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Power Narratives In The Selected Work Of Koral Das Gupta

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Abstract: Koral Das Gupta is a contemporary writer, mentor in English language. Her rise as a writer is primarily marked by Sati Series along with her other eclectic writings. Her works include *Power of a common man* (2014), *Fall Winter Collections* (2015), *Rasia- The Dance of Desire* (2017), *Summer Holidays* (2019), *Sati Series- Ahalya* (2020), *Kunti* (2021), *Draupadi* (2022), *Mandodari* (2023) and *Tara* (2024). Her books are discussed from the context of gender studies, art, myth and ecocritical literature. Other than India, Koral's books are shelved in the libraries of University of Harvard, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, University of Wales, Duke University, University of North Carolina, TAMU, and others. She is recognised in the list of Innovator25 Asia Pacific 2019 prepared by The Holmes Report, a New York based PR news agency and has been listed under the Women of Wonder (WOW) series in Outlook Business (September 2019). The present research paper focusses on women protagonists from Ramayana and Mahabharata namely, Ahalya and Draupadi. This paper tries to deconstructs the character of Ahalya and Draupadi with the perspective of the voiceless and underrepresented women in modern re-readings and retellings of epics. Ahalya and Draupadi are “Panch Kanya” from Ramayana and Mahabharata. Ahalya is wife of Sage Gautama who was cursed by her husband for indulging in bodily desire and Draupadi is wife of five Pandavas. Both the women holds a special niche in Indian Mythology as both were not conceived by human but rather creations of God Almighty.

Index Terms - Power Narrative, Meta-power, Indian Mythology, Feminist Perspective, Ahalya, Draupadi

Koral Dasgupta is one of the most powerful voices in Indian literature ever. This unique and significant creative personality is she who can reclaim female narratives from history and myth, inquire into the most intimate power politics, and merge myth with current issues. That her work makes Dasgupta's writing clear is a result of her thorough examination of the literary complexity, feminist overtones, and ethnic diversity that typify Dasgupta's writing. She never shies away from asking questions about social conventions, upsetting narratives, or introducing uncharted waters with the intention of providing the readers with new angles on the world. She undertakes to investigate power, gender, and identity in India at a time in India's history when such investigation is a defiant act, but her work, while deeply rooted in the rich, often discordant cultural heritage of her country, addresses audiences who are both curious and concerned about the writing of such works in the current context.

Koral Dasgupta combines mythology with the intricacies of modern life. In her Sati Series- *Sati*, *Ahalya* and *Draupadi*, *Tara* and *Mandodari*— Das Gupta retells the tales of great legendary women, presenting readers with a fresh perception of their objectives, difficulties and daily lives. Namita Gokhale points out that these retellings are powerful reimagining, not retellings of old tales, which resonate with readers today instead of yesterday. The pregnancies they expected come around, too, instead of Dasgupta depicting these mythological women as helpless objects forced to conform to patriarchal standards or heavenly standards. Taking this technique, Gokhale claims, takes her writing to resistance literature where women reject to take the stories, identities of the past, but instead take control of their own stories, identities and fates.

Gokhale has been particularly pleased with Dasgupta's ability to bring these mythological figures to life while still being the kind of grandeur to their original stories. For instance, Ahalya's protagonist takes its own journey through incredible strength and vulnerability, mixing divine effect and human feelings. Ahalya, who is most profoundly known for being cursed and then rescued by Lord Rama, is presented as a woman who must contend with complicated feelings, want and choices in order to regather her agency in a surfeit of kings and gods commends Dasgupta for having the guts to question conventional wisdom about these myths and offer readers a more nuanced view aligned more in keeping with contemporary feminist views (Mondal et al., 9).

Power entails the ability to control or influence the behaviour, actions, or thoughts of others. Regarding understanding the concept of power, French and Raven (19) divided it into different bases that include legitimate, reward, expert, referent, and coercive. In his view, Michel Foucault viewed power as dispersed and multifaceted but pervasive and shows itself in everyday life interactions with knowledge. This view was generalized by Lukes (5), who argued that power shapes people's choices unconsciously and operates at the levels of unseen, hidden, and invisible. Thus, power truly matters in social life and government and is both structural and relational.

