Chapter - III

THE FACE OF WIFE
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The role of the wife in the human order is one of the most challenging for woman. She is the angel of the house, expected to fulfil and provide the family with emotional sustenance. She absorbs the male ego, its glory and filth, and prepares the family for social oblations. As a woman she knows the self and the non-self, as the myths reveal, and she is the energy base of the family. But as wife she has a greater role to perform. In the *Mahabharat*, there is an episode where Siva asks Parvati about the duties of a woman; Parvati replies:

The duties of women are created in the rites of wedding, when in presence of the nuptial fire she becomes the associate of her Lord, for the performance of all righteous deeds. She should be beautiful and gentle, considering her husband as her god and serving him as such in fortune and misfortune, health and sickness, obedient even if commanded to unrighteous deeds or acts that may lead to her own destruction. She should rise early, serving the gods, always keeping her house clean, tending to the domestic sacred fire, eating only after the needs of gods and guests and servants have been satisfied, devoted to her father and mother and the father and mother of her husband. Devotion to her Lord
is woman's honour, it is her eternal heaven; and O Maheswara, I desire not paradise itself if thou are not satisfied with me.

(Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva* 108)

It may be noticed that woman in this view has only one identity; the identity of wife, and her duties and responsibilities are fixed at the wedding. Woman is seen only as wife in most Indian texts. Rajasekhara in his *Karpura Manjari* also suggests that a true wife always gladdens her husband. In the laws of Manu the role of wife is well defined:

She who controlling her thoughts, speech and acts, violates not her duty to her Lord, dwells with him after death in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful wife.

(Ananda Coomaraswamy 101)

Western individualism may not accept this view of duty performed by a woman through marriage. The Christian view of woman is based more on love than duty. The difference between the Hindu (Indian) view of woman and Western view lies mainly in the conceptual position of woman in relation to the purpose of life. The European tradition honours the full expression of the being of a woman whereas the Hindu view is that woman fulfils the group morality of the psycho-geographical area in which she operates. Ananda Coomaraswamy writes:
Thus the social order is placed before the happiness of the individual, whether man or woman. This is the explanation of the greater peace which distinguishes the arranged marriage of the East from where there is no deception, there can be no disappointment. (108)

The West does not set any great store by motherhood unlike the East. For the Hindus and the East motherhood is the greatest fulfilment of a woman. The West respects the mother, but does not identify woman with the mother. The Indian Vedic thought starts with the idea of mother. God is the mother of the Universe. Woman in man’s social life is modelled on this concept. Swamy Vivekananda, the greatest apostle of Vedanta, comments:

In India the mother is the centre of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the Universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas. Our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes that we now say: ‘The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle’.

(The Complete Works II, 506)

The Western woman is a wife, a lover, a separate person; her motherhood is sacred but of less pronounced identity. One need not search for evidence in the religious and philosophic texts to prove this point. The very
fact that the greatest writer of the West, Shakespeare, does not portray a
mother is proof enough. Shakespeare presents women, wives but no mothers.
A rare mother like Gertrude in *Hamlet* has been made a guilt-ridden victim of
incest and villiany. She is a hated mother. Her womb is dishonoured by the
words of her only son, Hamlet:

Such an act,

That blurs the grace and blush of modesty:

Calls virtue, hypocrite; takes off the rose

And sets a blister there; makes marriage vows

As false as dicer’s oaths...

(William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, iv, 40-45, 892)

The mother in Gertrude is rejected; the wife in her is blasphemed and the
woman damned. The mother or wife has no group value; the institution
shakes to its foundations. Similarly, Lady Macbeth unsexes herself and
destroy motherhood:

Lady M: ... I have given suck, and know

How tender it is to love the babe that milks me:

I would, while it was smiling in my face

Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,

And dashed the brains out ...

Motherhood could be sacrificed for personal ends. The individual is all: The woman rides rough shod over the feminine. Earlier we have seen how Cleopatra was only a lover, an individual pursuing her aspirations. The mother in her does not appear at any time.

Thus, the East regards woman as wife and mother, central to the concept of social life. The social fulfilment of woman right through civilisation has been seen within the institution of family. Woman is always considered to be the displayer of the family, with all its glories and disgraces. As wife, as jointress of fate, with the male in the family, woman on one hand makes her man ransack the world for all its jewels and on the other makes the family and home a replica of the imagined heaven. She occupies a place central to social cohesion and is given a role to manifest her potential as an order figure. The wife in all homes is the centre of all social activities and the repository of all love and meaning. She can be compared with John Donne's fixed foot in the famous compass image:

Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show

To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the Center sit

Yet when the Other far doth roam,

It leans and hearkens after it,

And grows erect; as that comes home.

("A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" 14-15)
She leans towards the perimeter of life goading the bigger one, that is, the husband to describe the widest circles of achievements and, at the same time, has the power to draw him back to the centre. The wife is not a mere bearer of children or a cook or ward servant in the family. She is the controlling deity who decides the manner of living and the tenor of life without polarities distinguishing the focal points of both dimensions.

