



Draupadi's emergence by Aditi

She Who Must Be Obeyed

Draupadi : The Ill-Fated One

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In the first two parts of this quest we explored three of the five kanyas, Ahalya, Tara, and Mandodari of the Ramayana, seeking to understand what makes them so special and, while en-route Pritha-Kunti, discovered in the Mahabharata her grandmother-in-law Satyavati, another remarkable woman sharing features that characterise the kanya. In the third instalment, we saw the remarkable character of Kunti, the first recorded instance of a redoubtable Single Mother. Now we meet the last of the five “virgins,” the heroine of the Mahabharata: Draupadi. To help us through the thickly interwoven maze of relationships, let us lay out the broad linkages:

- The sage **Parashara** forces himself on the fisher-girl, Matsyagandha-**Satyavati**, who is ferrying him across the Yamuna → Krishna (dark) Dvaipayana (born-on-an-island) **Vyasa**.
- **Shantanu**, king of Hastinapura, marries **Ganga** → Devavrata-**Bhishma**, who abjures the throne and vows celibacy so that Satyavati agrees to marry his father.
- **Shantanu** marries **Satyavati** → Chitrangada (killed in a duel) and Vichitravirya who becomes king in adolescence, with Bhishma as regent.
- **Vichitravirya** marries **Ambika and Ambalika**, princesses of Kashi (Benares) whom Bhishma abducts for this purpose. The youth dies without progeny. Bhishma refuses to break his vow and practices levirate on the widows as requested by the Queen-mother, Satyavati. She summons her illegitimate son Vyasa who has become a sage by now. Reluctantly he agrees to impregnate the two widows
- blind **Dhritarashtra** born from Ambika who shut her eyes in aversion during intercourse and pale (jaundiced) **Pandu** from Ambalika who became pale from shock at Vyasa's ugliness. Satyavati, therefore, insists that Ambika make good her lapse but the princess sends in her maid to Vyasa instead → **Vidura** the veritable soul of righteousness. The younger Pandu rules as Dhritarashtra is disqualified because of his blindness. Vidura becomes the conscience-keeper of the ruler.
- **Dhritarashtra marries Gandhari** (whose father Bhishma terrorised into giving her in marriage. She blinds herself by tying a cloth over her eyes permanently) → 100 sons called **Kauravas** (**Duryodhana**, Duhshasana, etc.), one daughter Duhshala, and another son Yuyutsu from a Vaishya maidservant during Gandhari's pregnancy. Gandhari's brother, scheming **Shakuni**, becomes their advisor.
- **Shura** of the Yadavas of Mathura → **Pritha**, whom he gifts away in childhood to his childless friend Kuntibhoja who renames her **Kunti**. The sage Durvasa gives her an incantation (*mantra*) whereby she can summon anyone, even a god, for begetting a son. To experiment, she invokes the sun god **Surya** → **Karna**, born with celestial earrings and armour, whom she sets afloat in a basket in the river Ashvanadi, as she is unmarried (see Part II).
- **Karna** is rescued by a childless charioteer **Adhirath** and his wife **Radha**, after whom he is called **Radheya**. **Duryodhana** makes **Karna** ruler of Anga and his fast friend.
- A son of **Shura** is **Vasudeva**, whose sons **Balarama** from Rohini and **Krishna** from Devaki, are **Pritha's** nephews.
- In a *svayamvara* **Kunti marries Pandu**. Immediately, Bhishma pays heavy bride-price and brings **Madri** as Pandu's second wife. Pandu is childless, being

“→” signifies “leading to the birth of”

cursed to die in coitus. In grief, he exiles himself with his wives in the Himalayas. Dhritarashtra rules. At Pandu's insistence, Kunti uses the mantra to summon **Dharma → Yudhishtira; Vayu → Bhima; Indra → Arjuna.** At Pandu's plea, Kunti teaches the *mantra* to **Madri** who invokes the twin **Ashvinikumaras → Nakula and Sahadeva.** These are the five **Pandavas.**

□ Pandu forces himself on Madri and dies in coitus. Entrusting her sons to Kunti, Madri dies, too. Kunti returns to Hastinapura with the five Pandavas.

□ Jealous of their cousins' claim to the throne, the **Kauravas** conspire with **Shakuni** and **Karna** to kill them. The Pandavas flee into a forest where a *rakshasi* **Hidimba marries Bhima → Ghatotkacha.**

□ Advised by their grandfather Vyasa, the Pandavas reach the Panchala kingdom where Arjuna wins the hand of its king Yajnasena-**Drupada's** miraculously born daughter Yajnaseni (emerging from the sacrificial altar)-**Krishnaa** (dark)-**Panchali-Draupadi.** She becomes the common wife of the five brothers at Kunti's command and is Krishna's special friend, *sakhi*.

□ Dhritarashtra asks the Pandavas to make their home in the forest of Khandavaprastha. Krishna assists the Pandavas in building their capital Indraprastha by clearing the forest.

□ The Kauravas deprive the Pandavas of their kingdom in a game of dice, in which Draupadi is staked and lost by Yudhishtira. The Pandavas are sent into exile for 13 years.

□ Arjuna marries Subhadra, sister of Balarama-Krishna → Abhimanyu who married Uttara daughter of king Virata in whose court the Pandavas take shelter in exile → Parikshit who becomes king of Hastinapura at the end of the epic.

Yajnaseni-Krishnaa-Panchali

If Kunti's is a death-in-flames, her daughter-in-law Draupadi is fire-altar born. Like Ahalya fashioned by Brahma, ocean-born Tara, Mandodari created by Vishnu or Parvati, and tree-engendered Marisha (wife of the ten Prachetas), she is *ayonija-sambhava*, not of woman born. Like Athena springing *cap a pie* from Zeus' head and Durga taking shape from the combined fury of the gods, Yajnaseni emerges in the bloom of youth from Yajnasena-Drupada's *yajna vedi*, sacrificial fire-altar, which is repeatedly cited as a simile for her hour-glass figure. Her manifestation does not require the matrix of a human womb and ignores the absence of Drupada's queen who does not respond to the priest's summons, as her make-up is unfinished.

