the era's hypocritical sanctity and bestowing upon Drōpadī an authentic human dignity [3,37]. Through this, he proclaims that deliverance from peril stems not from divine grace or godly intervention but from humanity's own righteous karma [25, 35].

The personas Sāraḷā Dās evokes in his epic cease to be aloof denizens of distant *Indraprastha* or *Hastināpura*'s royal enclaves; instead, they manifest as familiar folk from fifteenth-century Odisha's rustic milieu. He delineates Drōpadī as an adept homemaker and virtuoso in culinary arts, embodying the unadorned Oḍiā bride [23, 37]. Across the epic's cantos, her gastronomic feats brim with Odisha's ancestral delicacies—diverse greens, fermented rice, *pithā* (rice cake) confections, and ambrosial sweets—in lavish enumeration [3,36]. Her attire and adornments echo the sartorial splendour of contemporaneous Oḍiā elite women

[22, 38]. Beyond this, familial discord, mother-in-law-daughter-in-law dynamics, and brother-in-law-sister-in-law intricacies are rendered with vivid, unflinching realism. The Kuntī-Drōpadī bond deviates from Byāsa's sanctified ideal; it seethes with domestic jealousies, suspicions, and power skirmishes emblematic of quotidian household strife [27, 36]. By endowing Drōpadī with an ordinary Oḍiā woman's psyche through her quarrels with co-wives Hiḍimbikā and Subhadrā, Sāraḷā Dās dethrones her from remote goddesshood, rendering her intimately accessible to the common reader.

Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī transcends victimhood; she embodies stark realism and unbridled valour. Within her simmer human vulnerabilities alongside inexhaustible potency and defiant resonance. Post-disrobing, she spurns helpless lamentation; her fury erupts so cataclysmically that her gaze ignites a conflagration in *Hastināpura's* inner sanctums. Duryodhana's consort Bhānumatī and other *Kauraba* women, terror-stricken, flee, imploring her mercy and forgiveness, only then quenching her wrath and extinguishing the devouring flames [25, 35, 37]. This spectacle magnificently unveils Drōpadī's intrinsic '*narī śakti*' (feminine puissance), catapulting her beyond patriarchal frailty into a formidable, radiant sovereign capable of exacting personal vengeance against indignity [2, 13, 34].

### Drōpadī: Medieval and Modern Perspectives

In the mediaeval tapestry of Oḍiā literature, particularly during the *Pañcasakhā* epoch, Drōpadī's archetype was imbued with fervent devotion and profound philosophical ethos. In Jagannath Das's *Bhāgabata* and the *Mahābhārata* ascribed to his legacy, Drōpadī emerges as an unparalleled devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This era exalted the '*bastra haraṇa*' saga above all, where Drōpadī's abject surrender and Kṛṣṇa's miraculous preservation of her dignity were exalted by *bhakti* poets as the supreme paradigm of mortal-divine communion [43,44]. In the eighteenth century, Kṛṣṇa Singh's *Mahābhārata* endeavoured to transpose Byāsa's Sanskrit archetype into Oḍiā, jettisoning facets of *Sāraḷā's* innovations to some extent. Nonetheless, Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī had burrowed so indelibly into the Oḍiā collective consciousness that virtually all subsequent bards were inexorably swayed by his vivid portrayal [36].

Post-Sāraḷā Dās, luminaries penned epochal works: Chintāmaṇi Mahānti's '*Saptasati*' (1928), Banśīdhar kar's '*Drōpadī Bastraharaṇa*' (1924), and Paṭhāni Sāmantarāy's '*Drōpadī Swayamvara*' as poetic epics; Prasānta Mīśra's '*Nispeṣitā* Drōpadī' (1990) and Jyotsnā Rautṛāy's '*Drōpadī*' (1993) as searing short stories; and Pratibhā Rāy's '*Yājñāsenī*' (1985) alongside Surendranāth

Śatpathi's '*Kṛṣṇā*' (2004) as revolutionary novels. While the poetic successors cleaved to Byāsa and *Sāraḷā's* precedents, the dual narratives harnessed Drōpadī as an allegorical archetype mirroring the contemporaneous plight of women. Beyond this, the twin novels etch visceral portraits of feminine psyche, unyielding advocacy for women's sovereignty, and thunderous indictments against patriarchal hegemony [15,16,40,41,42].

### Yājñāsenī's Drōpadī in Oḍiā Fiction:

In the vanguard of modern Oḍiā literature, the audacious recasting of mythological archetypes has surged as a dominant literary torrent, particularly interrogating women's societal stature, human entitlements, and psychological sovereignty through a radical feminist prism on *Mahābhārata's* sagas. Within this crucible, *Jñānpīṭha* laureate Dr. Pratibhā Rāy's monumental opus '*Yājñāsenī*' (first unleashed in 1984) stands as a cataclysmic novel [4, 7, 17]. The archaic Drōpadī, hitherto a mere fragment in the patriarchal epic's mosaic, is here exalted into a wholly autonomous, profoundly introspective paragon of modernity—fiercely vigilant over her corporeal and psychic dominions. This narrative unleashes a thoroughly "gynocentric" *Mahābhārata*, transmogrifying history from 'His-story' into an indomitable 'Her-story' [4, 5, 14].