Women, especially in Indian culture, do not distinguish between the role of the lover and that of the wife. For most of them are the lover-wife inseparably linked with each other as the choice of the husband is always linked with an impersonal machination of fate. Since the husband is taught to be treated as god substitute, the woman lavishes all her energies on her husband, whereby her identity flowers within the family context. The role of the wife often demands complete absorption leaving little of her being for extraneous individuation. Hence, the wife functions as nature or Prakṛti and the family including her husband becomes the triumphal arch which she raises upto reality.

In the previous chapter we showed that Cleopatra was the embodiment of love, and as the greatest lover in history, she leaves behind the largest territory of admiration. But, it may be questioned; she achieved nothing. She merely destroyed Egypt and her clan bringing down with her another gentleman from the triumvirate, to pair her fall at the monument. These
observations are valid upto the sociological level; beyond the secure level of social life, however, there are other options available to carve out identity. Cleopatra by her very greatness involves the entire heroic world in a turbulent encounter of life.

The contention in this chapter is to contrast the single sprightliness of Cleopatra as lover to the marital bliss of woman; the woman chosen here is Draupadi in Vyasa's *Mahabharat*. The choice of Draupadi is almost a Hobson's choice because no woman in history or literature has lived with five husbands under the same roof. Women marrying fifteen times or hundred (our Rita Hayworths and Liz Taylors) is not unnatural or rare in history; but a woman living with five great heroes is not only rare, it is unique.

To dismiss the uniqueness, like the anthropologists saying that Draupadi is a polyandrous woman, is unscholarly and partisan. Polyandry was occasional and limited in Indian culture and the epics of India do not suggest preponderance of polyandry. Had Draupadi been really polyandrous the caustic remarks of Karna at the dice game and the general derision of the Kurus would not have been soul killing to Draupadi. However, this minor point made by the anthropologists need not detain us from saying that the choice of Draupadi as the illustration of wife can not be disputed without using logic as handmaid of self interest.
In world literature the stature of Draupadi has not been properly assessed. No study of her as woman and wife has been made to attract a scholar's attention. We propose in this chapter to study Draupadi as wife and expect to show that she is the greatest woman to have played wife in literature.
Draupadi's birth, contrastive to the natural process, was unexpected, unprayed for, and undesired. Drupada the King of Panchala, wanted a male hero to avenge Drona whose insults burned him long to cause a *yajna* for a son - his natural son being a eunuch. But the sacrificial fire blessed him with a male and female as a fateful duo to accomplish heroic deeds. The male, Dhristadyumna, is for action—war, diplomacy and murder. The female, Draupadi, is to cause and commission war as the principle of revenge. The male would act and the female would set the stage. They come as the strongest pair for world-shaking events:

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jvalavarno ghorauropha kiriti varma cottamam
vibhratsakhadgha saaaro dhanusmanvinadanmuuhu
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(Adiparva, Canto 155, Sl. 38, 806)

[A young man of fire colour, enormous strength, with a sword, came out of fire, thundering. And the invisible divine voice immediately declared that he was born to kill Drona.]

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bhayapaho rajaputra panchalanaam yasaskaara
rajanah sokapoja yeva dronavadhaye
ityuvaca mahaubhumadrusyam kecharam tada
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(Adiparva, Canto 155, Sl. 40, 807)
[This prince is born to kill Drona. This son will enhance the glory of the people of Panchala and will assail the fear and sorrow of the King.]

And then comes a young woman from the *yajna* fire:

$kumarī cāpi pānchāli vedimadhyātsamutthita$ $|$

$subhaga darsāniyārigī vedimadhyā manoramā$ $|$

(Adiparva, Canto 155, Sl. 41, 807)

[Thereafter from the middle of the altar appeared an attractive virgin of great physical symmetry, the graceful princess of Panchala.]

Draupadi, thus, is not an ordinary woman; she is the "daughter of fire."

$tām cāpi jātāṁ susrōṇīṁ vāguvaçāśārīrīṁ$ $|$

$sarvayōśidvarā krṣṇā kṣayaṁ ksatram ninīṣati$ $|$

(Adiparva, Canto 155, Sl. 44, 807)

[At the birth of this beautiful woman there was a prophecy, in the air:

"This dark lady Kṛṣṇā is the best among the womankind and will be the destroyer of the Kṣatriyas."

The daughter of fire, however, has no conventional childhood. She appears on the world of her destiny as a young and beautiful woman ready to start the drama of life. Vyasa describes her as:

$syāmā padmapalāsākṣi-nilakuchitamūrdhajā$ $|$

$mānuṣam vigrahāṁ kṛtvā sākṣādamaravārṇinī$ $|$


nīlotpala samo gandho yasyāḥ kroṣṭaprabhāyati ī
yā vibharti paramī rūpaṁ yasya nāstyupaṁā bhuvi ī ī

(Adiparva, Canto 155, Sl. 42 & 43, 807)

[Her blue eyes were like the petals of a blue lotus, Her hair was black
and curly. Seeing her it appeared as if an angel has taken human shape.
Her blue lotus fragrance of the body wafted aromatic miles. Her angelic
beauty has no parallel on earth.]