It is significant that Draupadi emerges gratuitously at the end of a sacrificial rite performed to wreak vengeance—that, too, on the Brahmin Drona—like the *kriya* (a woman created by sorcery to slay an enemy) sent by the prince of Kashi against Krishna to avenge his father's death and the *kriya* invoked by demons to bring suicidal Duryodhana

to them for restoring his confidence after his humiliating defeat by Gandharvas and rescue by the exiled Pandavas. Yajnaseni's complexion resembles the blue and red (*nilalohita kriya*) of the Rig and Atharva Vedas. Like Janamejaya's serpent-holocaust ritual performed by priests in black robes, the rite performed for Drupada draws on non-*shrauta* (sacred) tradition, a departure from the auspicious vedic sacrifice and partakes of the nature of *abhichara* (black-magic), death-dealing, because of which Upayaja, whom Drupada approaches first, refuses to perform it. Here, too, there is a resemblance with Kunti because Durvasa's boon to her is described as *abhicharasamyuktam... varam mantragramam* (I.113.34), invocations linked by black magic. In particular, it is linked to Yudhishtira's birth. Pandu specifically urges Kunti to summon Dharma with *abhichara* rites, *upacharabhicharabhyam dharmam aradhayasva* (I.39, 42).¹

Born to Destroy

Draupadi's emergence is an unintended bonus for Drupada who performed the rite for obtaining a son to kill Drona. Her birth is accompanied

by a skiey heavenly announcement that this lovely, dark (hence, one of her names is *Krishnaa*) lady will destroy all Kshatriyas. She appears, therefore, to fulfil not Drupada's purpose but that of the gods, responding to the Earth's anguished prayer to lighten her burden of oppressive Kshatriyas. Despite being aware of this announcement—or being conscious of it—the gods-engendered Pandavas wed her and destroy the Kauravas, whose birth is entirely human. Her marriage to the son of Yama-Dharma, Yudhishtira, reinforces her ominous links with death. Even her very first appearance is as Shri in the *Adi Parva* (I.196), in the context of a twelve-year sacrifice Yama, the god of death, performs on the banks of the Ganga, during which there is no death in the world. Shri is a mysterious *femme fatale* weeping tears that turn into golden lotuses in the Ganga, luring the intrigued Indra into the presence of Shiva playing dice with his consort. Indra, not recognising Shiva, berates him for not showing respect and is despatched into a nether-world-like cave to join four other arrogant Indras (Vishvabhuk, Bhutadhama, Shibi,

Shanti, and Tejasvi), all sentenced to be reborn on earth as the Pandavas accompanied by the *cherchez la femme* Shri as Draupadi.²

Lovely and Enchanting

“Panchali,” as she is called when she appears from the altar, is pregnant with double meaning: “of Panchala” and “puppet.” This presages how she lives her entire life, acting out not just her father’s vengeful obsession but as an instrument of the gods to bring death back to the world.

She is the only *kanya* whose appearance is described in detail and it is, therefore, worth noting:

eye-ravishing Panchali,
black-and-smiling-eyed...
Dark-skinned Panchali,
Lotus-eyed lady,
Wavy-haired Panchali
Hair like dark blue clouds,
Shining coppery carved nails,
Soft eye-lashes,
Swelling breasts and
Shapely thighs...

Blue lotus

Fragrance for a full *kroscha*
Flowed from her body...
(I.169.44-46)

Vyasa categorically states that the creator had so fashioned her that her loveliness surpassed that of all women (reminiscent of Valmiki about Ahalya) and enchanted everyone. The kings in the *svayamvara* hall are described as so tormented by the arrows of desire (*kandarpabanabhinipiditangah*) that even friends hated each other (I.186.5). When the brothers look upon her in the potter’s hut, they all lose their hearts to her. Noticing this, Yudhishtira recalls Vyasa’s prophecy and announces that she will be their common wife (I.190.12-14).

An Amorous Lover

Dark like her great grandmother-in-law Gandhakali and gifted with blue-lotus fragrance wafting for a full *kroscha* like Yojanagandha, she “knows”—like her mother-in-law Kunti and great grandmother-in-law Satyavati—more than one man. Like Kunti she is also described as an amorous lover: *Draupadi bhratripati ca pancanam kamini tatha*.³ Dr. Nrisingha Prasad Bhaduri records an account narrated by Pandit Anantalal Thakur in which Duryodhana’s wife Bhanumati sneers at Draupadi asking how she manages five husbands, “*kena vrittina Draupadi pandavan adhitishthasi*.” Draupadi swiftly responds that among her in-laws the number of husbands has always been rather excessive, “*pativridhi kule mama*”⁴—a right royal riposte that encompasses in a fell swoop her mother-in-law Kunti, grandmothers-in-law Ambika and Ambalika (who are Bhanumati’s, too), and great-grandmother-in-law Satyavati. The story shows how popular memory has treasured Draupadi for her acute intelligence and forceful personality that took nothing lying down. Yet, hers is an immeasurably greater predicament compared to those women of her husbands’ family. Where theirs were momentary encounters, Draupadi has to live out

her entire life parcelled out among five men within the sacrament of marriage.⁵ She shares with Satyavati and Kunti an imperishable, ever-renewable virginity:

The divine *rishi*, narrating this wondrous, miraculous and excellent event said,

Lovely-waisted and noble-minded indeed,
she became virgin anew after each marriage” (I.197.14)

Is there a link with the Vedic marital hymns where the bride is first offered to Soma, Gandharva, and Agni and only then to the human bridegroom as her fourth husband?

*Somah prathamo vivide
gandharvo vivida uttarah/
Tritiyo agnishte patisturiyaste
manyushyajah//*

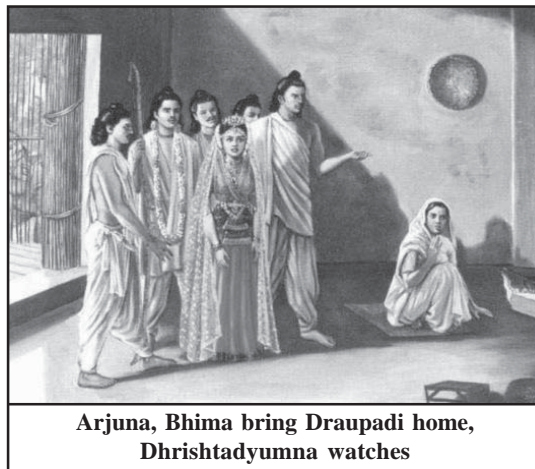
(Soma obtained her first of all; next the Gandharva was her lord./ Agni was thy third husband:/ now one born of woman is thy fourth./ Soma to the Gandharva, and to Agni the Gandharva gave:/ And Agni hath bestowed on me riches and sons and this my spouse.)⁶

She-Who-Must-be-Obeded

According to the Villiputtur’s Tamil version of the epic, Draupadi bathes in fire after each marriage, emerging chaste like the pole star.⁷

This emergence from fire reinforces the *kriya* image and reminds us of Rider Haggard’s “She-who-must-be-obeyed,” renewing her youth by bathing in fire, an Anima archetype.

The South Indian cult of Draupadi sculpts her holding a closed lotus bud symbolising virginity, as opposed to the open lotus of fertility Subhadra holds. Icons of Draupadi also hold in one hand a parrot, the vehicle of Kama the god of erotic desire.