A power narrative is an investigation into how power dynamics and structures influence social interactions, identities, and systems. It looks at how authority, control, and influence over others are an aspect of power and how they affect individual and group experiences. According to influential intellectuals, power permeates society, and shapes it through institutional structures, social norms, and knowledge (Foucault, 19). From family and interpersonal relationships to political and economic systems, power narratives can throw open both apparent and subtle mechanisms of control. As evident in the works of Toni Morrison and George Orwell, among others, power narratives within literary texts often represent issues of domination, resistance, and agency. Power narratives can be quite beneficial for one to understand what undergirds inequality and the potential of resistance within frames full of power, as it opens perspectives about societal hierarchies (Gramsci, 71).

Power is that diffused, soft energy which has implications both at the human and divine levels and finds most of its expression in Indian mythology. Power is not only physical might but also be combined with wisdom, protection as well as balance in the cosmos while appearing in characters like Shiva, Vishnu, and Durga whereas Vishnu's preservation of the law or ethical order attends to a strengthening force, destruction through action in Shiva embodies the power for change that creation and rebirth need (Flood, 1). Characters like Arjuna and Rama exemplify virtuous power used for the maintenance of justice and morality in Hindu epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana, as power here is often associated with dharma (Doniger, 2). The embodiment of female power can be realized from the fact that goddesses, such as Kali and Durga, represent Shakti, feminine divine energy concerned with evil and the restoration of balance between good and evil (Kinsley, 6). In these myths, power force plays at once the role of a destructive and protecting force for the cosmos order. Female figures of Greek and Indian mythology often present complex relationships of power, in which heavenly influence is often merged with social requirements. For example, Draupadi in Mahabharata is believed to have a strength of assertion and agency much more potent than patriarchal expectations in Indian mythology especially in a scenario such as the dice game incident wherein she faces objectification (Kishwar, 20). In the same manner, the Greek world of mythology holds considerable female characters: Athena's influence was strategic and intellectual, and Medea's revenge was seen as representing her marginalized yet empowered existence (Lefkowitz, 7).

If we compare Indian mythology with other mythologies globally, we find some similarities as well as differences whereas Greek myths are more related to individual purposes, Indian mythology is connected more with moral and family responsibility. Both mythologies present the social roles of genders. Michel Foucault's theory of power, which challenged common sense by considering power as a property of institutions or persons, modified our view of power and social domination. Instead, Foucault identifies power as a relational and omnipresent force that pervades social networks and discourses. It moulds the human performance in language, knowledge, and norms. Foucault 197 demonstrates this by linking the present-day utilization of prisons, schools, and hospitals as a "panopticon," a setup where people regulate themselves because they feel watched all the time. To Foucault, power and knowledge are interwoven concepts, and the phrase "power/knowledge" was coined to describe how power determines what is knowledge and how knowledge systems in turn perpetuate and sustain power structures (Foucault, 98).

This mutually advantageous relation is intrinsic to social institutions, which develop "regimes of truth" in the process of further marginalizing certain viewpoints and validating others that subtly influence into obedience without compelling violence. In that light, the concept of "biopower," coined by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1978), refers to the manner states regulate populations and govern life through their policies on health, sexuality, and procreation. According to Foucault, such power is practicable because it changes identities, roles, and social norms rather than just being inherently oppressive. He makes "resistance" a feature of power relations while asserting the possibility of resistance and transformation of structures or relations of power and denial of absolute power (Foucault, 78). In this way, Foucault's theory unfurls the convolution of the circumstance of power as a non-centred, dynamic force into everyday practicality, profoundly changing our sensing of authority and power. Friedrich Nietzsche's "power theory" revolves around the concept of will to power, which he believed to be a basic driving force in human behaviour and socio-structural formations. In brief, if life is primarily a fight that never ends and goes on with growth, domination, and self-overcoming according to Nietzsche's theory, then the old understanding of power dominance of other living beings is actually at odds with the conception in Nietzsche, which deals rather personally with the kind of power and sequential process of self-assertion, betterment and creativity (Nietzsche, 83–85). For example, he condemned Christian morality as a "slave morality" because it articulated a suppressed urge for power for people by advocating the virtues of obedience and humility. He, however, promoted a "master morality" bestowed on self-assertion, strength, and ambition because he believed this was how one was supposed to realize their complete actualization (Nietzsche, 87). This ideal is provided by the "Übermensch" or "Overman" of Nietzsche who rejects traditional morality and pursues his special vision of power and purpose.

