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**Draupadi and Sita
the Very Essence of Nari Shakti**

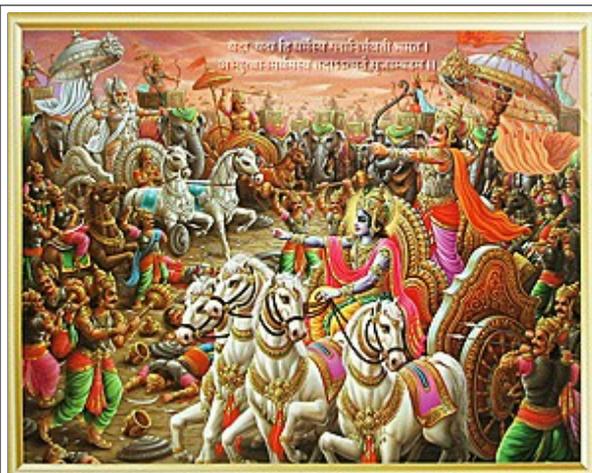
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Naari shakti or woman power has been given great important in Indian culture. While the Adi Shakti, the Primordial One, has been portrayed as the Sacred Feminine, who gives birth to the whole world from her womb, both Indian mythology and Indian history chronicle the existence of powerful women, who have been responsible both for great victory as well as the great downfall of mighty rulers and their legions. The Shrestha Naaris, the five most virtuous women featuring in the great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have veritably shaped the psyche of the modern Indian woman. They have been portrayed as powerful characters; forces to reckon with. While they seemed to be submissive and docile at times, a deeper analysis into their lives and times reveals that they were the true force behind these legends. In this article, we discuss the lives of the two most popular epic figures, Sita and Draupadi - two women, who were responsible for the very existence of the two great Indian epics.

Sita and Draupadi

Sita was the central female character in the Ramayana, while Draupadi was her counterpart in the Mahabharata. Though these two women have been portrayed to be very different from each other, the fact remains that the two great epics actually revolved around these two very powerful characters.

It is said that the world's most violent wars have been fought for one reason - to attain the love of a woman. This is true of Sita and Draupadi, who were, in fact, responsible for the great battles waged in both the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. They were, indirectly, the cause of the very existence of these two epics.



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BATTLE OF KURUKSHETRA



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BATTLE BETWEEN RAMA AND RAVANA

Let us now look into the lives of these two powerful legends.

The Story of Devi Sita

Devi Sita, also spelled as Seeta, was the consort of Rama, an avatar of Sri Maha Vishnu. Considered to be an avatar or incarnation of Sri Maha Lakshmi, she is revered as the very essence of Indian womanhood; a veritable standard for the highest of womanly virtues for all Hindu women. The story of Devi Sita portrays her undying devotion, dedication, self-sacrifice, courage and virtuosity.

Sita was the daughter of Bhoomi Devi or Mother Earth. Literally meaning, "furrow", Sita was found by her foster father, Janaka, while he was ploughing the ground as part of a yagna or sacrificial ritual. Interestingly, Sita is also a Vedic goddess, mentioned in the Rig Veda. Here, she is portrayed here, as an Earth Goddess, who blesses the land with fertile soil and a rich growth of crops. This goddess was hence also associated with fertility. The Kaushika Sutra and the Paraskara Sutra often refer to her as the wife of Parjanya (a deity associated with the rains) and also Indra.

Sita's Childhood and Youth

Sita was adopted by Janaka, the King of Mithila and his wife, Sunayana. Hence, she is also referred to as Janaki and Mythili. Janaka was known by another name, Videha, as he had the ability to transcend body consciousness. Hence, Sita was also called Vaidehi, the daughter of Videha.

She spent her entire childhood and youth in the palace of Janaka, as Princess Sita. When she came of marriageable age, she fell in love with Rama, the Prince of Ayodhya and eventually married him in an elaborate Swayamvara ceremony.

The Sita Swayamvara - the Actual Precursor the Ramayana

Janaka announced the Swayamvara of his daughter Sita and invited the greatest rulers from all over India to attend the function. According to the rules of the Swayamvara, a gigantic bow of Shiva would be placed in the center of the mandap. The person who successfully lifted and strung the bow would be able to win the hand of Sita and marry her.

Sita had chanced upon Rama prior to the Swayamvara and both had instantly fallen in love with each other. Rama was one of the invitees of the Swayamvara and was hopeful of winning her hand in marriage. As the Swayamvara proceeded, several kings and princes came forward to string the bow, but none could even lift it. Sita kept praying that Rama would be successful in this Swayamvara and would marry her.

