



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

EXPOSING MYTHS

DRAUPADI HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST VICTIM OF THE CONSPIRACY TO DENIGRATE OUR HISTORY. SHE WAS AN EMBODIMENT OF SPIRITUALITY, KNOWLEDGE, SOCIAL PROBITY AND COURAGE

While scholars and philosophers have written volumes in Draupadi's praise, the general public somehow has many wrong notions about this powerful protagonist of *Dwapara Itihasa*. Few are knowledgeable about her intellectual capabilities or about her trials, tribulations and contribution in upholding the principles of justice, equality, human dignity, valour and role in highlighting women's status.

Draupadi was a highly educated and "Yoddha Naari" with impeccable Vedic cultural values, upbringing and is rightly revered amongst the Panch Kanya (five pure women). As per our books *Kampilyamahatmya*, Draupadi is Kampilvasini and re-incarnation of Parvati. In South India and South East Asia, umpteen temples exist revering Draupadi Amman.

Our interest and understanding of the iconic personality come from our deep research and century's old links to her land, Kampilya (Kampil, UP). A very prosperous empire in ancient times, Kampilya was a land of Chakravarty Kings (स राजा ब्रह्मदत्तस्तु पुरीमध्यवसत् तदा। काम्पिल्यां परया लक्ष्या देवराजो यथा दिवम॥ Balkand, *Ramayana*) and *adhyatma*. In Dwapar yug it was the capital of Panchala Mahajanapada, and the place of Draupadi's birth and *Swayamvar*. Coming from such a spiritually evolved land, she was an embodiment of spirituality, knowledge, social probity and courage.



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"Draupadi is portrayed as a symbol of dignity and self-respect (...) proved the power of faith," said our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, in his message to Draupadi Dream Trust, in 2013. A truly liberated soul, she is considered the ideal woman by the late Shri Ram Manohar Lohia.

DELIBERATE DISTORTIONS

Despite her exalted character, the disconnect with our factual past has led to unsavory myths about Maharani Draupadi.

Draupadi is not a mythological character. She is as historical as any of us today. The misinterpretation of our *Dwapar Itihasa*, narrated in the *Mahabharata*, has created many misconceptions. Deliberate distortions and myths have been propagated over centuries to dilute our *itihasa*. Draupadi has been the biggest victim of the conspiracy to denigrate our history. As the new dawn of awakening to our glorious past has generated interest in knowing the truth, it is appropriate to have clarity on this ideal woman of *Bharatiya Itihasa*, our popular Panchali who became the first Maharani of Indraprastha.

DID SHE LAUGH AT DURYODHANA?

The most disturbing myths about Maharani Draupadi are ones that actually overturn the reasons that led to the *Dharma Yudh* at

COVER STORY/MAHARANI DRAUPADI

Kurukshetra. For centuries it has been mischievously propagated that Draupadi laughed at her *devar* Duryodhana and said 'andhe ka beta andha' when he mistook a waterpool to be a carpet and fell into the *Maya* water pool. How can we say Draupadi laughed at Duryodhana as he fell into the pond at the Indraprasth Palace? She was not even present at the site, because *Sabha Parv*, while describing the events at the coronation of King Yudhishtira at Indraprastha, does not mention her presence at that point in time and place.

Let us logically examine this important issue, which has a great bearing on the historical understanding of the fratricidal Kurukshetra war. Yudhishtira is to be crowned Maharaja and obviously his wife Draupadi, the Maharani, will be busy preparing for the *Rajyabhishek*, looking after the arrangements, atithi satkar of almost 100 *Rajas/ Yuvrajas* and a large number of guests. How can she be following her *Devar* or taking him around to admire her new palace? It is the palace officials or *daasis* who take the visiting dignitaries around for site seeing, not the *Kul Vadhu*. She was neither present where he fell nor did she see him fall and never said, *Andhe ka beta andha*. It was Bhim who, when he heard about Duryodhana's adventurous fall in the pool, remarked sarcastically, *Hey Dhritrashtra Putra*.

The above two misperceptions have arisen because of misinterpretation of the insinuations made by Duryodhana to his father, on his return to Hastinapura. His insinuations arise out of his hatred for Draupadi and Pandavas, and are based on his imagination that Draupadi insulted him.

CAN A NEWBORN EMERGE OUT OF BURNING FIRE?

Another myth is that Draupadi 'emerged' from a *Yajna kund*, or sacrificial fire, linking it to the multiple adjectives with her name. She is also called *Yajna Senini* or warrior born after fire ritual, and Agni Putri, daughter of Fire, because she was born after her father's penance and a *yajna*, organised by him, to fulfil his desire to have a warrior son. Draupadi was born to the Queen of Panchala as the twin, along with her brother Dushtadhyuma. The reference is a symbolic way of saying that she acquired fiery traits and as her father prayed for a warrior child, she acquired those warrior traits.

WHY SHE IS PANCHALI?

To get the facts correct, one has to know who she, and the five Pandavas actually are. Though there are various versions explaining the original lineage and birth of Draupadi, all refer to her relationship with Shiva, and Mother Shakti. As per the book *Kampilmahatma*, Draupadi is the reincarnation of mother Shakti Parvati. As deemed by Shiva, Parvati became the daughter of King Drupada

of *Panchala*. Shiva says-

- "O Parvati, you will reside in secret in the country of Panchala, in the town of Kampilya, with the name of Kampilya vasini. There the Munis will perform a fire sacrifice in your name..... by the mantra starting with
- आणाय स्वाहा पानाय स्वाहा ब्यानाय स्वाहा।
- अम्बेऽअम्बिके ऽअम्बालिके न मा नयति कश्चन
- ससस्त्यश्वकः सुभद्रिकां भद्रां काम्पीलवासिनीम्॥ 23/18 (*yajurveda* 23/18). Shiva further states that he will meet her in different forms

On getting this insight through Sri Krishna, and as per prevailing custom, she accepted five husbands - which only a bold courageous woman can do.

She is known as Panchali not because she had five husbands, but because she was the Princess of Panchala kingdom – like Gandhari was named as she was the Princess of Gandhar and likewise names of Kashalya, Janaki, Kekayi etc in *Ramayana Itihasa*.

Another myth relates to her is insulting Karna by preventing his participation in her *Swayamvaar* ceremony. *Swayamvaar* implies that she had the right to choose a husband. As Karna's social status was not known to her or others she denied him the right to contest. It was no insult to him.

WAS SHE DISHONOURED?

The greatest myth is about her being disrobed and pulling off limitless lengths of saree which is shown in dance dramas, films and folk performances. In that age, sari was not the dress code. Dress was an upper and lower garment and an *angrakhshak* or *dupatta*. Dr Pradeep Bhattacharya, a retired IAS officer and scholar on *Mahabharata*, has shown in his article in our book *Mahabharata Manthan* that Draupadi was not disrobed. Yes, she was pulled, verbally assaulted and publicly humiliated to insult Pandavas. In those times, even speaking rudely or forcefully touching a woman was great insult to a woman's dignity, akin to disrobing a person publicly. Her call to Sri Krishna silences the *Sabha*.

Due to these misconceptions, Devi Draupadi is portrayed in negative light. Why? Is it because she had the grit to challenge the might of the largest empire, when her modesty was attacked? Is it because the individuality of a liberated progressive woman is never accepted by persons of medieval mindsets? Her deep-rooted cultural upbringing makes her stand out as an icon for all progressive women of all times. It is time to give due justice and honour to the iconic Maharani Draupadi of Indraprastha. ■