Existing morality and conceptions of reality are questioned by existential philosophy in the light of the will to power. Instead, he contended the ability to direct meaning in an indifferent world through power for people to create their own values themselves (Nietzsche, 7). His theories have impacted several disciplines, such as psychology, existentialism, and political philosophy, which warmly received discussions on self-determination, moral relativism, and the role of the individual in forming society. One can recall Lacan's "male gaze" idea which is relevant to Indian mythology, where a male-centered worldview often dominates narrative views. For Jacques Lacan, the gaze is a way that the subject uses control and observation to create and declare his or her identity. This glaring gaze, viewing women as objects to define masculine identity, often symbolizes male dominance in mythical stories. This is in line with the Lacanian premise that a masculine subject creates a female "Other" for self-definition, often through objectifying or hierarchizing viewpoints. As outlined in the structure established by Lacan, the male gaze is a mapping of mastery that sustains the male dominance of discourse and is behind the urge to "have" the other (Evans, 6). The male gaze is conducted through various incidents in Indian myth for the expression of male desire and female subordination. For instance, the Ramayana assumes women to be images of manly goodness as Sita is only visualized in the vision of Rama who portrays her as his honour (Narayan, 2).

Similarly, the identity of Pandavas is created by the identity in Mahabharata rather than autonomy. These stories nourish patriarchic beliefs common to the conventional Indian society by developing more or less male-centric narration, the role needs and wants of women set in themselves (Doniger, 2009). But while portraying Indian mythology's male chauvinistic gaze as criticism, it solidifies the stereotyping that restricts the freedom of women's agency. Hence, the gaze plays not only with how women are perceived but also with the cultural norms of the world around it and affects the gender relations of its immediate real world. Applying Lacan's research to these mythologies might probably explain the veiled power structures that characterize gender identities and help in understanding cultural patriarchy (Butler, 2004). As when Draupadi is brought to courtroom by Dushasan, she is leered by Shakuni, citing the text,

His eyes were vulgar, hovering over my body. Clumsily, he clutched the back of my head and tried to pull me towards himself. I slapped him hard on the face. His escorts stepped behind, horrified. (Dasgupta, 175)

Julia Kristeva's book, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1984) we seek to correlate her theory of purity with the mythological story of Ahalya, Kunti and Draupadi. She defines purity as a force that maintains clear boundaries, defining what is socially acceptable by propelling what is impure or "abject." According to Hindu legend, Indra, the king of gods, seduces Ahalya by posing as her husband, and then curses her to become a stone for her alleged impurity. Duality of purity and impurity forms the center of Kristeva's theory which is personified through Ahalya's punishment and restoration at the touch of Lord Rama's foot.

According to Kristeva's abjection thesis, the community isolates or rejects perceived impurities to maintain a sense of purity (Kristeva, 1984). Although a victim, Ahalya is, in the patriarchal context, an embodiment of impurity because her curse is the way that society responds to her supposed moral transgression. Her being cast out as a "stone" stands for exclusion from the pure social unit. The tale also has to do with redemption, which Kristeva might take to be restored purity; when Ahalya is "purified" through Rama's touch, her humanity and virtues are regained. This connection presents the sociocultural contexts shaping and upholding purity regarding women. As Dasgupta says in Series Introduction,

Purity can refer to the transparent water, which clearly reflects every pebble and weed lying below the surface. In the Sati Series, I follow this meaning of 'purity' while retelling the stories of the five illustrious women – Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Mandodari and Tara. The purity that is brave enough to present itself the way it is – sans any cosmetic cover – and mirrors the mind unpretentiously as much as it exposes the politics of a society. (Dasgupta, xvii)

The legend of Ahalya de-masks gendered expectations where ideas about purity are still held when, more often than not, violations or infractions by women face greater rejection. Kristeva's argument is this so, but it is an argument compatible with the idea of achieving lost purity after social banishment. Indian society still treats menstruation as a taboo. As described in *The Mythic Origins of the Menstrual Taboo in the Rig Veda*, menstruation is still viewed as filthy and impure in many Hindu communities. This myth is said to have originated in the Vedic era and is frequently associated with Indra's murder of Vritras. As women have taken on some of Indra's guilt, Rig Veda declares that the guilt of killing a brahmana-murder appears every month as a period. Gender has been reduced to a commodity and object, yet parallaxes in its discursive horizon have made it a more nuanced "object of discovery and search." The chapter on endometriosis in the book *New Blood* (2010) provides a vivid description of gender as the sub-lens coupled with a cross-cultural perspective to study menstruation. By establishing the strategic connection between menstrual power and the unveiling of Draupadi, Dasgupta effectively connected the entire concept and created a notion around the body of a woman to this understanding and theories surrounding menstruation. Surprisingly, the author uses menstruation as a subversive and dominant force to enhance the feminine energy and identity in her works. For example, when Draupadi was dragged to court by her hair, her saree was poured with menstrual blood, leaving marks on it.