Arjuna, Bhima bring Draupadi home,
Dhrishtadyumna watches

“The parrot symbolizing the principle of desire,” writes Archana Sahni, “is poised atop the bud to tease it open, so as to begin creation. Draupadi, carrying the two interdependent and interactive symbols of desire and creation is none other than the goddess as the genetrix of all things.”⁸ Thus, she is *Shakti*, who is at once virgin and erotic. She transforms herself into stone, like Ahalya, when touched by the demon Kempirnacuran by invoking her chastity in an act of truth.⁹ She resembles Madhavi, ancestress of the Kurus, in retaining her virginity despite being many-husbanded.¹⁰ Kunti herself describes Draupadi to Krishna as *sarvadharmopacayinam*¹¹ (fosterer of all virtues), using the identical term by which Yayati describes his daughter Madhavi while bestowing her upon Galava.¹²

The conjunction of both occurrences of this epithet in the same *parva* is surely deliberate on the part of the seer-poet for drawing our attention to these correspondences. Madhavi regains virginity every time after giving birth to a son each to the kings Haryashva of Ayodhya, Divodasa of Varanasi, Ushinara of the North-West, and to the sage Vishvamitra. After this, Yayati holds a bridegroom-choice ceremony for her; but at that point she chooses to retire to the forest and become an ascetic. When her father falls from heaven because of his pride, she reappears to join her sons in gifting their joint merit to Yayati so that he rises back to the realm of the gods. Sharadandayani, whom Pandu mentions when persuading Kunti to have children by others, stood at night at crossroads and chose a passer-by from whom she had three sons.

However, neither Madhavi nor Sharadandayani nor Kunti had to live out their lives adjusting repeatedly to a different husband from among five



Arjuna and Draupadi with lotus bud and parrot

brothers at specified intervals. Possibly, the only comparison can be with two women Yudhishtira mentions, both non-Kshatriyas: Marisha/Varkshi mother of Daksha married to the ten Prachetas *rishis* and Jatila spouse of seven sages, of whose lives we know nothing else.

A Mind of Her Own

A true “virgin,” Panchali has a mind of her very own. Both Krishna and Krishnaa appear for the first time together in the *svayamvara sabha* and make decisive interventions. It is Draupadi’s wholly unexpected refusal to accept Karna as a suitor (significantly, here Vyasa does not call her “Panchali”) that alters the entire complexion of that assembly and, indeed, the course of the epic itself. The affront to Karna sows the seeds of the assault on her in the dice-game. It is her *sakha*-to-be, Krishna, who steps in to put an end to the skirmish between the furious kings and the disguised Pandavas. She alone enjoys the unique relationship of *sakhi* with her *sakha* Krishna, an equality of status that empowers her to upbraid him much as his aunt Kunti does in the *Bhagavata Purana*:

No husband have I, nor son
nor brother, nor father; and
O Madhusudana, even
you are not mine!”

She exhorts that he is bound fourfold to protect her¹³:

For four reasons, Krishna, you
are bound to protect me ever:
I’m related, I’m renowned,
I’m your *sakhi* and
all revere you. (III.10.125, 127)

The special relationship she enjoys with Krishna is seen not only in such dramatic confrontations but also in unexpectedly delicate, understated interactions. When Krishna tells Yudhishtira that Arjuna has one defect in his body that condemns him to misfortune, “Krishnaa Draupadi glanced askance at Krishna in annoyance” and Krishna’s reaction is one of approval at her display of love (III.14.89).

Relation with Krishna

Her relationship with Krishna and with Arjuna is complicated. She is the incarnation of Shri, the spouse of Vishnu who is incarnated as Krishna. That is the secret of the unique intimate relationship between Krishnaa and Krishna which is one of the most enchanting features of the epic. On the other hand, she is wed to Arjuna, the partial incarnation of Indra. The *Markandeya Purana* (V.25-26) seeks to solve this awkward situation of Vishnu’s spouse becoming Indra’s by indulging in some rewriting to declare that it was Indra’s wife Shachi who emerged from the sacrificial flames (instead of the epic’s altar) as Krishnaa, and she is wedded only to Indra who had divided himself into five. In Pauranic accounts, Shri leaves the demons and goes over to the gods to become Indra’s “good fortune and prosperity.” Draupadi’s insistence on accompanying the Pandavas into exile is, therefore, doubly significant:

their Shri has not abandoned them. Throughout the exile she constantly badgers Yudhishtira, desperately and tirelessly labouring to arouse in him a desire to win back what she symbolises and he has gambled away.

Panchali, like Helen of Troy, is fully conscious of her sexual power. Satyabhama explicitly begs her to share her secrets of female sexuality by which her husbands are at her beck and call (III.222.7). She uses it in getting her way with Bhima in Virata's kitchen (IV.20) and with Krishna in turning the peace-embassy into a declaration of war (V.82).

The captivating pose she strikes when alone in Kamyaka forest, enchanting Jayadratha, is a telling instance of this. Leaning against a *kadamba* tree, holding on to a branch with an upraised hand, her upper garment displaced, she flashes like lightning against clouds or like the flame of a lamp quivering in the night-breeze (IV.264.1). Though as lovely as Sita left alone in the wilderness, no Ravana would have succeeded in spiriting Draupadi away. When Jayadratha seizes her, she repulses him so hard that he falls to the ground. Retaining full control of her faculties, she mounts his chariot on finding him bent on forcing her, calmly asking the family priest to report to her husbands. There is no Sita-like lamentation here, no shrill outcries for succour. As her husbands close on Jayadratha, she taunts him with an elaborate description of the prowess of each and the inevitable trouncing that will follow.

Art and Craft of Sexual Power

The manner in which Draupadi manipulates Bhima to get what she wants is a fascinating lesson in the art and craft of sexual power. She does not turn to Arjuna, knowing him to be a true disciple of Yudhishtira as seen in the dice-game. Then Bhima alone had roared out his outrage. In



**Draupadi going to Kichaka:
Painting by Ravi Varma**

Kamyaka forest when she finds a wonderfully fragrant golden flower *saugandhika*, she gives it to Yudhishtira and calls Bhima by the name usually reserved for Arjuna, using a ploy common to women for getting what they want from their men:

If you truly love me, Partha,
then bring me many more such.
(III.146.7)

Bhima, of course, obliges her with a vengeance, despatching hordes of *Krodhavasha* Rakshasas guarding the lake where these flowers grow. Just before this, we have seen how delicate she is. Unused to walking on hilly terrain, after covering just a *kroshta* on Gandhamadana mountain *en route* Badari ashram, Draupadi trembles and falls:

Trying to support herself on her
elephant-trunk-graceful
thighs, she slipped and fell
like a plantain tree. (III.144.4)

Again, it is Bhima who comes to her rescue, summoning Ghatotkacha to carry her. What is of interest is the reaction of the Pandavas here, deeply concerned and lavishing personal care on her, which is so different from their total indifference to her collapse in their final journey. It is Nakula who

rushes to help and calls out to Yudhishtira who, taking her head on his lap, grieves:

The soft hands, face and lotus-feet
of this lady, deserving
the finest cosmetics, are dark-blue
today—all my fault!
my obsession with dice is the
cause of all this!