The mighty Ravana, the Demon King of Lanka, fell in love with Sita, the moment he set eyes on her. He was already wedded to the stunningly beautiful Mandodari and yet, desired Sita beyond measure. He was supremely confident of his strength and was sure that he would be the one to wed Sita.

When his turn came to try his hand at the bow, Ravana arrogantly stepped towards it, bragging that he would be able to lift his with his left little finger. Proceeding to lift the bow, he was stunned to note that it would not budge from its place. He then tried lifting it with one hand and then two. He then applied all his strength at the bow, but it refused to budge an inch. Finally, humiliated, he had to return to his seat. Ravana, however, swore that he would make Sita his own, someday soon.

Rama entered the arena next. Humbly, he touched the bow, put it to his eyes and prayed to Shiva for his grace. Lifting the huge bow in one easy movement, he effortlessly strung it, creating a resounding twang as he checked the tension of the string.



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SITA'S SWAYAMVAR

A joyous Sita placed the Varamala (garland) around Rama's neck and they married each other in a grand wedding ceremony.

The Exile and Sita's Abduction

Soon after their wedding, Rama's stepmother commanded him to go on Vanvaas (exile) for a period of 14 years. Sita, who was raised in the luxuries of the palace, uncomplainingly accompanied her husband on this long Vanvaas, along with Rama's brother, Lakshmana. Spending some time in the forests of Dandaka, they then moved on to Panchavati. Sita willingly endured the difficult life in the forest and was happy to be with her husband at all times.

In the meantime, Ravana, sensing the opportunity that the Vanvaas presented to him, decided to abduct Sita and take her with him. He asked his uncle, Mareecha, to help him out in this mission. Accordingly, Mareecha turned himself into an attractive golden deer and presented himself before Rama's hut.

Amazed by the magnificent deer and wanting it for herself, Sita asked Rama to go after it and capture it. Rama warned her against going after the deer, but Sita would not heed his advice. Finally, Rama gave in to her wish and chased the deer deep into the forest. Mareecha imitated Rama's voice, asking Lakshmana to come help him capture the deer. Though not willing to leave Sita alone in the hermitage, Lakshmana was forced to join Rama. Drawing a line (for protection) on the ground with his arrow, Lakshmana requested her not to stay indoors and refrain from crossing it.



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SITA REQUESTS RAMA TO FETCH THE ILLUSORY GOLDEN DEER

Ravana disguised himself as a Brahmin mendicant and requested Sita for alms. He noticed the Lakshmana-rekha (the line) and told Sita that he would accept the alms only if she crossed the line and gave it to him. Once she was close enough to him, he lifted

the ground she was standing on and placing her on the chariot, drove speedily towards Lanka.



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**JATAYU VADHAM - SITA
HORRIFIED SEEING RAVANA
CUTTING
JATAYU'S WING**

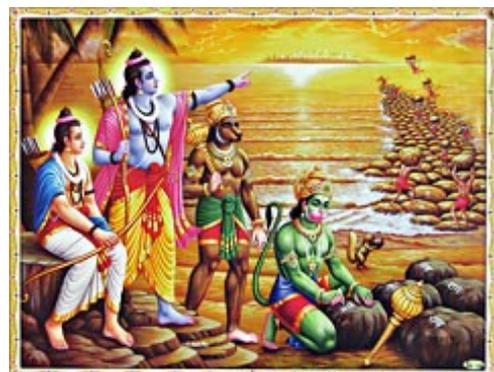
Jayatu, the vulture-king, tried to stop Ravana from abducting Sita. He valiantly fought the demon king, but Ravana chopped off his wings and he fell to the ground. When Rama found Jayatu in a critically wounded state, he took him on his lap and enquired as to what had transpired there and where Sita was. Jayatu told him about Sita's abduction, before breathing his last.

Rama was furious and vowed that he would rescue his beloved wife and bring her back at any cost.

Sita was taken to Lanka and held prisoner by Ravana for a whole year. Though Ravana repeatedly proposed to her, Sita maintained her chastity. In the meantime, Rama sent Hanuman to seek Sita and to assure her that he would be coming soon to rescue her. Sita gave Hanuman her Chudamani (jewellery) and requested him to give it to her husband. Hanuman was caught by the Lankan army and was about to be executed, but managed to escape cleverly. He also burnt down much of Lanka before heading back to his Lord.

Rama's Battle against Ravana

With the help of Hanuman and the rest of the Vanarasena (army of monkeys), Rama built a bridge all the way to Lanka, where he fought Ravana in a long battle, in order to rescue Sita. Eventually winning the war, Rama rescued Sita and decided to take her home to Ayodhya.