The man flaunted his masculinity by dragging a woman by her hair through the open corridor, hauling the chaste like an accused, shouting perverted profanities about her upbringing and femininity. (Dasgupta, 175)

Dasgupta demonstrated how skillfully a patriarchally poisoned social framework might cast a human as a commodity for consumption among the public hunters when Duryodhan flung her on the floor in front of the public.

My attire was wet with menstrual blood. Drops of red stained the floor, which I had been hauled across. Inhuman force pulled me to immodest, merciless display of womanhood, in cruel violation of privacy. I crumpled under that touch, feeling small and spent. I squirmed to set myself free from the monstrous grasp. I felt dirty. I felt guilty, for reasons I could not explain. I experienced the helplessness of a woman - hopelessly compromised before the wicked, wriggling to hide herself, ashamed of nature's bountiful giving to her, constrained to believe that her biggest strength was her worst weakness. Even if I discarded the body, would the soul ever forget this encroachment? (Dasgupta, 176-177)

The Draupadi in the Mahabharata isn't a silent meek Hindu wife by virtue of having five husbands but is a strong woman whose decisions and voice are key to the story to the extent that it is impossible to do so without her. Das Gupta's description of Draupadi as a woman of deep conviction, and of knowledge, radically overturns the traditional notion of a woman controlled by fate and duty. In Gokhale's view, Das Gupta uses mythology to issue questions about patriarchal systems. This rethinking of power by redefining it as a fluid, dynamic, very personal force rather than setting out for itself as a single and immutable force. So too do her female protagonists usually fete the conflict encapsulated between the power that is given to them by society and that which is located within them. Gokhale sees how the complexity of Das Gupta's power dynamic storytelling lends depth to her work, allowing her characters to rise above the positions of their historical times to be vernacular personalities of the modern era.

Her writings have definite feminist undertones, especially considering his work of rescuing female tales from mythology and history. Dasgupta's focus on women who have, throughout history, been marginalized or misinterpreted, adds to readers a novel feminist perspective, which leads them to rethink how women are represented in myth, history, and literature. Gokhale appreciates Dasgupta for showing that women are active agents who direct their own fates despite social pressure precisely as helpless objects of destiny. For instance, in *Draupadi*, Dasgupta revives the well-known Mahabharata figure as a woman making dry land between the danger shoals of politics, power and gender norms, not with her guile but intellect and emotional stoicism. Das Gupta rewrites the all-too-common sad character of Draupadi as a courageous and resilient one. Dasgupta creates *Draupadi* as protagonist who owns her story and accepts and foresees the brewing war after her insult in court. As she says,

'You are right Krishnaa. The passing hours are signalling a phase of transformation, when brothers won't be brothers, relatives will become strangers. Where dear or distance wouldn't matter. Expect a war, Krishnaa. A devastating one, a demanding one and a levelling one. One that questions morality and rationality, where duty remains as the only constant, the rest burns on the pyres. That is the burning smell you perceive.'

Fire purges everything.'

'But why now? Is someone dying, Krishna?'

'Yes, Krishnaa, You!' (Dasgupta 170)

Instead of a seated, passive victim of fate, Dasgupta embodied the fire born queen, Draupadi, as a strong and complex woman reaching out to the complicated relationships with Pandava brothers, about her connection with Krishna, and her desire for a loving home. The reinterpretation of the characters like *Kunti* and *Mandodari* as multidimensional, powerful women, as a representative product of her art often deals with conflict between personal autonomy and social norms. Debroy reviews the stories of how Dasgupta's stories outshine traditional retellings of myths; how they delve into ethics, leadership and femininity besides riveting the reader with tales. In fact, Debroy often refers to Dasgupta's reimagining that have made her a well-known name in the literary circles for the way they highlight the unsung tales and emotional depth of these women.

