

ЯЗЫКИ НАРОДОВ ЗАРУБЕЖНЫХ СТРАН (С УКАЗАНИЕМ КОНКРЕТНОГО ЯЗЫКА ИЛИ ГРУППЫ ЯЗЫКОВ) / LANGUAGES OF PEOPLES OF FOREIGN COUNTRIES (INDICATING A SPECIFIC LANGUAGE OR GROUP OF LANGUAGES)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2022.31.5>

PHILOSOPHY OF THE ANCIENT INDIAN EPIC *MAHĀBHĀRATA* IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL *DRAUPADĪ* (1984) BY PRATIBHĀ RĀY

Research article

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**Abstract**

In the article, the author examines the novel *Draupadī* (1984) by the Indian writer Pratibhā Rāy, which plot is based on the ancient Indian epic *Mahābhārata*. The correspondence between the philosophical ideas presented in the novel and the philosophy of the epic itself is analyzed, in accordance with the way it is presented in the Bhagavad Gita, which is considered the didactic-religious and philosophical core of the *Mahābhārata*. It is concluded that, despite the general correspondence and fairly accurate adherence of the philosophy of the novel to the concepts of the Bhagavadgītā, at the end of the novel the main character makes an unexpected decision, from the point of view of traditional Hindu philosophy: she prefers rebirths on earth to the liberation from the cycle of births samsara and union with the absolute reality of the Brahman. Such a decision, however, is quite consistent with the humanistic message of the novel by Pratibhā Rāy.

**Keywords:** Mahabharata, Indian heritage, Indian literature, epic, Bhagavadgita, Hinduism.

ФИЛОСОФИЯ ДРЕВНЕИНДИЙСКОГО ЭПОСА "МАХАБХАРАТА" В КОНТЕКСТЕ РОМАНА ПРАТИБХИ РАЙ "ДРАУПАДИ" (1984)

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

В статье автор исследует роман индийской писательницы Пратибхи Рай "Драупади" (1984), чей сюжет основан на древнеиндийском эпосе "Махабхарата". Анализируется соответствие философских идей, представленных в романе, и философии самого эпоса, в соответствии с тем как она изложена в "Бхагавадгите", которая считается дидактико-религиозным и философским ядром "Махабхараты". Делается вывод о том, что при общем соответствии и достаточно точному следованию философии романа концепциям "Бхагавадгиты", в конце романа главная героиня принимает неожиданное, с точки зрения традиционной индуистской философии, решение: предпочитает новые рождения на земле освобождению от круга перерождений сансары и соединению с абсолютной реальностью Брахмана. Такое решение, однако, вполне соответствует гуманистическому послылу произведения Пратибхи Рай.

**Ключевые слова:** Махабхарата, индийское наследие, индийская литература, эпос, Бхагавадгита, индуизм.

**Introduction**

Pratibhā Rāy is an Indian writer from the Indian state Odisha. For her literary work she received several prestigious awards, she is also known as a follower of Vaishnavism and a social rights activist. In her literary works she is questioning the religious, gender and caste discriminations, while portraying the life struggles and moral conflicts. Novel *Yajñasenī* was written by P. Rāy in 1984 in her native Odia language, translated into Hindi as *Draupadī* [1]. The novel received acclaim and popularity across India. It is written in the form of a perimortem letter of the main heroine of the ancient Indian epic *Mahābhārata* (hereinafter - Mbh) Draupadī that she addresses to her friend and mentor Krishna; the plot outline of the epic is generally preserved, but all events are narrated from the point of view of Draupadī, thus subjunctivized.

The Sanskrit epic Mbh is revered in India and retains great importance as a symbol of Hindu and Indian identity [2], and a source of inspiration for many generations of Indian writers, including modern authors [3]. In the center of the epic is the story of the Kurukshetra war between the cousin brothers Pandavas and Kauravas, which ended in the extermination of the latter.

There have been a number of research papers dedicated to the gender issues raised and feminist perspective given in the novel *Draupadī* [4], [5], [6], [7], with less attention given to the study of the philosophical ideas as they are presented in the novel and in the Mbh, and these studies are mostly limited to the analysis of the concept of *dharma* [6], [8].

The purpose of this paper is to determine how the ideas of the novel by P. Rāy correspond to the philosophy of the Mbh, as presented in the *Bhagavadgītā* (hereinafter - Bhg). The Bhg is part of the sixth book of the epic and is considered its doctrinal and philosophical core, as well as one of the most revered sacred books of Hinduism [9, P. 90], representing a conversation between Krishna and a Pandava prince Arjuna on the eve of the fateful Kurukshetra battle. The paper conclusions are

supported by citations from the book *Indian philosophy* [10] by one of the leading Indian philosophers of the XX century, S. Radhakrishnan [11, P. 48].

The main research methods are: cultural-historical and hermeneutic methods, the method of holistic analysis of the literary text.

### Main results

*Dharma* is one of the key concepts of Hinduism, a set of established rules, observance of which is a necessary condition for maintaining cosmic order [9, P. 180].

The concept of *dharma*, applied to different characters and situations are much deliberated upon and interrogated in the novel:

- "He who does not hesitate to give his wife to another man, in order to secure his own *dharma*, might be considered the most virtuous soul on earth, but cannot be a real husband for any woman, unless she is crazy" [1, P. 44].