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**HANUMAN AND THE VANAR SENNA BUILD A
BRIDGE OF ROCKS ACROSS THE SEA TO
LANKA**

Sita's Agnipariksha



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SITA'S AGNIPARIKSHA

Rama, however, was concerned about public opinion about his wife having lived on another man's territory for so long. He hence asked her to undertake an Agnipariksha (trial by fire) in order to prove her innocence to the rest of the world. Sita meekly submitted to Rama's requirement and entered the fire, coming out unscathed by it, thus proving her chastity.

Rama's Pattabhishekha (Coronation) and Sita's Second Exile

Back in Ayodhya with Sita by his side, Rama was crowned as King in an elaborate Pattabhishekha ceremony. Though Rama was completely loyal to Sita and never looked at another woman, it soon became evident to him that some people in Ayodhya could still not accept the fact that Sita had been held in Ravana's abode for so long. As a ruler, therefore, Rama was looked down upon, because he had accepted his wife, in spite of knowing she had lived at some other man's place.



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SITA WITH LUV AND KUSH

Accordingly, Rama decided that, in order to maintain his own dignity as a ruler, he would have to drive out Sita yet again. By this time, Sita was already pregnant. Rama was well aware of this fact and yet, he decided that she would have to endure a second exile. Only this time, he asked Lakshmana to leave her in the forest, at the hermitage of sage Valmiki. Sita, who had no clue about Rama's plans, was shocked and hurt when Lakshmana dropped her off at the hermitage. In due course of time, Sita gave birth to twin boys, Lava and Kusha. Though a single mother, Sita raised them well, to become intelligent, bright and valiant young men.

Sita Returns to Bhoomi Devi

A few years later, Rama coincidentally met Lava and Kusha in the forest, when they ably captured the horse he had sent out during his Ashwamedha Yagna. When he asked them who their father was, they recited the entire tale of Rama, thereby making him realize that they were his own offspring.

Rama invited Sita to his court and back into his life. Sita, however, handed over the twins to him and sought final refuge in the willing arms of her mother, Bhoomi Devi. Having been deeply wounded and humiliated time and again by Rama, she was not willing to live with him anymore and requested her mother to accept her. Instantly, the earth split open and Bhoomi Devi appeared from it. Holding her daughter's hand, she took her away to a much better place, for all time. Thus, Sita separated from her husband for good.



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**SITA BEING TAKEN AWAY BY
MOTHER EARTH**

Understanding Sita in the Ramayana

Devi Sita is often wrongly portrayed as being an "abala naari" - a helpless woman who is forever meek and submissive. From an extremely feminist perspective, Sita serves as an example of female subservience, who completely endorses male supremacy and gives in to his every whim and fancy, even if it were to wound her permanently. Feminists argue that this attitude of a woman actually encourages domestic violence and subjugation of women in India.

In truth, however, she reflects the attitude of the modern Indian woman, who is smart, capable and knows her mind. Though she appears docile, there are some powerful speeches she made during the Ramayana. The following are some of them:

- Sita speaks out for the first time in Chitrakuta, when she reminds Rama of his promise to her that he would never hurt anyone without provocation.
- The second time, Sita speaks powerfully to Ravana when he comes to her in the guise of the Brahmin. She looks at him for some time and tells him that he does not look like one.
- When Hanuman locates Sita at Lanka, he offers to take her back to Rama. He proposes that Sita should ride on his back. But Sita refuses his offer, saying that she did not want to run away like a thief and would be pleased only if Rama fought Ravana like a true warrior, vanquished him and personally took her back to Ayodhya.



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HANUMAN WITH SITA AT LANKA

Sita as the Essence of the Modern Indian Woman

- Sita was ever graceful and soft and lacked the aggression displayed by Draupadi in the Mahabharata. However, she showed immense mental strength and the strength of character, even under the most excruciating circumstances she faced

during her lifetime.