There has been interest as Prof. Philip Lutgendorf, an eminent Indologist and one of the leading scholars of Indian epics, has recognized Koral Dasgupta's literary oeuvre for its fresh retellings of mythological characters. As one of school's best-known researchers on the subject of Indian culture and the Ramayana, Lutgendorf's critiques of Dasgupta's writings are perceptive in their analysis of how the author uses India's epic traditions while imbuing his characters with modern sensibilities. Lutgendorf has focused attention on this re-interpretation of legendary women. Hailed for its skill in bringing to modern audiences these famous figures of mythological women from ancient Indian scriptures, Dasgupta's Sati series reimagines the mythic characters. He praises Dasgupta's skill for creating ties between the old and new in his analysis of her retelling of mythological heroines. Dasgupta's Sati series on Ahalya, Draupadi, Mandodari and Tara brings a new angle to these well known characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata. The women characters in the epics are represented so often as supporting characters bracketed by male characters like Rama, Arjuna, or Ravana, but Lutgendorf appreciates having been able to bring out the layers of complexity within these characters as Dasgupta reveals their inner lives and voices their issues, desires, and decisions, the productions of Dasgupta are unique for the way they empower these women. This is a huge feminine intervention in the corpus of Indian mythology storytelling. In reinterpreting these mythological women, Dasgupta takes traditional cultural context in which these mythological women exist as well as conventional praxis of these mythological women in the epics. Lutgendorf praises Dasgupta for finding this balance and allowing these people to grow organically within the contexts of their own stories—however through a current lens—rather than grafting modern ideas on them.

Pavan K. Kumar's critique of Koral Dasgupta's works on their narrative style and subject investigations could be shown as an analysis of Dasgupta's works such as *Kunti* from the Sati series. Dasgupta gets credit from Kumar for sharing the inner lives and struggles of powerful female characters from the Indian mythology. Dasgupta offers a new reimagining of the famous Mahabharata figure of Kunti, focusing on Kunti's journey from puberty to maternity, and how she figures the gods and her partner Pandu. But Kumar finds it admirable, because Dasgupta makes Kunti a woman with authority, strategy and emotional depth, not just a passive character. But Kumar also points to the importance of Dasgupta's feminist rethinking of

legendary characters that cast doubt on traditional roles of women. Kumar in particular has argued that Kunti is the 'secret strategist' who translated Hastinapur's prosperity, reorienting our thinking of feminine authorial positions in traditional stories. According to Kumar, Dasgupta's works powerful storytelling has great resonance with themes of gender, identity and retelling within myth, and is therefore an important contribution to modern Indian literature. Saikat Majumdar looks at how Koral Dasgupta weaves mythology into modern topics in her narrations and artistic creations. What is Majumdar particularly drawn to in Dasgupta's telling of mythological characters in the Sati Series is that they give voice to women so often relegated to the margins of traditional narratives. Majumdar praises her for making, gods like Parvati and Sati human and those gods have human struggles. By presenting us with these well-known characters fully nuanced and fully psychological the author shows us how myth is a very rich medium for the discussion of contemporary gender and identity issues. As Indra says,

Who says myth is the magic of the past? Life itself is the biggest myth. Unbelievable sufferings are transformed into incredible ballads after traumatic phase is left behind.. But not all myths are tragic... They are the stories.' of spectacular accomplishments coupled with helpless tears

Dasgupta's unique point of view on relationships, as well as her reading of myths by reinterpreting them, is something of value. Familial, romantic, or social. Her thematic focus enables her to bridge the gap between myth and the modern era and present feminist viewpoint on stories that have not only traditionally excluded women, but have now also been effectively coopted by men to address particular types of readers. Dasgupta's work, says Majumdar, fuses mythology with feminist criticism and fiction to test the genre and story limits. It would be an understatement to say she is a potent voice in contemporary Indian literature: her writing skips effortlessly from time and place and challenges a reader to look at familiar stories from new angles.

Draupadi is reimagined as a character who only makes use of a romantically strong voice to articulate her emotional freedom and complexity. The reconstruction of a feminine authority of purity is a result of re-narration of Draupadi with Dasgupta's work arising out of the fact that she was a woman, a wife and her soul that questioned and dismantled the comprehensive culture and beliefs that were prevalent and concerning the body of a woman, a pure purity and chastity. The spirit of the Panchakanyas, of note, for their commitment to gendered requirements set out by society, has been embodied in the character of Draupadi. Yet, as Dasgupta's story develops, we see that the popular culture about Draupadi leads people to a perverted picture of the character entirely from Draupadi's perspective. Morality of Draupadi as a demand for identity, positionality, respect and rights, and not as the strength of endurance and sacrifice. Here is one of the few times where she can tell her story. The author here tries to recreate Draupadi's suffering and distresses in the book without being on the sword. Usually, her stories deal about the relationship between the social and the personal power, with a special focus on the problems and freedoms of women in the historical and mythological situation. In her retellings of old myths and her investigation of contemporary themes, Dasgupta presents different views on how power engages itself in various relational and social dynamics. Going back to these individuals, Dasgupta incorporates broader societal observations, and in the process raises issues of gender, power, and resistance. This analysis will explore how various academics and critics understand her approach to power narrative, theming oppression of society, gender politics and individual agency. The study of power relations in Dasgupta's writings is powered by her feminist reworking of legendary characters. The *Sati Series* reimagines characters such as Tara, Draupadi and Ahalya in how Dasgupta views them. In traditional mythological tales these characters are generally supporting roles or victims. The 'peripheralization' of these characters is no match for the psychological and emotional complexity to which Dasgupta gives them. In her stories, these are women who are active agents, interacting in novel ways (and in many instances, subversive ways) with the power regimes with which they interact.