She is accomplished in the fine arts of music, dance and also in feminine
grace. She enters the world as the princess of Panchala to make the Mahabharat
war centre around her. The whole of Aryavarta (the heart land of India)
wakes up to her reality when Drupada, her father, arranges her svayamvara
(Marriage by her choice). The svayamvara is more than a ritual for royal
families; it is a declaration of pride, pomp, and glory. The bride is the centre
of the pride: glamorous, extraordinary and a prize. She cannot be a common
man's wife. She must be won by the best. From Drupada's point of view the
best among the princes is the one who can kill Drona, his sworn enemy.

Drupada invites all kings and princes of Aryavarta. The svayamvara is a royal
statement of aristocracy and superiority both political and cultural. Draupadi
could transform the non-descript Panchala of pre-Draupadi days of Drona-
fixation and defeatism into a glorious theatre of fate-making. She is flaunted
for her beauty, grace, artistic excellence and above all her divine birth,
distinguishing her from all woman-born. The svayamvara, therefore, takes all kingdoms of Aryavarta with a sweep of majestic challenge. Drupada has challenged the heroes of the great civilized world of north India with Draupadi as prize. She is definitely a prize with all her native and acquired qualities, at a time in Indian civilization, when women were less than the proverbial doormats without education or exposure to high culture. Draupadi was a living goddess, (her birth corroborating it), the greatest possession for a man who believes that he deserves everything that a god would enjoy on earth. The bet or the condition of the prize, however, was not child’s play:

\[\text{idam dhanurlaksyamime ca bāṇāḥ sruṇavantu me pārthivāḥ sarva yeva} \]
\[\text{yantranchidronābhyaṭikramya laksyam samarpayadhvam} \]
\[\text{khagameirdasārdheiḥ} \]

(Adiparva, Canto 176, Sl. 34, 890)

[Listen O Kings present here. This mechanical device set at a height in the sky which is seen here must be pierced with only five sharp arrows shot through the bow kept here.]

The prize could be won by an archer who looking down at the reflection on water of a revolving device of a fish, set on a wheel at a height, shoots an arrow to pierce the eyes of the fish: A task worthy of the prize and the winner:
Then they walked up to the artificially constructed pool of water. A long pole had been fixed in the centre, on the top of which a fish, fastened to circular frame, was revolving rapidly. Guru Sandipani, old, lean and muscular, as the master of the context stood by its side.

(K.M. Munshi, *Krisnavatara*, III. 320)

The *Svayamvara* is more for Drupada's choice of son-in-law than Draupadi's husband. Draupadi had no choice but to marry the winner of the archery test. For Drupada his revenge is half done when he gets the hero who wins the test as his son-in-law. He could certainly avenge himself of Drona. For Draupadi, however, the hero who wins the test is her future life. Her husband is not the future killer of Drona: He is her Lord who would share his reality with her.

The Pandavas win the test. Since the details of the surfacing of the Pandavas after their post-Jatugruha forest life are not directly relevant to our purpose here, we will refrain from narrating the episode, save, stating that it was Draupadi who brought the five Pandavas, back to social life. Their days of socially dead, forest wandering come to an end. The greatest archer of Aryavarta, Arjuna and his family now can take the risk of public appearance. The archer in Arjuna, next only perhaps to Kṛṣṇā must take this chance. If he wins the test their fate will change, they will have an identity after long years of shaded existence. The epic narrative of Vyasa poises the entire social-
political consciousness of Aryavarta on the Draupadi-**svayamvara** centre stage. The scene changes the socio-political equations of Aryavarta.

The Pandavas now shake off their disguise as Brahmin mendicants and relive their normal princely lives. But the woman who causes all this happen to the Pandavas, who were assumed to be dead in the Jatugruha fire caused by the Duryodhana-Sakuni designs of evil, suffers further ignomy of lowliness as woman, when the Pandavas reach their underground abode with the prize. She was not triumphantly led by Arjuna, her conqueror. She was the poor last in the line of the filing Pandavas according to their order of birth. She was not a trophy displayed, she was beggars' alms accepted as a routine. For they announce to Kunti, their mother, that they have brought alms. Her first experience of marital "joy" comes when she is taken in triumph to the temporary abode of the Pandavas. What should have been a moment of glory for her to enter into a royal family, now houseless and poor, becomes a tame gift of alms to delight the appetite of an impoverished family. Her first experience as wife to a great hero is suddenly reduced to a shared "edible" when her victor Arjuna tells his mother at the potter's house:

\[
gatvā tu tāṁ bhārgavakarmasālāṁ pārthou pṛthāṁ pṛāpya
\]

\[
mahānubhāvau \]

\[
tāṁ yajñasaṇiṁ paramapratītau bhikṣyeyathāvedayatāṁ
\]

\[
narāganyau \]

(Adiparva, Canto 192, Sl. 1, 910)
[The great human beings Bhima and Arjuna went in a joyful mood with yagnaseni Draupadi to the potter’s house where Kunti awaited and told her: “Mother! Today we got this alms.”]

Thus, she begins life shared by five men. With these five men thrust upon her, choicelessly, she is asked to construct a universe of her own. She begins life with a social role fitted for her already. The challenge as she was to the whole of Aryavarta heroes, she is now challenged by fate which was accomplice to the desire of the brothers for her beauty:

\[\text{ta thaiva pārthaḥ prthubāhavaste virau yamou caiva māhānubhavau} \]
\[\text{tām draupadīṁ prekṣya tadā sma sarve kandarpabāṇābhīhata} \]
\[\text{babhuvuḥ} \]

(Adiparva, Canto 178, Sl. 12, 895)

[The long armed Prutha’s son Yudhisthir, Bhima and Arjuna as well as the great sons Nakula and Sahadeva - all at that time of her svayamvara, were love sick at the sight of Draupadi.]