- Though unhappy in her life, she never tried to portray herself as the victim. When her husband suffered difficult times, she stood by him unflinchingly. She willingly sacrificed all the luxuries of the palace and decided to join her husband during his Vanvaas.
- Sita had great powers of persuasion as well. Though Rama was not initially willing to follow and capture Mareecha, Sita was strong enough in her desire and saw to it that her husband conceded to her desire.
- While at the Ashok Van with Ravana, Sita showed amazing strength of moral character. She never let the demon king anywhere near her. In fact, he was well aware of this fact even when he tried to abduct her. Ravana knew that he would never be able to touch her without her express permission and hence, he never actually touched her - he lifted the entire earth under her feet instead.
- Sita was well aware of her own strength and that is precisely why she agreed to the Agni Pariksha. She could have refused to enter the fire, but had full faith in her own mental and moral strength. She eventually came out the winner.
- She continued to remain strong while at Valmiki's ashram (hermitage) and raised two boys as a single mother. She never once let them feel the absence of their father and nurtured them into wise, valiant young boys.
- Lastly, she revealed her true free spirit when she made the decision of separating from her husband, after leaving her sons in his care. Though deeply hurt, she was graceful to leave with her dignity intact, with her head held high.

Considering the above facts, Sita's story is indeed inspiring and a fine example for the emerging modern Indian woman.

The Tale of Draupadi



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DRAUPADI

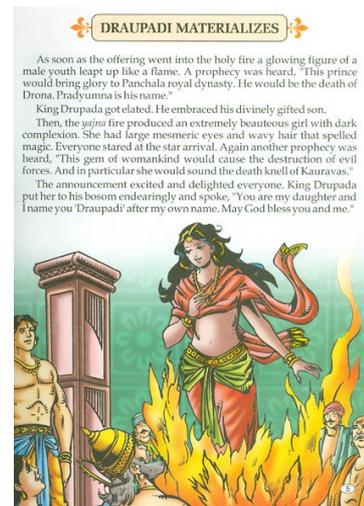
Draupadi, also commonly referred to as Krishna Draupadi, was the daughter of Drupada, the King of Panchala. Hence, she is also called Panchali. In the Mahabharata, she is the central female character, who is also the wife of the five Pandavas. At the end of the war, Yudhishthira, the eldest of the five brothers became the King of Indraprastha. At that point of time, she automatically became the queen of the region. An exceptionally beautiful and virtuous woman, Draupadi was also very strong-willed.

Having fallen for her charms, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, wanted to marry Draupadi. But she was firm in her stand that she would forever remain with the Pandavas. Her rejection of Duryodhana and her public humiliation at the hands of the Kauravas was what actually triggered the very battle of Kurukshetra.

Here is the story of Draupadi...

Birth of Draupadi

Drupada had been defeated by the Pandava prince, Arjuna, who had fought on behalf of his teacher, Drona Acharya. In order to wreak revenge on Drona, Drupada decided to perform a Yagna, whereby he would attain powers to destroy him. Draupadi emerged from this fire, along with her brother, Dhristadyumna. She was a beautiful, olive-skinned young woman and hence, she got the name Krishna. Since she was Drupada's daughter, she was also called Draupadi.



DRAUPADI MATERIALIZES

As soon as the offering went into the holy fire a glowing figure of a male youth leapt up like a flame. A prophecy was heard, "This prince would bring glory to Panchala royal dynasty. He would be the death of Drona. Pradyumna is his name."

King Drupada got elated. He embraced his divinely gifted son.

Then, the *yajna* fire produced an extremely beautiful girl with dark complexion. She had large mesmerizing eyes and wavy hair that spelled magic. Everyone stared at the star arrival. Again another prophecy was heard, "This gem of womankind would cause the destruction of evil forces. And in particular she would sound the death knell of Kauravas."

The announcement excited and delighted everyone. King Drupada put her to his bosom endearingly and spoke, "You are my daughter and I name you 'Draupadi' after my own name. May God bless you and me."

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THE BIRTH OF SITA

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DRAUPADI - THE MOST AMAZING CHARACTER OF THE MAHABHARATA

Draupadi's Swayamvara



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THE SWAYAMVARA OF DRAUPADI

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DRAUPADI - THE DUSKY FIREBRAND

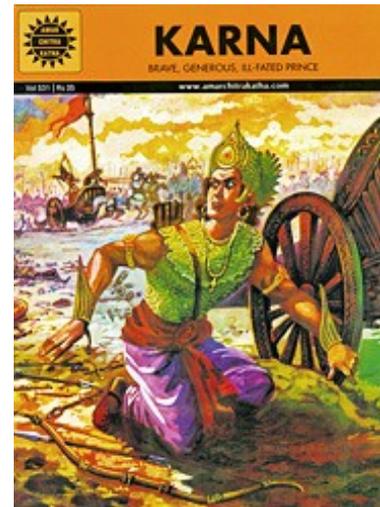
Draupadi was already a youthful woman when she manifested from the fire. Hence, Drupada started thinking in terms of giving her away in marriage. He conducted an elaborate Swayamvara ceremony, whereby the suitors would have to vie with each other to win her hand.