In her work, as confirmed by Dasgupta, myth is an essential device of resistance, both social and personal. But Dasgupta champions the strength of her female protagonists and calls out patriarchal power structures by rewriting legendary narratives in light of feminism. Literary resistance in the works of Dasgupta to dominant cultural ideologies emerges as a reworking of mythical stories. Power relations as revealed by language and art are fundamental to Dasgupta's work. Dasgupta's work, however, is described as poetic by a lot of people who tend to pay more attention to its artistic features. Often Dasgupta conveys their emotional and psychological complexity through words. Aside from language, Dasgupta's interest in how art affects power structures is also in evidence. Her works portray characters that use art as a way to claim their identities and challenge social norms. As an instance, Dasgupta looks at how Draupadi retains her narrative by

reminding her readers that she has reclaimed her narrative in her retelling of the story using the motif of painting. By literally putting words in Draupadi's mouth, she uses art to challenge the conventional view of her as a helpless victim, to claim her independence through her struggle.

Dasgupta's linguistic and artistic choices, however, are entirely consistent with the view of storytelling as a feminist literary theory. This focus on the aesthetic aspects of her stories allows Dasgupta to convey emotional and psychological nuances of power dynamics that are beyond the constraints of a traditional narrative format. With this method she can cover broader questions of art function in challenging and changing social power structures. By exploring power narratives in her works, Koral Dasgupta offers a much more complex and multidimensional critique of gender, cultural narratives, and societal standards. She offers another way of seeing the part of women in the historical and modern cases and asks the question of power systems established through her feminist retellings of mythological characters. By examining family relationships, sexuality and resistance her picture of power is more nuanced and makes clear how women confront and attack patriarchal tyranny. This role in the book's storyline reconciles the declaration that women's needs cannot be stereotyped, but they are a necessary part of Grihasta culture.

To conclude, it can be said that the titular leads of Dasgupta's three novels- *Ahalya*, *Kunti* and *Draupadi* defy the conventional perception of the Hindu woman in countless ways. Ahalya and Kunti are not cowardly ladies while Kunti's grace is like that of a crouched lioness flicking her tail as she examines her prey, Ahalya exudes a delicate, natural grace. Although Ahalya and Kunti are devoted to their husbands, they both have strong feelings for people who are not in their planned marriages. Even though Ahalya and Kunti's narrative and dialogue are lyrical and beautiful, they occasionally create a remote atmosphere. Nevertheless, we witness them go through the whole gamut of human emotions throughout their stories, including amazement, longing, grief, passion, and the like. The distinction between women and legendary, idealized figures becomes hazy. Ahalya espouses a form of subtle feminism. Ahalya aspires to live life to the fullest, but her commune and surroundings seem focused on preventing her from doing so. It could be argued that Ahalya should follow a different road than the one that seems to be allocated to her, but it would be avoiding the purpose of this recounting. Ahalya's ability to maneuver around expectations and limitations shows how important little resistances are in the lives of those who have little control and how they can have a small but meaningful impact on societal change. In addition, Ahalya would have been unwilling to give up her sole social support system from a practical standpoint—a barrier that is still present in contemporary society. Moreover, Ahalya attempts to modify, reinterpret, and elevate established, conventional positions rather than redefining the roles that women perform in society (and in the original tales). By challenging the subservient positions that women have been assigned throughout Ahalya, Kunti goes even further. For instance, Kunti is the unseen tactician behind Hastinapur's success because of her acute awareness of those around her. While it doesn't quite demand the abolition of gender norms and the gender binary (maybe in a later instalment), it does call for the recognition of a more complex kind of femininity.

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