'*Yājñāsenī*' thunders as a feminist foundational epic, as decreed by legions of eminent critics [4, 5]. Herein, Drōpadī's psychic insurrection, volcanic rage, and searing inner torment erupt with crystalline ferocity. Kuntī's inadvertent edict—"Whatever you've brought, divide among the five brothers"—may stem from unwitting folly, yet its brutal toll is borne solely by Drōpadī. The excruciating physical and mental torment of embracing five husbands against her sovereign will, coupled with her treatment as mere chattel or estate (movable or immovable property), ignites a blistering revolt permeating every sinew of the novel [4, 6].

Pratibhā Rāy's Drōpadī shatters the primordial patriarchal mythos that "*the husband is the wife's supreme deity*" into utter oblivion [4, 5]. Those spouses who faltered in shielding her honour amid peril, abandoning her to public desecration, forfeit any claim to divine veneration—a verdict she proclaims with unassailable conviction [4,6,31]. The novel enshrines women's unalienable sovereignty over their bodies and societal parity as its cardinal creed, echoing the bedrock of contemporary feminism. In the harrowing denouement, as the *Paṇḍabas* forsake her in a glacial shroud on the snow-veiled peaks, marching toward celestial ascension in solitary abandon, she awakens to the inexorable truth: no quantum of feminine sacrifice or immolation can compel a male-centric cosmos to bestow

genuine esteem or worth; ultimately, woman is condemned to perish in isolation [4, 5, 30].

### The Metamorphosis of Traditional Drōpadī into Modernity:

In the orthodox epic, Drōpadī languishes as a commodified artefact or utilitarian object, but in '*Yājñasenī*', she ascends as an emancipated "entity" or autonomous agent (subject) [31, 32]. Dr. Pratibhā Rāy refrains from confining her to a relic queen of antiquity; instead, she anoints Drōpadī as the eternal emblem of womankind's dignity and torment [5]. Where the conventional Drōpadī seethes as a bloodthirsty avenger, clamouring for carnage, '*Yājñasenī*'s incarnation radiates as a pacifist herald of humanistic ethos [5, 6, 9]. The novel laments the *Mahābhārata*'s sanguinary deluge, genocidal fury, and apocalyptic ruin with profound anguish, culminating in her terminal invocation—"Om Śānti: Śānti: Śānti"—a fervent plea for the soul's serenity and universal peace [5, 32]. The authoress frames this vista within an expansive humanistic expanse, asserting that while women

and men may diverge in nature and physique, they stand in absolute equity regarding social and human prerogatives [4,6].

Through '*Yājñasenī*', Drōpadī erupts from the rigid carapace of ancient scriptural lore, resplendent in an immortal feminist luminescence. Her odyssey resonates with the ceaseless battles of every exploited and suppressed woman in our epoch, igniting an inferno of self-assurance to empower her kin.

### Social, Psychological, and Literary Comparison:

In the triad of monumental texts—Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* (archaic Sanskrit), *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata* (mediaeval Oḍiā), and Pratibhā Rāy's '*Yājñasenī*' (contemporary Oḍiā)—a colossal and epoch-shattering metamorphosis is discernible in Drōpadī's societal and psychological stature [6, 7, 19, 25, 36]. The ensuing tableau delineates a comparative panorama of Drōpadī across these immortal creations, furnishing a crystalline denouement to the inquiry:

Comparative Attributes	Drōpadī in Byāsa's <i>Mahābhārata</i>	Drōpadī in <i>Sāraḷā Mahābhārata</i>	Drōpadī in ' <i>Yājñasenī</i> ' (Pratibhā Rāy)
Core Essence and Purpose	Divine, fire-born annihilator of <i>Kṣatrīyas</i> , and indomitable sentinel of dharma.	Quintessential Oḍiā rustic bride, grounded in realism, entwined with human endeavors.	Profoundly contemplative modern woman, emblem of feminist awakening and unyielding equity.
True Savior in the Disrobing Ordeal	Dharma or Lord Kṛṣṇa (intervention of supernatural, celestial potency).	Lord Surya (rooted in past virtuous deeds or karmic fruition doctrine).	Her own psychic resilience and internalized defiance against societal tyranny.
Depiction of Psyche	Idealistic, duty-bound, and relentlessly vengeful.	Laden with human frailties and veiled carnal desires (" <i>Satya Āmba</i> " episode).	Ravaged by profound inner turmoil, anguish, and scathing indictments of patriarchal dominion.
Stance on Polyandry	Embraced as the inexorable decree of predestined fate from prior incarnations.	Accepted as societal exigency, yet unquelled allure toward another man remains unsuppressed.	Widely condemned as a patriarchal burden and a manifestation of ultimate injustice against womanhood.
Narrative Style and Authorship	Third-person chronicle, male-centric epic fragment (Byāsa).	Third-person saga ( <i>Sāraḷā Dās</i> ), fused with Oḍiā folklore synergies.	First-person memoir (epistolary or autobiographical vein), wholly gynocentric exposition.