And all the five brothers wished to possess her:

\[\text{te dṛṣṭvā tatra tiṣṭhantīṁ sarve krṣṇāṁ yasāsvinīṁ} \]
\[\text{samprekṣyānyonyamāśinā hṛdayeistāmadhārayaḥ} \]
\[\text{teṣāṁ hi draupadīṁ dṛṣṭvā sarveṣāmamitoujjasāṁ} \]
\[\text{sampramathyendriyamagnāṁ prādurāśīṁmanobhavaḥ} \]

(Adiparva, Canto 182, Sl. 11 & 12, 911)
[The sage Vaisampayan said - The Pandavas, seeing that famous beautiful 
woman Draupadi, looked at each other. Each of them took her to be his 
wife in his heart. Those Great heroes felt disturbed by Cupid, the God of 
love.]

The farsighted, wise brother Yudhisthira could know that her exceptional 
beauty, irresistible to all the living beings could easily bring about a rift 
among the brothers, if she is married to only one of them:

kāmyam rūpam hi pānchālya vidhātra vihitam svayam I
vabhuvādhikamanyābhyāḥ sarvabhūtamanoharam I I
abravītsa hi tānbhāṭrnmithobhedabhayāntpaḥ I
sarvesām draupadī bharyā bhavisyati hi nah śubhā I I

(Adiparva, Canto 182, Sl. 13 & 15, 912)

[God had created Draupadi with such great beauty that she would be the 
most beautiful and would steal the minds of all. That King Yudhisthira, 
afraid of a likely feud among the brothers said: “Draupadi of all 
auspicious signs will be wife to all”.

Draupadi was born to perform as royal wife to all the five Pandava 
brothers. She was conceived by her creator, Vyasa, as a shared woman 
destined to match five tempers and souls in her sole being. This was the 
prophecy of the poet-creator Vyasa to the Pandavas:
[O Jewels of the Kura kula! That woman these days has already been born in Drupada clan, angelic, incomparable that Draupadi named Kṛṣṇā is waiting to be your wife. Therefore, you strong Pandavas now go and wait in the city of Panchala. Undoubtedly you will get happiness getting Kṛṣṇā there.]

Manipulated by human desire or trapped by the machinations of the forces of fate, Draupadi choicelessly, had to accept five men as her husband, instead of the one who had won her. As she was the fire-born gift to her father's penance of vengeance, so she had to become the fiery consort to the Pandava's mission of rightful revenge on the Kurus. If her wedding is linked up to the attainment of a greater goal, what she felt as a woman or how she reacted, whether revolted or revelled at this unusually challenging moment is not known. Draupadi never lamented like Shakespeare's Portia who rued her dead father's decisive interference in the living daughter's marital life:

'O'me, the word 'choose!' I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse who I dislike: so is the will of a living daughter curb'd by the will of a
dead father. Is it not hard Nerissa, that I can not choose one, nor refuse none?

(William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, I, ii, 194)

No woman in literature has been subjected to such a challenging life to start with and live through as Draupadi in the Mahabharat of Vyasa. No Shakespearean heroine in the tragedies or comedies had to embrace reality on such complex scale. We have cited Portia’s case as a minor compliment to Draupadi’s vastness. Even making a choice of a husband is hard on her, although the will of her father indicated a choice to be exercised by a suitor which would indicate his priorities in life. Portia was a socio-economic choice of womanhood beyond the glitters of the world. Draupadi, on the other hand, was royal and cosmic, the prize of a hero: But she gets the prize of five great heroes as befitting her vastness. She evinces an enormous confidence in the 'woman' deep inside her. If Cleopatra projected the immersed self on the reality around her and lived by individuating herself as heroic lover, Draupadi immersed the self in her social identity and lived projecting it as wife.

Draupadi is not cheated into a polyandrous situation as it is often made out to be. She accepts her novel status as wife to five hero-brothers with joy, not with submission.

as̄ota bhūmau saja pāṇḍuputreiḥ pādopadhāneva kṛta kūseṣu ।

na tatra dukhaṁ ca vabhūva tasyā na cāvamene kurupungavāṁstān ।

(Adiparva, Canto 184, Sl. 10, 915)
Draupadi lay down on ground and grass and made herself a footrest for her husbands. But she was never unhappy nor did she disrespect the members of the Kuru clan.