I am reduced to seeing her in
an animal-infested forest!"
Saying, 'O auspicious one, Kalyani,
You will find happiness with
Pandavas'

King Drupada bestowed on us
his large-eyed daughter.
And now, broken down with the
rigours of sorrow and
travel—all my fault!—she lies
unhappy on the ground....

The twins, with bowstring-scarred
hands, began massaging
gently her red-soled feet graced by
all the auspicious signs.
(III.144.11-14, 20)

Draupadi makes a similar request when they come across multi-coloured flowers lying on the banks of Ashvaratha River. Seeking Bhima out when he is alone, shrewdly she first praises Arjuna's prowess in the burning of Khandava forest and urges Bhima that he, too, is like Indra in might and should free the mountain peak of *rakshasas* because,
Bhima, I have wanted this
for a long time.

I want to be on the summit,
protected by you.
Foe-chastising, mighty-armed Bhima
seemed to come
under a spell; he stood like a proud,
whip-tormented bull.
(III.160.26-27)

Voicing what she fancies, she appeals to his masculine ego by wanting his protection and comparing him to his younger brother. His *amour propre* wounded and his manhood appealed to, Bhima rushes to decimate

rakshasas and their leader Maniman on Gandhamadana's peak, winning Kubera's approval for what he has done for Krishnaa depending on his own prowess.

Never Forgets or Forgives

After the terrible trauma of her humiliation in the Kaurava court, Draupadi's most trying ordeal is when Sudeshna, Virata's queen, despatches her to meet her brother Kichaka who is maddened by her beauty.

It is Bhima, again, to whom Draupadi turns for revenge when Kichaka, whom she has shaken off as she had done Jayadratha and rushed for protection into Virata's court, has kicked her in the presence of the king and the disguised Yudhishtira. Her eldest husband, instead of coming to her rescue, reprimands her for making a scene and disturbing the king's dice-game and commands her to repair to the women's apartments.

Furious, Panchali (as Vyasa refers to her more than once in this sequence) seeks out Bhima in the dark of the night in Virata's palace, as a maidservant (befittingly her disguise is that of Sairandhri) would steal out on an assignation. Finding him asleep in the kitchen, she snuggles up to him *like* a woman aroused (clearly it is planned seduction), as a wild she-crane presses close to its mate and a three-year old cow in season rubs against a bull. She twines herself round him as a creeper entwines a massive *shala* tree on Gomati's banks, as a lioness clasps the sleeping king of beasts in a dense forest, as a she-elephant embraces a huge tusker. As Bhima awakens in her arms, Draupadi administers the *coup-de-grace* by addressing him in dulcet *vina*-like tones pitched at the *Gandhara* note, the third in the octave. To rouse his anger, she narrates all her misfortunes, even how she, a princess, has now to carry water for

the queen's toilet and particularly mentions how she swoons when he wrestles with wild beasts, having to bear barbed comments from maids. She laments over mighty Arjuna, consumer of Khandava, hiding in the inner apartments in female attire instead of protecting her and exclaims what can be more painful than her wasting away despite her husbands being alive. Finally, in an ineffable feminine touch, she extends to him her palms chapped with grinding unguents for the queen. His reaction is all that she had planned for so consummately:

Wolf-waisted foe-crushing Bhima covered
His face with the
Delicate, chapped hands of his wife,
And burst into tears." (IV.20.30)

Kichaka's death is sealed. When Bhima has pounded him into a misshapen lump, Panchali recklessly flaunts the horror before his kin, revelling in her revenge. They abduct her to burn her with his corpse and she has, once again, to be saved by Bhima.

There is a piquant touch added in a Kannada folk myth. To grant Draupadi's prayer that Bhima should never forget her sorrow, Krishna creates onions and throws them into Virata's kitchen, so that whenever

Bhima peels one, his eyes burn and he recalls Draupadi.¹⁵ Even after the war, when Ashvatthama has slain all her sons in a night-raid, it is to Bhima that she turns for wreaking revenge.

Ill-fated from Birth

Catching these nuances, in her splendid recreation of Draupadi's last moments in *Yuganta*, Iravati Karve has her whisper to Bhima, "Aryaputra, in the next birth, be the eldest!" There is, undoubtedly, a special relationship between them, which Bhatta Narayana dramatized in his play *Venisamhara* (6.40-41):

With this very hand smeared with
Suyodhana's blood
I will bind up Panchali's black
tresses,
pulled apart by Duhshasana.
My queen, daughter of the
Panchala king...

Look at me, and cease
this fearful trembling.
Touch this blood, clotted on my
hands—
all that remains of the beast
Duhshasana who dragged you
into the council of kings'
and, beloved, touch this blood as well,
still liquid and smeared on all
my body,
of the Kuru king whose thigh my
mace crushed to extinguish
the fire of your disgrace.¹⁶

As women, both Kunti and Draupadi are singularly ill fated. Like her mother-in-law, Draupadi never enjoys possession of her first love. Kunti had chosen Pandu above all kings in the *svayamvara* ceremony and lost him to the voluptuous Madri. How deeply this pained her is voiced frankly as she finds Pandu lying dead in her co-wife's arms (I.125.23). Similarly, before Arjuna's turn came to be with Draupadi, he chose exile. Her anguish at losing him to Ulupi, Chitrangada and Subhadra in succession is expressed with moving *abhimana*, hurt self-image:



Kichaka insults Draupadi in court¹⁴:
Painting by Ravi Varma

Go son of Kunti,
 where she of the Satvatas is!
 A second knot loosens the first,
 however tightly re-tied.” (I.220.17)

During their exile, when he has left to acquire weapons from the gods, she voices how much she misses him in plangent verses:

Arjuna with two hands was
 like Kartavirya-Arjuna with many;
 without that excellent Pandava,
 this forest has no charm.
 Wherever I look, I see only
 an empty earth.
 This forest, with its flowering
 trees,
 its pleasing sights,
 gives me no pleasure at all,
 for Arjuna is absent;
 his skin is the colour of dark blue
 clouds, his strength an elephant’s.
 Without that lotus-eyed hero, how
 insipid is the Kamyaka
 forest! I think of the thunder-
 roaring twang of the
 bow of ambidextrous Arjuna,
 and my peace is gone.”
 (III.80.12-15)

As we have seen, she always gets Bhima to do what she wants by bringing in comparisons with Arjuna’s prowess.