- "The *dharma* of a woman is not in her resignation to injustice. If a husband acts unjustly, and a woman silently endures it, it is a disaster for everyone" [13, P. 168].

- "Be it *dharma* or *adharma*, it is the duty of a man to repay his debts" [1, P. 234].

There is a line of questioning going through the whole novel, regarding what *dharma* (especially, woman's *dharma*) really is, as well as a conflict between *dharma* and duty, *dharma* and virtue.

After the battle, Krishna consoles Rāy's Draupadi: "After the likes of Dushasana (Kaurava prince who offended Draupadi - K.M.) perish, the earth will be freed from sin. *Dharma* will be reasserted on earth. This is the purpose of my life and yours" [1, P. 246]. Here the concept of *dharma* is quite consistent with the concept of the *dharma* in the Mbh, following which is perceived as the highest value: "And for the sake of observing duty, you should not hesitate. There is no higher good for a kshatriya than a righteous battle" [12, VI.24.31], - says Krishna to Arjuna on the battle eve in the Mbh, when the latter in dismay refuses to fight his relatives.

In response to Krishna's words, Draupadi points out that the son of Arjuna Abhimanyu died though he did nothing wrong, to which Krishna replies: "Such are the terrible changes that the battle brings. For the good of the earth, on the path to the destruction of evil, righteous people have to part with their lives. For the sake of the general welfare, a person has to sacrifice personal interests. A person has to give his life for it too" (1, P. 246). In the Bhg, Krishna convinces Arjuna to fight with different arguments: "You grieve for those for whom it is not necessary to grieve, and [besides] you speak wisely, but meanwhile the sages do not grieve either about the dead or the survivors. It has never happened that I did not exist, nor you, nor these lords of the peoples, and after that we all will not cease to exist" [12, VI.24.11-12]. Thus, citing the interpretation of the Bhg by S. Radhakrishnan, "death is not extinction. An individual form may change, but the essence is not destroyed" [10, P. 457]. While in the novel the arguments to fight relate to the benefit of the living, in the epic they correspond to the immortality of the soul.

In the novel, the emphasis is on moral qualities. Krishna says to Draupadi: "Karna died because of his pride. Having overcome his pride, Arjuna won and survived. So don't be sad for Karna. Nobody kills anyone. Man himself goes towards his death" [1, P. 252]. The flaws of the human character lead the heroes to their death. On her last journey, the heroine reflects on the human qualities-*gunas* according to the Indian philosophical concept: "Three *gunas* - *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* fetter the soul of a living being. *Tamas* *guna* gives rise to illusions, *rajas* *guna* - passions and violent desires, *sattva* *guna* - righteousness. Yet *sattva* is also a bondage. Therefore, my ascent to the Himalayas seems to me like golden shackles" [1, P. 256]. Indeed, in the Bhg, Krishna tells Arjuna that in order to achieve the highest understanding, one must renounce all three *gunas* [12, VI.24.45]. "The *gunas* make up three strands of rope. As long as we are subject to the action of one of them, we rush about in the cycle of existence, freedom is liberation from the action of the *gunas*" [10, P. 450-451]. Deep in thought, Draupadi stumbles over a gold-bearing rock protruding on the path (apparent allusion to the "golden shackles" of the *sattva* *guna*); she falls and remains alone, while her companions continue their ascent [1, P. 257]. Here we can see the novel following the line of thought of the Bhg quite closely.

Then Draupadi feels herself finally free from the illusion *maya* and entrusts to God both her pride and her helplessness [1, P. 258]. According to S. Radhakrishnan, "the Gita teaches that a person who is free from passion and fear, having passed through the all-purifying flame of true knowledge, achieves union with God" [10, P. 444]. Heroine's last thoughts are turned towards Krishna, following the logic of the Bhg, her soul is ready for the union with the *Brahman* [12, VI.30.5]. However, she asks Krishna for the opposite: "I do not need liberation from rebirths. I do not want to ascend to heaven in the flesh. I want to be reborn on earth instead" [1, P. 259].

Thus, the story ends contrary to the traditional Hindu philosophy, where *mokṣa* (liberation from the circle of *saṃsāra*) is considered the utmost aim of human life. To *mokṣa* Draupadi prefers rebirths, as she wishes to stay with people, in India, instead of following the path of the gods [1, P. 259]. The author of the novel remains faithful to humanistic ideas and principles to the end, but P. Rāy sees them differently, contrary to the traditional perception of the main goal of human existence: in the Bhg, union of the individual soul with the *Brahman* is considered the greatest boon [12, VI.30.20-21], [10, P. 472], while in the novel human life is affirmed as the highest value by itself.

### Conclusion

In the novel by P. Rāy, the humanistic pathos lies in the fact that while maintaining the leading position of Krishna, who is undoubtedly viewed in the novel as the supreme god, and it is to him the heroine addresses both her story and her requests, Draupadi takes the decisive choice regarding her final fate and the destination of her soul into her own hands. Interestingly, the decision of Draupadi to stay in the circle of *saṃsāra* when she can escape it echoes the Mahayana teaching concerning the *bodhisattvas*, who prefer rebirth to Nirvana, seeking to help and inspire as many people as possible [13, P. 90]; again, considering the humanistic message, that define the literary works by Pratibhā Rāy, that may have been a possible inspiration behind this novel twist.

**Конфликт интересов**

Не указан.

**Рецензия**

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

**Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

**Review**

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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