Draupadi had no grief for her state nor contempt for Pandava brothers for bringing her to this. She gracefully enters in to her social role, as seen and reported by her brother Dhristadyumna, who secretly followed her with her husbands. Dhristadyumna reports that Draupadi in her in-laws' house is perfectly adjusted and does not suffer from any kind of physical or psychic maladjustment:

\begin{verbatim}
teṣāṁ tu bheikṣyaṁ pratigrhyā kṛṣṇā kṛtvā brahmaṇasācca kṛtvā
tāṁ caiva vṛddhāṁ parivṛṣya tāṁśca nara-pravīraṇsvaya-
mapyabhuṅkta

suptāstū te pārthiva sarva yeva kṛṣṇā tu teṣāṁ caraṇopadhānāṁ

āsītpṛthivyāṁ sayanāṁ ça teṣāṁ darbhaṅgaṇṇa-gaṅga-staraṇopapannaṁ
\end{verbatim}

(Adiparva, Canto 185, Sl. 9 & 10, 918)

[When the husbands bring alms Draupadi offers a part of it to the gods and Brahmins; then, she serves her mother-in-law and husbands and only after that she eats. After food the Pandavas used to sleep on the ground spreading a mattress of grass and deer skin. Draupadi slept at the feet of her husbands like a pillow.]

It is neither child's play nor a frivolous polyandrous woman's
mechanical routine to play wife to such men as the Pandavas - the greatest and the unmatchable heroes of Aryavarta. It is now essential, at this point, to know what sort of men are these five Pandavas whom Draupadi married, and with whom she is given a chance to create a universe of her own.

Draupadi was fated to be a wife, not to one man, but to five: And what men? Men of diverse tempers and energies - Yudhisthira, the son of Dharmaraj and Kunti, is a mind, that speaks of calm reason, representing the moral conscience of the universe. His name indicates an efficient calmness of the mind in all crises. Bhima is the son of the Air God, who signifies the life breath. Life is called Prana in Sanskrit which means air. This Bhima is massive in body, relishing food and sex in massive measures. Arjuna is the third; a disciple of Kṛṣṇā, a scholar, artist and the greatest archer of Aryavarta. He knows the art of love and war and concentrates on the still point. His body and mind never quiver. The fourth is Nakul: The handsomest, suave and wielder of the sword, Nakula is the sexual male. And finally, Sahadeva, twin to Nakula of the same father, Aswini Kumar who himself is twin to his alter ego. He could tame the pastoral cow and look beyond the seeds of time to predict with hints and innuendos: The man who knows the process yet participates in its stage management, like a novice.

The male parents of these brothers form a pattern: Dharmaraj, Vayu, Indra and the twins Aswini Kumar may represent the full potential and
almost complete vision of Universal Life, that is Prana, is the fundamental basis of life, which must be controlled and glorified by law, Justice and the Power of enforcement. The Powers are vested in Indra, a dictator like Zeus of the West who will enforce law and justice with his striking powers. He is the wielder of the Vajra, the thunder bearing Jove, who commands absolute obedience. His thrust is the horse power, the standard power measure in all civilizations. The Aswini twins are the patron gods of animals and medicinal powers (the flora and fauna). In this kind of pattern the picture that emerges is that of an organic whole.

Draupadi, evincing a great understanding of her husbands, describes their features and powers to Jayadratha, when he tried to kidnap her:

ye yeṣa jambunadasuddhagourah praṣandaghoṇaṣtanurāyatāksah ।
yetam kurusreṣṭhatam vadaṇti yudhisthiram dharmasūtām

patim me । ।
apyeṣa śatroḥ sararāgatasya dadhyatprāṇandharmacāri nyāraḥ ।
pareihyena mūḍha javena bhūtaye tvamātmanah pṛāṇjalinyasta-

śāṅkhaḥ । ।

(Aranyakaparva-II, Draupadiharanaaparva, Sl. 7 & 8, 1320)

[That man whose complexion is like pure gold, whose nose is sharp and elevated and eyes large - that husband of mine is known as the best in the Kuru clan and is called Yudhisthira, the son of Dharma. He is such a
great soul that he spares the life of his enemy who comes to seek asylum;

He is a great hero of absolute dutifulness. O’ fool, Jayadratha, your
welfare lies in falling at his feet, throwing away your arms and weapons.]

Yudhisthira is more of a mind that comprises cool analysis and reason,
scientifically impartial, dispassionate, detached from emotions.

Bhima, younger brother, the second of the Pandavas, is his opposite. He
is tall, broad and of enormous strength. Pointing at Bhima she says:

\[ \text{athāpyenami paśyasi yam rathastham mahābhujāṁ} \\
\text{salamiva prṛddham} || \]
\[ \text{sandaśthoṣṭhāṁ bhrukuṭīśaṁhatabhruvaṁ vṛkodaro} \\
\text{nāma patirmaṇeisah} || \]
\[ \text{ājāneyā balinaḥ sādu dāntā mahābalāḥ śūramudāvahanti} || \]
\[ \text{yetasya karmaṇyaṁtaṁmaṇuṣāṁi bhīmeti śabdosya gataḥ prṛthivyāṁ} || \]
\[ \text{nāsyaparadhāḥ sōṣamihāpnuvanti nāpyasya veiram vismarate kaçācit} || \]
\[ \text{veirasyāṁtāṁ saṁvidhāyopayāti paścanchānti na ça gachatyatiṇa} || \]

(Aranyakaparva, Draupadiharanaparva, Canto 254, Sl. 9, 10 & 11, 1321)

[With a sarcastic gesture, who is biting his nether lip in passionate anger,
whom you see riding a chariot is called Vrikodar my husband. His horses
are the finest breed, strong and fast. His good deeds have earned for him
the title of ‘Sadhu’ from great men of heroism and courage, his
superhuman deeds have made him famous as Bhima. That husband of
mine is Bhimasen. Any one who offends him cannot live. He never forgives his enemies. Even after punishing his enemies he is restless. His other name is Mahabala.]