Puppet like Submission

As Draupadi replaces Kunti as the central female interest in the epic with the *Sabha Parva*, there appears to be a sudden decline in the status of women.¹⁷ This begins with her silent consent to the shocking dispensation of becoming the common wife of five brothers. Her father and brother protest, but she does not utter a word throughout the multiple exchanges between them, Kunti, Yudhishtira, and Vyasa. This is significant because, immediately before this, she had astonished everyone by publicly refusing to accept Karna as a suitor despite Drupada’s announcement that anyone passing the test would win

her hand. The very first night in the potter’s hut—where the disguised Pandavas have taken shelter in Panchala—sees mother-in-law and daughter-in-law paralleling each other in their sleeping postures. Kunti lies horizontally at the Pandavas’ heads, while Yajnaseni lays herself down similarly at their feet, silently. Does Vyasa’s story of her asking for many husbands in an earlier birth represent a psychological truth about Krishnaa the *kanya*?¹⁸

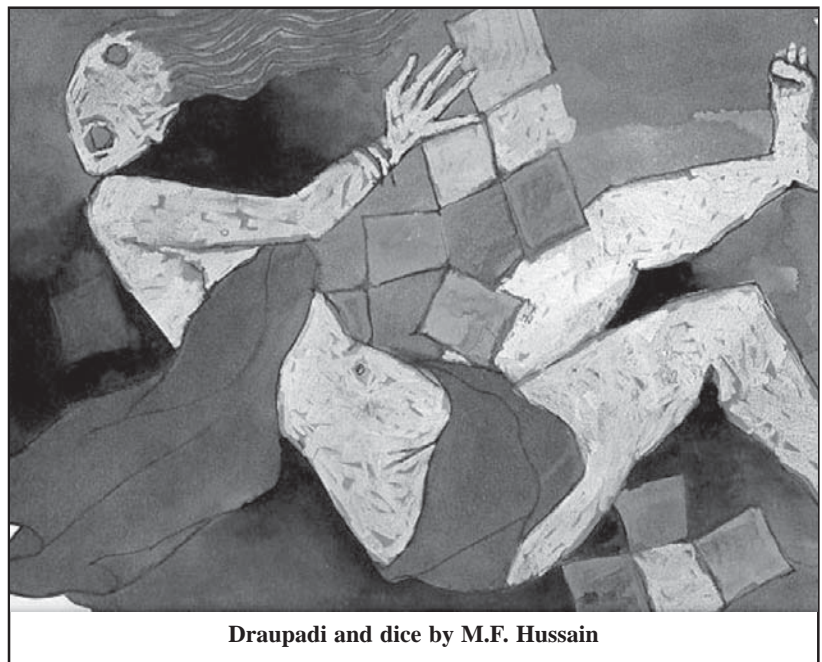
Later, the manner in which she is described by her husband Yudhishtira, as he stakes her like chattel at dice, wipes out her very individuality as a human being. We are reminded that when she emerged from the fire-altar she was called “Panchali,” also meaning “puppet”:

Neither short
 nor tall, neither dark nor pale,
 with wavy dark-blue hair,
 eyes like autumn-lotus leaves,
 fragrant like the lotus...
 extraordinarily accomplished,
 soft-spoken and gentle...
 She is the last to sleep,
 the first to wake

even earlier than the early-rising cowherds and shepherds. Her sweat-bathed face is lovely, like the lotus, like the jasmine; slim-waisted like the middle of the sacred vedi, long-haired, pink-lipped, and smooth-skinned. (II.65.33-37)

From Passive to Aggressive

It is then that, all of a sudden, we find a complete reversal from meek passivity to an extraordinarily articulate and forceful expression of a personality that towers above all the men in the royal court. Fire-altar-born Yajnaseni shocks everyone by challenging the Kuru elders’ very concept of *dharma* in a crisis where the modern woman would collapse in hysterics. Her questions show her to be intellectually far superior to all the courtiers. Instead of meekly obeying her husband’s summons, as expected from her conduct so far, she sends back a query which remains unanswered till the end of the epic: can a gambler, having lost himself, stake his wife at all? She has a brilliant mind, is utterly “one-in-herself” in Esther Harding’s phrase for the



Draupadi and dice by M.F. Hussain

“virgin,” and does not hesitate to berate the Kuru elders for countenancing wickedness. As Karna directs her to be dragged away to the servants’ quarters, she cries out to her silent husbands. Finding no response, with quicksilver presence of mind she seizes upon a social ritual to wrest some moments of respite from pillaging hands. Her speech drips with sarcasm. The elders whom she ceremoniously salutes, deliberately using the word

“duty,” have remained silent in the face of Vidura’s exhortation to do their duty and protect the royal daughter-in-law. Significantly, it is only Vikarna, one of the junior Kauravas, and a servant-maid’s son Vidura who voice their outrage. The epic says that it was Dharma (Vidura’s other name) who protected Draupadi when she was sought to be stripped. Let us attend to Draupadi’s choice of words:

One duty remains, which
I must now do. Dragged
by this mighty hero,
I nearly forgot. I
was so confused.
Sirs, I bow to all of you, all my elders
and superiors. Forgive me for
not doing so earlier.
It was not all my fault,
gentlemen of the *sabha*.” (II.67.30)

It is a “mighty hero” who is dragging into public view his single-cloth-clad menstruating sister-in-law by her hair. She has “nearly forgot” her duty, while the elders are wholly oblivious of theirs, despite being reminded by a servant-maid’s son. It is surely not her fault that she is being outraged and it is certainly not she who is “so confused,” but rather the Kuru elders, of whom Bhishma says,

“Our elders, learned in *dharma*,
Drona and others, sit



Disrobing Draupadi, Basholi 18th c.¹⁹

Here with lowered eyes like
dead men
with life-breaths gone.” (II.69.20)

Rescuer of Husbands

When the repentant Dhritrashtra offers her boons, Yajnaseni takes advantage of this to win back freedom for her enslaved husbands. Karna pays her a remarkable tribute, saying that none of the world’s renowned beautiful women had accomplished such a feat: like a boat she has rescued her husbands who were drowning in a sea of sorrows (II.72.1-3). Later, (*Udyoga Parva* 29.41-42), Krishna reiterates her remarkable deed saying:

“That day Krishnaa did a deed
exceedingly pure and difficult.
Herself and the Pandavas she
lifted up
as in a ship from the swell of the
terrible sea.”

With striking dignity, she refuses to take the third boon Dhritrashtra offers. For, with her husbands free and in possession of their weapons from his two boons, she does not need any gift from anyone. Can we even imagine any woman married off to five brothers, though won by one, and made to spend a year with each in turn, regardless of her own feelings, so that none has more of her than the others? Be staked at dice by her

husband like an insensate object? Suffer molestation in public, with her husbands sitting mute? Face abduction in the forest and see her husband forgive Jayadratha the abductor? Be molested again in Virata’s court, be reprimanded by her husband for making a scene, and be carried off to be burnt alive? With war imminent, witness her husbands ask Krishna to sue for peace? Finally, find all her kith and kin and sons slain—and still remain sane?

And not just sane, but in such command of her intellectual faculties as to succeed in persuading Yudhishtira to rule instead of taking to the forest after the war?