The participants at the Swayamvara were presented with a revolving target overhead. They had to look down at its reflection in a bowl of water and hit it with an arrow. Drupada had wanted Arjuna to win this competition. Draupadi had also fallen in love with the young prince and was praying that he would be able to accomplish the task. Arjuna, who was then in exile, came there with his other 4 brothers, Yudhishthira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva, disguised as Brahmins. He succeeded in this task and won Draupadi's hand in marriage.

Karna at the Swayamvara

Karna, the eldest son of Kunti, who abandoned him at birth; also a close friend of Duryodhan, was also a suitor for Draupadi at her swayamvara. As he was ready to set aim on the revolving target, however, on a gesture from Krishna, Drupada restrained him from shooting the arrow, referring to him as a soota-putra (son of a charioteer). He said that he would not consent to give his daughter's hand in marriage to someone of a lower caste. Karna had been found and adopted by a charioteer and his wife. This insult by Drupada enraged Karna to the extent of taking revenge on Draupadi much later, during the game of dice.

There is a version that states that Draupadi and Karna were very much in love with each other. They wanted to marry each other, but Krishna had opposed this relationship right from the beginning. He had told Draupadi that this was not destined, and hence, would not happen. Draupadi had moved away from Karna at Krishna's insistence. It is believed that this further enraged and insulted Karna, who swore that he would avenge this rejection by Draupadi.



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KARNA

Draupadi Weds the Pandavas

Returning home with his bride, he asked his mother Kunti to come and take a look at what he had brought home with him. Kunti, not being present in the room at the time, absently asked him to share what he had brought, with his brothers. Though Draupadi was shocked by this, she realized that they had to obey their mother's order and hence, she accepted all the five brothers as her husbands.

Krishna later explained to Draupadi that she had earned her five husbands as the result of a boon she had received in a previous birth. In that birth, she was born as Nalayini and had prayed to Shiva to grant her a husband with the five most desirable qualities in a man. Shiva told her that since it would be difficult to find all these qualities in a single man, he would bless her with five husbands in her next birth. Shiva also blessed her that irrespective of the fact that she would have five husbands, she would retain her virginity till the end of her life.

This is how she got her five husbands - Yudhishthira (the Righteous One), Bhima (the Powerful One), Arjuna (the Valiant One), Nakula (the Handsome One) and Sahadeva (the Loving One).

Draupadi Insults Duryodhana

The Pandavas built Indraprastha, the Palace of Illusions, at a site in the Khandava forest. Once they settled in, the Pandavas invited Duryodhana to come and visit their palace. Accordingly, Duryodhana came with his whole entourage. The main courtyard of the palace was divided in two parts. While one part appeared like the surface of a rippling lake, the surface of the other part appeared like solid granite flooring.

An unsuspecting Duryodhana stepped onto the seemingly solid part of this courtyard. There was an immediate splash and Duryodhana found himself waist deep in water, drenched from head to foot. Draupadi, amused by this incident, laughed out loud and exclaimed, "The son of a blind man also turned blind!" This enraged Duryodhana, who vowed to himself that he would take revenge for this incident - that he would make the Pandavas fall at his feet and beg for mercy.

The Game of Dice

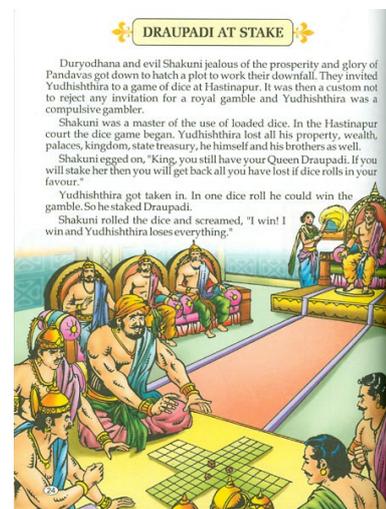
The Game of Dice marks a definitive moment of history in the Mahabharata epic. It is one of the most important instances leading to the great Mahabharata war. Indraprastha came under the sovereignty of King Dhritarashtra (father of Duryodhana). Duryodhana was always jealous of his cousins and kept trying to create trouble for them, even trying to kill them on several occasions.

Duryodhana's equally evil uncle, Shakuni, came up with the idea of the Game of Dice to defeat the Pandavas at the gambling game and thereby, snatch all their possessions from them, including their kingdom. Shakuni was very skilled in winning by unfair means and he conspired with Duryodhana to form a winning plot to defeat his cousins.