She describes Arjun as:

$mṛdurvadānyo dhṛtimāṇyaśāsvi jītendriyo vṛddhāsevī nṛvīraḥ$  
$bhrātā ca sīṣyasca yudhisthirasya dhanañjayo nāma patirmameśaḥ$  

(Aranyakaparva, Draupadidaranaparva, Canto 254, Sl. 12, 1321)

[The greatest archer among heroes, intelligent, wise and selfcontrolled man you see is Yudhisthira’s disciple and brother, named Arjun is my husband.]

She introduces Nakula in the following manner:

$yāḥ sarvadharmārthavinīṣcajyo bhayaṁtaṁ bhayahartā maniṣi$  
$yasūtāmam rūpamāhuh prthivyāṁ yaṁ pāṇḍavāḥ parirakṣanti sarve$  

(Aranyakaparva, Draupadidaranaparva, Canto 254, Sl. 14, 1321)

[He who knows the intricacies of duty as well as the principles of business and money transactions; who destroys the fear of the fearful, is my husband Nakula. There is none as handsome as he in the world and Pandavas always protected him.]

Sahadeva for Draupadi is:

$yāḥ khadgayodhī laghuçitrahaṁ mahaṁśca dhīmaṁsaḥahadevodvitiyaḥ$  

(II line of Sl. 15, 1322)
**Aranyakaparva, Draupadiharanaparva, Canto 254, Sl. 17, 1322**

[A wonderful swordsman who weilds the sword like lightning, is extremely intelligent and wise and is a non-pareil in fighting. This great soul is the youngest brother of the Pandavas powerful as the sun and moon. He is the favourite of the Pandavas. He is unrivalled in scholarship, oratory, intelligence and knowledge of certainties.]

Draupadi combined in her personality diverse streams of skill and knowledge to meet her husbands individually. Her encounter as wife with Yudhisthira was moral which included law, justice, and *dharma* (duty). For Bhima she was appetite, sweet and luscious. And for Arjuna, her winner, she was an artist with pride as ornament. For Nakula she was a model of grace and refinement. For Sahadeva she was of occult charm daring him to look beyond the seeds of time.

Draupadi could rise up to each husband as a model of excellence in his biopsychic universe. She played varying roles to everyone’s satisfaction. She was a good house wife, queen and daughter-in-law to the Queen mother, Kunti. She divided her time and energy to suit the anticipated challenge of moments in her royal household. For, the Pandava heroes never had a word of complaint against Draupadi. They never evinced a symptom of
dissatisfaction even in the undecipherable depths of their heart. It is not easy to engage the affections and engross the attentions of such a philosophic, non-involved man like Yudhisthira. Vyasa gives a glimpse of Draupadi’s wisdom, knowledge and scholastic mind that could captivate Yudhisthira and silence him in challenging debates on the subtleties of Dharmasastra and its practical implications in life. The poet gives six long sections to her in which she defines ordinary human duties, King’s duties and so on. In Aranyakaparva-I she invites Yudhisthira into this debate asking him to tell her whether royal pardon is nobler than righteous anger:

nūnam ca tava neivāsti manyurbharatasattama
yatte bhrātrsca mām āeiva drṣṭvā na vyathate manah

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto 28, Sl. 33, 143)

[You noblest of the Kuru clan. If after all this (agony and humiliation) your passion is not stirred, I am positive, you have no passion at all.]

She acts surprised to see Yudhisthira’s smug acceptance of his brothers’ and her miseries in the forest, and their ignominious fall. She defines for him the properties of a King or what is called Kshatriya Dharma. Quoting Prahlad from Balipurāṇa, she tells him that unrestrained pardonining cheapens a man. A man who does not temper his forgiveness with punishment, is treated callously by his servants even. On the other hand, a vindictive man ruins himself. A King is one who blends mercy and force:
A king who is too soft is ignored, while one who is a tyrant is feared. But one who behaves as the situation demands, qualifies to be King.

This wisdom is seldom seen elsewhere except in India. Machiavelli the pre-Renaissance philosopher spoke of the lion and the fox as opposed to the "soft" and "tyrannical" of the Mahabharat. The West, in its Greco-Roman models and Dark Age models as well as the Renaissance models, thinks of strength and cunning as the "master-thought" of the political authority, whereas, Draupadi suggests the feminine paradigm of a wife: Wife of the Emperor of Aryavarta. She suggests that the power that could punish must be tamed by the softness of love, alleviated by nobility of heart.

Beginning the discussion on the right approach to human problems, right attitude to life and the right implementation of Hindu Dharma and way of living, Draupadi reveals a depth of understanding of the various intricacies of Dharma Sastra:

yevameva prthagdrstvā dharmārtho kāmameva ca l
na dharmapara yeva syānna thārdthaparamo naraḥ
na kāmaparamo vā syātsarvānsevena sarvadā 11

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto 34, Sl. 38, 183)
[A man should distinguish between Dharma, Artha, and Kama in objective isolation. He should not emphasise either Dharma or Kama or Artha. He should carefully integrate all the four into his life and serve all institutions of life always.]

dharma pūrva dhanāṁ madhye jaghanye kāmāmāçare t
ahanyanuçaredevamesa sāstrakṛto vidhīḥ ī

(Canto 34, Sl. 39, 184)

[A man should think of doing Dharma, like worshipping gods and religious rites and rituals in the first part of the day, and earning and spending (Artha) at midday, and the evening in Kama, the realising of his desires, luxurious dreams and giving vent to his passions.]