An illuminating contrast can be seen in Shaivya (also called Taramati), wife of king Harishchandra.²⁰ She does not utter a word when Vishvamitra drives her out of her kingdom, belabouring her with a stick because she is too exhausted to move swiftly (VII.29). She herself suggests to Harishchandra that, since she has fulfilled her function by presenting him with a son, he should sell her to pay Vishvamitra what he requires (VIII.30-31). When the Brahmin to whom she is sold drags her by the hair, she remains silent (VIII.56). This is precisely the paradigm of the *patrivrata*, chaste wife, who utterly wipes out her own self and lives only in, through, and for her husband.

Crafts Her Own Morality

The *kanya*’s personality, on the other hand, blazes forth, quite independent of her spouse and her offspring. She seeks to fulfil herself regardless of social and family norms. Draupadi does not rest until the revenge her father sought is complete and the insult she suffered is wiped out in blood. Through the thirteen years of exile, she never allows her

husbands and her *sakha* to forget how she was outraged and how they were deceitfully deprived of their kingdom. The marital relationship between Draupadi and the Pandavas is constantly that of a *mahout* goading a somnolent elephant into the fray. Krishna's urging Yudhishtira in the forest that *karma* and individual enterprise, *purushartha*, are indispensable to preserve society and one's integrity anticipates her *sakha* Krishna's discourse to Arjuna on the battlefield. "She is the only one among the Pandavas and Kauravas who assumes an atheistic, *nastika*, stance in a violent outburst, like one who does not believe in scriptural norms of morality. This calls forth Yudhishtira's plea that she abandon criticising the *dharma* observed by the strictly scriptural—as he is doing in accepting the exile for 13 years, sticking to the conditions of the dice-game—for that is *nastika* heresy. She gives this back in full measure after the war when he wishes to become a hermit, saying that were his brothers not as crazy as he, they would have tied him up as an atheist non-believing in raja-dharma and ruled the kingdom themselves (XII.14.33)."

The healthy respect in which her husbands hold her has been well brought out in Rajshekhar Basu's delightful take-off "Panchali—Beloved of the Five."²¹ In exile she says (III.32, III.30.23) that creatures are like wooden dolls (*darumayi yosha*) in the hands of a whimsical creator, recalling the significance of her own name Panchali, anticipating King Lear's heart-wrenching, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods/They kill us for their sport," and Thomas Hardy's, "the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess." This, she says, is part of the political science she learned

listening to a learned Brahmin discoursing to her father and brothers (III.30.60-61).

The complete account of income and expenditure of her husbands was in her grasp, and she alone knew the extent of their wealth. She kept track of what each of the many maidservants attending on her husband was doing. It is she who used to make all the arrangements for Yudhishtira's tours, keeping count of the large retinue of horses and elephants and their quartering, laying aside her own comfort (III.233.458). It is not without justification that she is called a *pandita*, scholar (III.28.2).²²

A particularly piquant revelation is that she takes particular care never to surpass her mother-in-law in ornaments, dress, and even the food taken, besides controlling herself to avoid all criticism of Kunti (III.233.38, 41). When she finds her husbands, except Sahadeva, and even her *sakha* Krishna in favour of suing for peace, she brings to bear all her feminine armoury to turn the course of events inexorably towards war. Pouring out a litany of her injuries, she takes up her serpent-like thick glossy hair and, with eyes streaming with tears that wet her breasts, urges Krishna to recall these tresses when he sues for peace.²³ At this point, Shaonli Mitra's Draupadi²⁴ asks Krishna whether, if she agrees to forgive the Kauravas as he wishes, he will guarantee that in future no woman will be outraged as she has been. Krishna remains silent.

The epic recounts that after Dvaraka was submerged, the mighty archer Arjuna failed to protect the Yadava women from being abducted by staff-wielding Abhirs. In the epic, sobbing with rage and hurt, she declares that her five sons led by Abhimanyu and her old father and

brothers will avenge her if her husbands will not. Krishna's response is all that she has been aiming at:

Consider those you disfavour
As already dead!...
The Himavant hills may move, the
Earth shatter
In a hundred pieces, heaven
collapse;
My promise stands...
You will see your enemies killed.
(V.82.45, 48)

The course of the epic is determined by the dark five and Kunti, of whom three are *kanyas*: Kali-Satyavati, Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, Vasudeva Krishna, Arjuna, Draupadi-Krishna, and Kunti. While Yamuna's black waters link the first three, Arjuna is a second Krishna while Satyavati, Kunti, and Draupadi are prototypes of one another. It is Draupadi, Krishna, and Arjuna who jointly persuade Yudhishtira not to pursue his decision to renounce the throne after the war, with Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa adding his voice to clinch the case. There is also a thematic motif of Ganga opposed to Yamuna. Hastinapura ruled by the Kauravas is on the Ganga, while Indraprastha established by the Pandavas is on the Yamuna. It is Krishna, Krishna, Arjuna, and Vyasa, all linked with the Yamuna, who are opposed by Bhishma, son of Ganga.

Relations with Other Women

What do other women have to say about Draupadi? Krishna's favourite wife Satyabhama circumambulates Draupadi in admiration and in gratitude (III.224). Draupadi's only rival is Krishna's favourite sister Subhadra. Yet, when meeting Draupadi for the first time, she is sent by Arjuna dressed as a *gopika* (cowgirl) to gain her favour. Vyasa himself describes her in *Vana*

Parva as priya ca darshaniya ca pandita ca pativrata, “beautiful, learned, devoted to her husbands and beloved of them” (III.27.2). Like a mother, she first feeds her husbands and all Brahmins and only then assuages her hunger with what is left over (III.50.10). Kunti asks Krishna to convey to “that auspicious and renowned Krishna, O Krishna, that what irked me most was not losing the kingdom or the exile of my sons, but the humiliation of that great dark woman weeping in the assembly hall as they mocked her. Nothing more painful than that insult.”

She urges him to tell Arjuna from her side to “follow Draupadi’s path” (V.137.17-19).