As the game proceeded, Yudhishtira started losing all his wealth. Eventually, he wagered his kingdom and lost that too. He then went on to put his brothers at stake and lost them all, one by one. Finally, he put himself at stake and lost that bid too. Now, the Pandavas had all become the Dasas (servants) of the Kauravas. Shakuni did not stop there. He asked Yudhishtira to place his last wager - Draupadi. He also told him that if he won this hand, he could recover everything in one go, including Draupadi.

To the horror of everyone present in the Sabha of great dignitaries, Yudhishtira agreed and placed Draupadi at stake. Both Bhishma and Drona raised their voice against this move, reminding him that a woman could not be put at stake, even if she were the gambler's own wife. Yudhishtira chose to ignore this warning and continued to play the next round. Yudhishtira lost yet again and this time, Duryodhana ordered his younger brother, Dushasana, to forcefully bring her from her quarters and present her before the forum. Accordingly, Dushasana dragged her by the hair and brought her to the Sabha.

Draupadi, clad in just one layer of attire, was deeply humiliated by this incident and appealed to all the elders in the family to stop this adharma from taking place in such a forum. Draupadi also demanded an answer from her husbands, especially from Yudhishtira, asking him how he could probably think of her as a mere commodity and what right he had to wager her, when he himself had become a mere Dasa of the Kauravas. She then begged her other husbands to come forward to protect her dignity, but none came forward to help her. They all merely hung their heads in shame. Karna, who had been waiting to insult Draupadi in public, called her a Veshya (prostitute), saying that the one living with five husbands could only be considered a fallen woman.



DRAUPADI AT STAKE

Duryodhana and evil Shakuni jealous of the prosperity and glory of Pandavas got down to hatch a plot to work their downfall. They invited Yudhishtira to a game of dice at Hastinapur. It was then a custom not to reject any invitation for a royal gamble and Yudhishtira was a compulsive gambler.

Shakuni was a master of the use of loaded dice. In the Hastinapur court the dice game began. Yudhishtira lost all his property, wealth, palaces, kingdom, state treasury, he himself and his brothers as well.

Shakuni egged on, "King, you still have your Queen Draupadi. If you will stake her then you will get back all you have lost if dice rolls in your favour."

Yudhishtira got taken in. In one dice roll he could win the gamble. So he staked Draupadi.

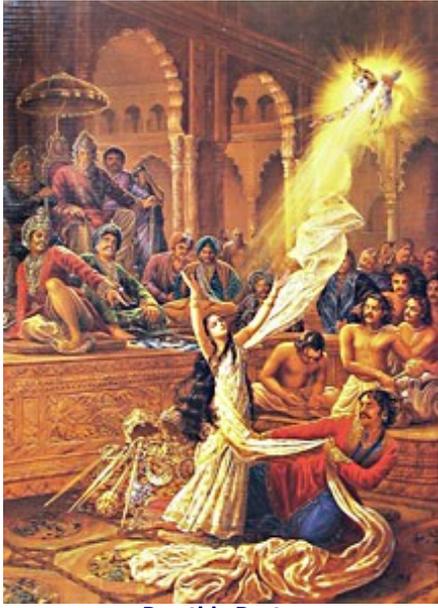
Shakuni rolled the dice and screamed, "I win! I win and Yudhishtira loses everything."

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THE GAME OF DICE

FROM THE BOOK

DRAUPADI - THE MOST AMAZING CHARACTER OF THE MAHABHARATA



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DRAUPADI'S VASTRAHARAN

The arrogant Duryodhana then ordered Dushasana to disrobe Draupadi. Dushasana proceeded to pull out her sari. Draupadi, knowing by now that no one else would come to protect her, prayed to Krishna for his grace. She closed her eyes, raised her folded hands well above her head and surrendered completely to his grace. The Sabha was then witness to a miracle. As Dushasana continued to unwrap layers and layers of clothing off her person, her sari kept getting extended in an unending stream of fabric, till an exhausted Dushasana fell to the ground. Krishna had indeed manifested and protected his Sakhi, Draupadi's, modesty.

Draupadi's Vow

An enraged Draupadi takes a shapat (vow) that she would leave her long hair open till such a time that Bhima would kill Duryodhana and bathe her hair in that blood. Bhima then angrily vowed that he would not rest till he tore open Dushasana's chest and drank his blood. Duryodhana, wanting to provoke the Pandavas further, looked at Draupadi and patted his thigh, indicated that she should come and sit on it. In a rage, Bhima took a vow in front of the entire Sabha that he would one day break that very thigh of Duryodhana in battle.