Thus, Draupadi - Yudhisthira relationship as man and wife is not based on the "taken for granted" ceremony of marriage. She penetrates the mind of Yudhisthira and the result is the patience which Yudhisthira shows in his actions. She could make him more intensely aware of the political duties of a prince who must demonstrate divine patience and hence wisdom in his thought, speech and action. There must be a unity of pattern of growth and maturity. Yudhisthira, for us, is that equanimity of temper and steadfastness of purpose. We may not say that Draupadi made Yudhisthira what he became after his marriage. But Draupadi stimulated his mind. She was an intellectual challenge and thereby charming as wife. Wife is not a child bearing machine
only; she is a companion, a challenging presence and she too thinks about the Universe and its life-management issues. Yudhisthira for her is the future of the country and Draupadi is the royal consort well versed in the art of dharma and politics.

Bhima for Draupadi is an achiever. Passionate and wild, Bhima is guileless, honest and quick reacting. He has a great physique, standing as a symbol of protection. He has appetite for food and the joys of the flesh. Draupadi rises up to reach Bhima on the physical level. She feeds him food and love in such measures that Bhima accomplishes the seemingly impossible. For instance Draupadi desires thousand golden flowers to be brought to her;

\[\text{yadi teham priyā pārtha bahunīmānyupāhara ।} \]
\[\text{tānyahāmi netumichāmi kāmyakāmī punarāśramām ।} \]

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto 146, Sl. II, 739)

[O Sun of Kunti, if I am dear to you, then bring me innumerable such flowers : I would take the flowers to our Asram at Kamyak forest.]

She plays with him the angel love : the fragile woman of the Medieval Romances. She binds his soul to hers with an emotional knot. To obey her, to please her, to satisfy her is a passion for Bhima. It is only, he, of all the five, who kills her wrong doers and vindicates her honour as woman and wife. The Keechak Vadha episode in the Mahabharat bears testimony to Bhima's total immersion in Draupadi. Bhima takes the risk of killing one of the most fearful
warriors and king makers of North India whose writ was supreme in the Kingdom of Virata. During the underground period (the thirteenth year of their exile) it was a great risk for the Pandavas. But Bhima takes the risk for Draupadi's honour. She could fully absorb Bhima in her charming self. She gave her love, physical and emotional, and he staked his everything to protect, defend and avenge her honour as woman and wife.

The Draupadi-Arjun relationship has the high drama of romance and tragedy. Arjun it was who had won her as prize at the svayamvara. A woman with Draupadi's charm and accomplishment definitely deserved the son of Indra, the best archer of India, the scholar, the lover, the singer and dancer (all these qualities are revealed when Arjun serves the Virata Princess as dance teacher, as the eunuch Brihannala during the underground period of the Pandava misery, consequent upon the defeat at the dice game with Duryodhan and Sakuni). Arjun has the experience of great love and celibate self control. He alone among the five brothers has the heritage of ruling power and supremacy flowing from Indra, the King of Heaven. And this Arjun also has a sexual objectivity to love. He has lived between man and woman and has known both. Arjun it is who demonstrates his passionate love for man and life at the Kuruksetra battlefield, moved existentially by the prospects of total destruction. He experiences futility and fulfilment.
But Draupadi was not the sole wife to Arjun. Her winner, for her, was a sharer not the sole lord. Her relationship with Arjun must be viewed from a dual perspective: (1) Draupadi’s pride is psychologically hurt (which she does not show as wife) when the victor agrees to divide his victory as alms. He had no pride for Draupadi, nor did he assert himself as the Victor. (2) For Draupadi, Arjun was noble and magnanimous to have sacrificed what was rightfully his; he was to be admired for his sacrifice. Thus, Draupadi suffers the conflict between woman and wife in her encounter with Arjun. She had to play wife suppressing the woman in her, and accept social norms and their built-in humiliations to win her winner. She thus rises above the usual feminine spite, jealousy and intolerance to accept Arjun’s love for Subhadra and receive her as her co-wife. She honours his marriage with Subhadra;

pratyuthāya ca tāṁ kṛṣṇā svasāraṁ mādhavasya tāṁ	sasvaje cāvatprītā niḥsapatnostu te patih
tattheiva muditā bhadrā tāmuvaćeivamastivati

(Adiparva, Canto 293, Sl. 20, 1034)

[As Subhadra comes for her blessings she embraces her and owns her saying, may her husband never have any enemies. By blessing her she not only owns Subhadra, but grants Arjun to be her husband.]