As with Kunti, the power and nobility that radiates from Draupadi places her far above the other female characters and most of the male. When Jatasura abducts Draupadi along with the twins and her eldest husband Yudhishtira, his warning to the *rakshasa* contains a significant revelation of her destructiveness:

In touching this woman you have drunk a jar of well-stirred poison. (III.157.26)

While she is like a boat to her husbands, saving them from drowning in the sea of distress, to the wicked she is death itself. Her impact is borne witness to by none other than Duryodhana in his speech to Kripa after Karna’s death:

Krishnaa-Draupadi, anguished Krishnaa, engages in fierce asceticism to destroy me and ensure her husbands’ success; ever she lies on the ground. Even Vasudeva’s sister, discarding status and pride, became as Krishnaa’s maid, ever obeying her.” (IX.4.18-19)

In keeping with her deadly role, she is left childless after the war, her *sakha* having taken no steps to protect her five sons from assassination. Indeed, the dark, fiery, “virgin,” Draupadi is the counterpoint of the fair, traditional wife, “very auspicious” Subhadra who becomes subordinate to the overwhelming destructive nature of her senior co-wife.²⁵

Sati who Turns Kanya

Draupadi is the only instance in epic mythology of a *sati* becoming a *kanya*. Addressing Krishna in anguish when they meet in the forest, she exclaims accusingly, “O Krishna, despite being a *sati* admired of women, I was, in the very presence of Pandu’s sons, O Madhusudana, dragged by my hair”



Draupadi, Pandavas, Ashvatthama

(III.12.121). The Southern recension of the epic states that in an earlier birth as Nalayani (also named Indrasena) she was married to Maudgalya, an irascible sage afflicted with leprosy. She was so utterly devoted to her abusive husband that when a finger of his dropped into their meal, she took it out and calmly ate the rice without revulsion. Pleased by this, Maudgalya offered her a boon, and she asked him to make love to her in five lovely forms. As she was insatiable, Maudgalya got fed up and reverted to asceticism. When she remonstrated and insisted that he continue their love life, he cursed her to be reborn and have five

husbands to satisfy her sexual craving. Thereupon, she practised severe penance and pleased Shiva, obtaining the boon of regaining virginity after being with each husband.²⁶ By asserting her womanhood and refusing to accept a life of blind subservience to her husband, Nalayani the *sati* was transformed into Yajnaseni the *kanya*.

Her Earlier Incarnations

According to the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*,²⁷ she is the reincarnation of the shadow-Sita who was Vedavati reborn after molestation at Ravana’s hands and would become the Lakshmi of the fourteen Mahendras in Svarga, of whom five incarnated as the

Pandavas. Because she existed in the three *yugas* (in *Satya* as Vedavati, in *Treta* as Sita and in *Dvapara* as Draupadi), she is known as *trihayani* and being *vaishnavi krishnabhakta* is named “Krishnaa.” Draupadi’s astonishing intellectual acumen also has its roots in Vedavati, who was so named because the Vedas were ever present on the tip of her tongue (*ibid.* 14.64):

satatam murttimantashca vedashcatvar eva ca/ santi yasyashca jihvagre sa ca vedavati smrita//

Significantly, this text states (14.57) that after the fire ordeal, the lovely and youthful shadow-Sita was advised by Rama and Agni to worship Shiva. While doing so, *kamatura pativyagra prarthayanti punah punah*, tormented by sexual desire and eager for a husband, she prayed again and again, asking the three-eyed god five times for a husband.

As far back as 1887, the great Bengali litterateur Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay

drew an illuminating distinction between Sita and Draupadi,²⁸ noting that while the former is chiefly a wife in whom the softer feminine qualities are expressed, the latter is pre-eminently a tremendously forceful queen in whom woman's steel will, pride, and brilliant intellect are most evident, a befitting consort indeed of mighty Bhimasena. He also pointed out that Draupadi represents woman's selflessness in performing all household duties flawlessly but detachedly. In her, he sees exemplified the *Gita's* prescription for controlling the senses by the higher self. Since a wife is supposed to present her husband with a son, she gives one to each of the Pandavas, but no more, and in that exemplifies the conquest over the senses, as in the case of Kunti. Once this duty is over, there is no evidence of any sexual relationship between her and the Pandavas, each of whom has a wife of his own. However, Draupadi can call no man her own and that is why she, like Kunti, stands apart from other married women. Despite having five husbands, Draupadi is the acme of chastity, *priya ca darshiniya ca pandita ca pativrata* (III.27.2), "beloved, lovely, scholarly and faithful to her husbands." Akin to *sakha* Krishna, like the lotus bud and the parrot her icon holds, she is of this world of senses, yet never immersed in it. The bloom of her unique personality spreads its fragrance far and wide, soaring above the worldly mire in which it is rooted.

Left to Die Alone

Ultimately, the fact that Draupadi stands quite apart from her five husbands is brought tellingly home when not one of them—not even Sahadeva of whom she took care with maternal

solicitude as directed by Kunti, nor her favourite Arjuna—tarries by her side when she falls and lies dying on the Himalayan slopes, *nathavati anathavat*²⁹(husbanded, yet unprotected). Indeed, only Bhima speaks. That, too, is a question addressed to Yudhishtira, not a word of sympathy for her. The crowning insult is the answer Yudhishtira provides: she has fallen because she was partial to Arjuna. That is when we realise that this remarkable "virgin" never asked anything for herself, while her mother-in-law Kunti and great-grandmother-in-law Satyawati both sought the status of *virgo intacta* and the royal throne for their sons. Born gratuitously, thrust abruptly into a polyandrous marriage, Krishnaa seems to have had a profound awareness of being an instrument in bringing about the extinction of an effete epoch, so that a new age could take birth. And, being so aware, Yajnaseni offered up her entire being as a flaming sacrifice in that holocaust of which Krishna was the presiding deity. Yet, did all that happened in eighteen days fulfil her hopes of being the cause of a righteous war, *dharma yuddha*?³⁰

Instrument of Higher Design

This feature of transcending the lower self, of becoming an instrument of a higher design, is what seems to constitute a common trait in these ever-to-be-remembered maidens. Remembering them daily, learning from them how to sublimate our narrow ego to reach the Higher Self, we transcend sin.

These maidens provide a parallel to the three forms of the ancient Arcadian goddess, Hera: maiden, fulfilled woman and woman of sorrows. Hera, too, would emerge from her bath in the spring

Kanathos as virgin anew. As Hera is also her daughter Hebe and Demeter is also Kore-Persephone, so is Satyawati also Kunti and Kunti also Draupadi. Like Demeter-Nemesis and the "awful" Persephone queen of Hades, who arouse both admiration and fear, Draupadi is Krishnaa, the dark goddess, the virgin Vira-Shakti whose cult still exists in southern India, a manifestation of the goddess Kali, supping full of horrors on the battlefield at night, the primal uncontrolled, chaotic persona of *Prakriti*. Similarly, in the northern hills, the *Pandavalila* of Garhwal celebrates her as an incarnation of the same goddess with an intriguing reference to her eight avatars:

Draupadi took eight incarnations;
The Kali of Kailash did the
Kurukshetra war.³¹

The later story of Barbareek, son of Ghatotkacha, adds a significant dimension to the epic account. When his decapitated head that has witnessed the entire war is asked who really slew the Kauravas, he answers that he saw only the Sudarshan discus flashing everywhere and Draupadi roaming the battlefield drinking the blood of the enemies.³²