Dhritarashtra, realizing the seriousness of the situation, intervened to prevent things from getting worse. He told Draupadi that he would grant any wish she asked for. Draupadi immediately asked that her husbands become free of their bondage. Dhritarashtra granted the same and also ordered that all of the Pandavas' wealth and assets be restored to them.

Shakuni and Duryodhana later joined hands to convince Dhritarashtra to invite the Pandavas for yet another game of dice; this time, with different rules. The loser of this game would have to go on exile for 12 years and then endure another year of anonymity. Yudhishthira, at Dhritarashtra's invitation, played this game and lost it again, thus resulting in the exile and the agyaatavasa (living in anonymity).

Jayadratha's Defeat at Draupadi's Hands

During the exile, the Pandavas were in the Kamyaka forest. They usually went hunting, leaving Draupadi in the care of their priest, Dhaumya. Jayadratha, the son of Vriddhakshatra, the husband of Duryodhana's sister Dussala, was passing through the same forest, while on the way to Salwa Desa. He chanced upon Draupadi and fell in love with her. Jayadratha requested her to desert her husbands and go away with him. He claimed her that her spouses were not worth it, as they had not stood by her in her time of need. Draupadi refused, saying that it would not be correct to desert one's spouse just like that. But Jayadratha would not budge and tried to force her into going with him. Draupadi tried to fight back, but was overpowered and got taken in his chariot.

Meanwhile the Pandavas returned, to find out what had just happened. Yudhishthira and his brothers climbed onto their chariots and gave chase to Jayadratha. Jayadratha joined

forces with several armies and waged war against the Pandavas. But the five brothers defeated all the armies in no time. Jayadratha fled in fear, leaving Draupadi behind in all this confusion. Yudhishthira asked Bhima to spare Jayadratha's life, as he was after all, Dushala's husband. Though not too pleased with his decision, both Bhima and Draupadi acquiesced to it. Bhima and Arjuna brought Jayadratha to their hermitage, where he was chained and declared the slave of the Pandavas. They shaved his head in five places and then let him walk free.

In this episode too, Draupadi was indirectly responsible for the battle fought by her husbands against the formidable armies posted by Jayadratha.

Keechaka is Slain

During the Pandavas' agyatavasa, Keechaka, brother of Sudeshana, also the commander of King Virata's forces, happened to see Draupadi. Falling in love with her, he asked her to marry him. Draupadi refused his advances, saying that she was already married to "Gandharvas". Since they were living in anonymity, she did not want to reveal her husbands' true identities. She also warned Keechaka that her husbands were very strong and that he would not be able to escape death, if he ignited their fury.

Later, Keechaka tried to molest Draupadi, but she escaped and ran into Virata's court. The King refused to take action against his commander and Keechaka kicked her in front of all the courtiers including Yudhishthira who was also present in the court at that time. Draupadi then promised Keechaka that her husbands would surely kill him. Later that night, the Pandavas together hatched a plot to slay Keechaka.

As per the plan, Draupadi agreed to be with him, on the condition that none of his friends or brothers should know about their relationship. Keechaka was overjoyed and readily accepted her condition. Draupadi asked Keechaka to come to the dancing hall at night. Bhima, in the guise of Draupadi, fought Jayadratha and finally killed him. Draupadi was hence also responsible, in a sense, for Jayadratha's death.

Draupadi's Relationship with Krishna

Draupadi's most unique quality was that Lord Krishna himself, considered her his Sakhi and sister. Krishna, hence, always protected her and kept her from trouble. Once, when the Pandavas were in exile, Durvasa Muni, the sage known for his temper, suddenly dropped in along with several of his disciples. Unfortunately, the Pandavas had just eaten and there was no more food left. Afraid of Durvasa's anger, Draupadi prayed to Krishna. When he appeared, Draupadi took the last grain of rice sticking to the pot and asked Krishna to eat half for himself and half for the whole world. When Durvasa and his disciples arrived, they felt really full, like they had had a feast. They wanted nothing more to eat, and so, left after a visit.

Draupadi is one of the best examples of bhakti and surrender. She had been graced by his divine presence all her life and was constantly supported by him in everything she ever did.