### Byāsa *Mahābhārata* vs. *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*:

Byāsa's Drōpadī embodies the archetype of an 'ideal queen' and a dynamic conduit for divine orchestration. Every deed she undertakes is underpinned by the imperatives of *dharma* and ethical mandates. Yet, in *Sāraḷā Dās*'s opus, we diverge from this superhuman sanctity of *dharma*, venturing into the raw terrain of commonplace societal dynamics and authentic human instincts [24, 25, 37]. For instance, in *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*'s '*Darpadaḷana*' *Upākhyāna* (Saga,

episode) or the '*Satya Āmba*' saga, a profound psychoanalytic verity is laid bare: that a woman's psychic inclinations and carnal allurements cannot perpetually be shackled or subdued [3,36].

In the disrobing debacle, where Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* exalts divine benevolence as paramount, *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata* cogently champions the supremacy of one's karmic repercussions [25]. The bestowal of garments by Lord Surya was no capricious miracle or sorcery; rather, it

constituted the inexorable repayment of a karmic debt from antecedent lifetimes [25]. Through this, Sāraḷā Dās illuminates how Odisha's rustic ethos of karmic determinism can eclipse even the omnipotent divine prowess. In this essence, Sāraḷā's rendition surges as more democratic and intimately attuned to the proletariat than Byāsa's magisterial narrative [37, 38].

### Sāraḷā Mahābhārata vs. Pratibhā Rāy's 'Yājñasenī':

Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī is forged in the crucible of fifteenth-century Odisha's mediaeval societal panorama, while Pratibhā Rāy's incarnation radiates with the full blaze of late twentieth and twenty-first-century modernist feminist ethos [4, 38]. Where Sāraḷā's Drōpadī ostensibly conforms to societal edicts, carving out her niche of dignity and esteem within their confines, Pratibhā Rāy's *Yājñasenī* unleashes a frontal assault on those very mandates and archetypes. Sāraḷā's woman embodies stark realism sans outright insurgency, but Pratibhā Rāy's paragon fuses unyielding realism with ferocious rebellion [28, 38].

In '*Yājñasenī*', Drōpadī traverses abyssal psychological tempests (such as perceiving polyandry as corporeal and psychic torment, harbouring profound distrust toward her spouses, and grappling with labyrinthine emotions for her confidant)—a depth of introspective dissection utterly unattainable within Sāraḷā's literary ambit. '*Yājñasenī*'s' Drōpadī seizes the quill herself (emerging as the sovereign narrator), demolishing the patriarchal monopoly of godlike male chroniclers like Byāsa or Sāraḷā, scripting her saga in her own indomitable voice [5, 12, 28]. In male-authored epics, she languished as a mere persona; through a female scribe's lens, she ascends as the architect of an entire tome—a thunderous testament to women's empowerment in contemporary literature [4,6].

### The Metamorphosis of Drōpadī's Essence Across Oḍiā Literary Epochs:

Across the annals of Oḍiā literature's epochs, Drōpadī's archetype undergoes a relentless, revolutionary evolution. In the fifteenth-century *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*, she descends from a divine pedestal to embody an unpretentious Oḍiā homemaker, immersed in culinary rites and familial skirmishes [3,12,33]—a folklorisation that democratises mythic grandeur. In subsequent eras, the eighteenth-century *Ritī* period's literary vogue—reducing women to mere voluptuous artefacts or corporeal icons (though Drōpadī wasn't central)—was shattered by nineteenth- and twentieth-century luminaries who invoked her defiant spirit anew [33, 37].

In modernity, from Sāraḷā Debī and Kuntaḷā Kumāri to Pratibhā Rāy, Yaśodharā Miśra, and Sarojini Sāhu, feminist scribes wielded Drōpadī as a formidable bulwark against patriarchal tyranny [6, 11]. Pratibhā Rāy's *Yājñasenī* crowns

this lineage, infusing Drōpadī with philosophical profundity and humanistic fervour. Thus, from mute goddess to visceral human, and from human to feminist colossus, Drōpadī's odyssey immeasurably enriches Oḍiā literary heritage [28, 29].

## CONCLUSION

In holistic scrutiny, it crystallises that Drōpadī's persona has served as a paramount catalyst in Oḍiā literature's metamorphosis. Whenever societal scourges like female oppression, commodification, and human rights erosion ignite controversy, scribes have harnessed her titanic archetype. Byāsa's primal Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* laid the bedrock for a religio-political saga; Sāraḷā Dās fused it with Oḍiā's vernacular pulse, birthing a vibrant cultural renaissance. Through Drōpadī's humanised visage, Sāraḷā Dās and Pratibhā Rāy attest that literature transcends arid ideals—it unflinchingly mirrors unvarnished human frailties and grim societal verities, compelling readers to visceral self-reckoning.

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