Draupadi, like the Kore Helen, appears with the skiey announcement that she will be the destruction of warriors. Like Deirdre, the "sorrowful one," she is the cause of wholesale destruction of warriors and is a mother left without any children. Draupadi, like Demeter and Helen, is always subjected to violence: her *svayamvara* ends in strife; a fivefold marriage is imposed upon her; she is outraged in the royal court twice over; Jayadratha and Kichaka

attempt to rape her; and the Upakichakas seek to burn her alive. Like vengeful Demeter-Erinyes and Helen, Draupadi seems to attract rape and wreaks vengeance thereafter. Again, like the vengeful Amba who pursues Bhishma through death itself, whose suicide in flames represents the inner anguish consuming her and who takes rebirth to exact blood-price for her outraged femininity, Draupadi is veritably a virgin goddess of war like Artemis and Athene. □

Endnotes

- 1 C. Minkowski: "Snakes, Satras and the Mahabharata" in *Essays on the Mahabharata* ed. A. Sharma, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, p. 391 and A. Hildebeitel: *Rethinking the Mahabharata* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 188.
- 2 Hildebeitel *ibid.* pp. 190-191.
- 3 *Brahmavaivarta Purana* 4.115.73.
- 4 Dr. Nrisingha Prasad Bhaduri: "Draupadi," *Bartaman*, annual number 1396, p.26.
- 5 Pratibha Ray portrays this at length in her novel *Yajnaseeni: the story of Draupadi* (Rupa, New Delhi, 1995, translated by Pradip Bhattacharya) and Roopa Ganguli conveyed the anguish dramatically in the Bengali teleserial *Draupadi*.
- 6 *The Hymns of the Rigveda* 10.58.40-41, translated by R.T.H. Griffith, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973. Repeated in the *Atharva Veda* XIV.2.3. Sayana explains that till sexual desire arises in the girl, Soma enjoys her. When it has arisen, Gandharva has her and transfers her at marriage to Agni from whom man takes her to produce wealth and sons cf. S.D. Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1978). The painting is by Nandalal Bose, www.kamat.com/kalranga/mythology/mahabharat/draupadi.htm
- 7 Alf Hildebeitel: *The Cult of Draupadi*, Vol. I, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1988 p. 438.
- 8 Archana Sahni, personal communication and "Unpeeling the layers of Draupadi" in the National Symposium on the Pancha Kanya of Indian Epics, Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Kolkata (forthcoming).
- 9 Hildebeitel *ibid.* p.220, 290. Greek mythology is replete with instances of metamorphoses undergone by virgins to protect themselves against rapists (Daphne, Chloe etc.).
- 10 Three outstanding artistic creations on the predicament of Madhavi are Subodh Ghose's remarkably insightful Bengali retelling "Galav and Madhavi" in *Bharat Prem Katha* (translated by Pradip Bhattacharya, RUPA, Calcutta, 1990), Bhisham Sahni's play *Madhavi* (translated by Ashok Bhalla, Seagull, Calcutta, 2002) and Dr. Chitra Chaturvedi's Hindi novel *Tanaya* (Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad, 1989).
- 11 *Mahabharata*, V.137.16.
- 12 *Ibid.* V.115.11. A. Hildebeitel: *The Ritual of Battle*, Cornell University Press, 1976, p. 222-4.
- 13 Dr. N.P. Bhaduri *op. cit.*
- 14 The painting of Draupadi insulted in Virata's court is by Raja Ravi Varma, www.cyberkerala.com
- 15 A.K. Ramanujam: "On Folk Mythologies and Folk Puranas", *Purana Perennis* ed. W. Doniger, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993, p. 104.
- 16 D.L. Gitomer: "Rakshasa Bhima: Wolfbelly among ogres and Brahmins", *Essays on the Mahabharata* ed. A. Sharma, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, p. 322.
- 17 Pradip Bhattacharya: "Epic Women: East and West—some observations", *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, XXXVII.3, 1995, pp. 67-83.
- 18 Dr S.D. Singh describes this as "the significant but eloquent silence of Draupadi. She is neither appalled nor outraged by the prospect of Pandava polyandry...She is exceedingly trustful and as willing as a woman could be, if her deportment serves as any guide." *Polyandry in Ancient India* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1978) p. 92-93. This is a detail from an 18th century Kangra painting taken from www.asia.si.edu/devi/fulldevi/deviCat81.htm
- 19 *Ibid.* *The Disrobing of Draupadi attributed to Nainsukh* (1710-1778). India, Punjab Hills, Basholi, ca. 1765.
- 20 *Markandeya Purana* VII-VIII, Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta.
- 21 Parashuram's "Panchapriya Panchali", translated into English by Major General S.K. Sen, VSM at www.boloji.com and in *A Pauranik Score* (Indialog Publications, New Delhi, forthcoming).
- 22 Hildebeitel: Rethinking the Mahabharata p. 268.
- 23 Draupadi leaving her tresses unbound, as a symbol of her insult, is the exact opposite of what Sita does. She leaves her hair braided in a single plait. Sarama assures her that soon Rama will loosen her bound hair (*Ramayana, Yuddha kanda* 33.34).
- 24 Shaonli Mitra: *Nathaboti Anathabot*, M.C. Sirkar & Sons, Calcutta, 1990, p.63
- 25 Alf Hildebeitel: "Two Krsnas, three Krsnas, four Krsnas, more Krsnas", *Journal of South Asian Literature*, XX.1, 1985, pp.71-77.
- 26 Vettam Mani: *Puranic Encyclopaedia*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, p. 549. He does not provide the reference to the source of this story. Also M.V. Subramaniam: *The Mahabharata Story: Vyasa & Variations*, Higginbothams, Madras, 1967, p. 46-47. The Jaina *Nayadhammakahao* picks this up and tells of suitorless Sukumarika reborn as a celestial courtesan because of her passion who is born as Draupadi (B.N. Sumitra Bai's "The Jaina Mahabharata" in *Essays on the Mahabharata* ed. A. Sharma, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, p.253).
- 27 *Prakriti khanda*, 14.54 and *Krishna Janma khanda* 116.22-23.
- 28 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Draupadi" in *Bibidha Prabandha* Part 1, 1887.
- 29 A term used by Dhritrashtra to describe Draupadi in his lament in 1.157 and by Kunti in 5.90.87. Shaonli Mitra created a riveting one-woman performance of this name in Bengali to depict the agony of Draupadi, *op.cit.*
- 30 Shaonli Mitra *op.cit.* p.65.
- 31 Hildebeitel, *op.cit.* p. 291 and vol. 2, 1991, p. 400. William Sax, "Ritual and performance in the Pandavalila of Garhwal" in *Essays on the Mahabharata* ed. by A. Sharma, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1991, p.290.
- 32 The Khatu Shyamji temple in Sikar district of Rajasthan is dedicated to Barbareek whose head is supposed to be buried here. The story forms part of two teleserials: B.R. Chopra's "Mahabharat Katha" and another named "Khatu Shyam." <http://www.khatushyamji.com/legend.htm>, http://www.shrikhatushyamji.com/shri_shyam_katha_ii.php3?lang=e □