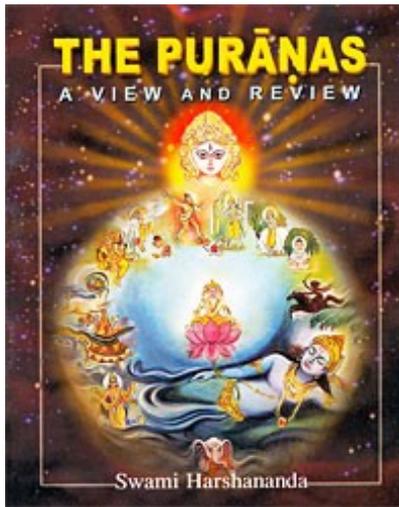
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PURANAS - A VIEW AND REVIEW

According to the Garuda Purana, Draupadi is the incarnation of Bharati Devi, The Consort of Lord Vayu (the God of Wind). The Narada Purana and Vayu Purana describe Draupadi as the combined avatara of Goddesses Shyamala (wife of Dharma), Bharati (Wife of Vayu), Shachi (wife of Indra), Usha (wife of Ashwins), and Parvati (wife of Shiva). They state that she hence married all of their earthly counterparts - the Pancha Pandavas - in her avatara as Draupadi. According to the texts, these heavenly wives were cursed by Brahma to take human birth. Parvati came up with the idea whereby they all would be born as just one woman, Draupadi. Draupadi's aura, her divine qualities, her fiery nature, her need to establish justice at any cost and her strength of moral character is reflected in her entire personality, throughout her life span. Some other texts also extol her as the combined power of the eight most powerful Goddesses, namely, Kali, Parvati, Shachi, Shyamala, Usha, Bharati, Shree, and Swaha.

In spite of being fiery, Draupadi also had a compassionate side to her. She encouraged everyone to face life with the inner strength that she did. After the death of Abhimanyu, she consoled his young widow, Uttara, reminding her of the actual cause for which Abhimanyu had given up his life. She encouraged Uttara to gather all her strength for the sake of their yet unborn child. After the war, Draupadi also looked after Gandhari, even though Gandhari's sons had wronged her and her entire family in more ways than one.

Draupadi - the Epitome of Modern Indian Womankind

Because of her virtuosity, Draupadi is considered as one of the Panchakanyas, one of the five Sreshtha naaris (most virtuous women). She is, even today, held in very high esteem and is considered as a veritable torchbearer among the modern generation of Indian women.

When her husbands decided to renounce the material world and head towards the Himalayas, she accompanied them without the slightest thought or regret. Having reached Heaven, she sat there, filled with spellbinding aura and splendour.

Draupadi was the Goddess Shree herself, born in this world to endure her Karma, to spread joy among everybody she came into contact with and, most importantly, to educate women about their own strength lying within; to demand and attain justice as and when necessary.

Sita and Draupadi - a Comparative Study

Trying to draw a parallel between Sita and Draupadi, one can find both similarities and differences in their personalities and their lives. Here is a comparative study of both these personalities:

- Both Sita and Draupadi were very beautiful and immensely strong women, being the central female characters of the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata respectively.
- Both these women are considered as Sreshtha Naaris.
- Sita belonged to the Treta Yuga, while Draupadi manifested in the Dwapara Yuga.
- Neither of these women were born the "usual way". While Sita was found in a furrow, Draupadi was born from the fire. Maybe that is why Sita was more

enduring in her approach to life, while Draupadi exhibited fieriness.

- Both were adopted by Kings and both women were raised as princesses.
- While Sita is always portrayed as being soft and submissive, Draupadi is always shown as more aggressive and temperamental.
- Both Sita and Draupadi had fallen in love with their suitors and both had swayamvaras. They were also married off at the age of 14.
- Both these naaris went on exile with their husbands.
- Both Sita and Draupadi were desired and kidnapped by other men and were eventually responsible for their downfall.
- Both brought on terrible battles and were the very cause of the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Both of them also became the reasons for the ultimate fall of great dynasties, the Pulastya Vansha (for Sita) and the Kuru Vansha (for Draupadi).
- Both Sita and Draupadi went through immense trials and troubles in their lives, but also came out unscathed and stronger at the end.
- Finally, both Sita and Draupadi are believed to be incarnations of Goddess Lakshmi.

In spite of the apparent differences between Sita and Draupadi, the fact remains that both these women constitute the very essence of Naari Shakti or woman power. Through their life stories, they set an example as to how a woman should live and carry herself in society. Though these powerful women come from bygone epochs, their lives are the living examples, leading the way for the future of modern Indian women.

This article was written by Priya Viswanathan, a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Classical Music and Classical Instrumental Veena. A recipient of several awards for both music and dance, Priya is also a freelance writer online. She currently writes for About.com, a subsidiary of the New York Times Company (<http://mobiledevices.about.com>)

Our efforts have been directed at making this article informative and refreshing for you. We will truly appreciate all forms of feedback. Please send your feedback to info@dollsofindia.com.

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