Her love for Arjun is reflected in her love for his world, his choices, his
love for Subhadra and his *Sadhana* for archery. But as a wife she never lets others feel her love for him. Without hurting the tender feelings of the other brothers and their soft sentiments, she tells Arjun how he is her life and love when he leaves for learning the subtler secrets of archery in the Kairatparva:

\[
\begin{align*}
nūnām \text{ te bhṛatarāḥ sarve tvaktadhābhīh prajāgare} & \\
\text{ramisyante vīrakarmāṇi kīrtayantu punah punah} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Aranyakaparva-I, Kairatparva, Canto 38, Sl. 22, 209)

[From today onwards your brothers will live their time by talking about your brave deeds.]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{neiva naḥ pārtha bhogesu na dhane nota jīvite} & \\
\text{tuṣṭiruddhibhavitī vā tvayi dīrghapratvāsini} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Aranyakaparva-I, Kairatparva, Canto 38, Sl. 23, 209)

[We cannot enjoy life or riches or any pleasures while you are far away from us.]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tvayi naḥ pārtha sarvesāṁ sukhaduhkhē samāhitē} & \\
\text{jīvitaṁ maraṇāṁ ceiva rājyaimśvāryameva ça} & \\
\text{āprśto mesi kounteya svasti pṛapnuhi pāndava} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Sl. 24, 209)

[Because all our happiness and sorrow are in your hands. And our life and death, power and glory are also in your hands. O son of Kunti! you have permission to go and earn glory.]
namo dhātre vidhātre ca svasti gacha hyanāmayaṃ
svasti tesatvāntarikṣebhyaḥ pārthivebhyaśca bharata
divyebhyasceiva bhūtebhyaḥ ye čānye paripanthinaḥ

(Aranyakaparva-I, Kairatparva, Canto 38, Sl. 25, 209)

[I bow down before the Maker and the Creator of the universe for your safe journey. May you be helped and protected from the creatures on sky and earth and also the animals fierce and wild moving between heaven and earth.]

Being wife to the Madri sons, the Aswin Kumar twins, was not as challenging as the Kunti sons. Nakul, the handsome and Sahadeva the occultist and all knowing, were young and sober. They were flute players and tamers of horses and cows: They stayed immersed in her bountiful beauty and love.

These husbands could be accommodated by one Draupadi because she had a mind to match Yudhisthira, a body to entice Bhima, an aesthetic taste and artistic femininity to suit Arjun, and a fanciful, inquisitive and loving personality to bewitch the Madri twins. Draupadi's mind, body culture, love of beauty, inquisitiveness, playfulness, dutifulness and feminine grace could not have otherwise been fulfilled had she not been fated to have the Pandavas as husbands. She is not a perfect woman: she is complete. Her perfection is multifold to complete her being.
If Cleopatra's femininity is distinguished by an infinite variety, Draupadi's is asserted by an unattainable vastness. Accommodating five personalities into her being and immersing their souls in her or accepting a co-wife to live with her, however, are not the only signs of her vastness. In the process of expanding her being for her husbands, she grows faster. Her vastness, beginning with her men, extends phase by phase to the whole universe around her, attaining a divine magnitude. In the Satyabhama-Draupadi Samvada episode in *Aranyakaparva* she tells Satyabhama how she grew to accommodate and absorb the lives of her men, their needs, spiritual and earthly, the palace-world, and the whole of the palace life and family:

\[
\text{aṣṭāvagre brāhmaṇāṇāṁ sahasrāṇi sma nityada} 1  \\
\text{bhujyate rukmapātrīśu yudhistiranivesāne} 11
\]

(Canto 222, Sl. 40, 1192)

[Eight thousand Brahmins daily ate at Yudhisthira's palace in golden crockery.]

\[
\text{aṣṭāśitätisahasrāṇi snātaka grhamedhinaḥ} 1  \\
\text{triṃsadāśīka ekeiko yānvibharti yudhisthiraḥ} 11
\]

(Sl. 41, 1193)

[Yudhisthira maintained twenty eight thousand brahmin families in the campus of his palace.]
[Ten thousand celibate brahmins and sages daily ate rice cooked in golden pots.]

[Draupadi not only supervised but attended them all personally, waited till they were well clothed and fed.]

[Yudhishthira personally had one lakh maid servants. All of them were graceful, beautiful and dolled up gorgeously. They were all expert dancers, singers and beauticians. Draupadi knew each one's name, form, dress habits, food fancies and what they did or did not do.]
Besides these there were one lakh maids who attended and served the guests day and night. The emperor had one lakh horses and one lakh elephants who filed behind him daily. She kept the servants, the horses and the elephants and their grooms under her surveillance.

She knew every detail about every one starting from the maids in the queen’s quarters to the ministers in the King’s Court, their activities and movements. Keeping herself in touch with everything that went in and about the palace and informed about every one in the palace.
[Draupadi kept the accounts of the empire.]

adhruvyam̐ı varuṇasyeva nidhipūrnamivodadhiṁ ।
ekāham̐ı vedimi kośam̐ı vei pañīnām̐ı dharmaçārinām । ।

(Sl. 54, 1194)

[And she alone knew the vast treasure of the Pandavas.]

nityamāryāmahan̐ı kuntoṁ virasum̐ı satyavādinīṁ ।
svayaṁ pariçarāmyekā snānācchadanabhohaiṁ । ।

(Sl. 38, 1192)

[She herself attended the Queen Mother and served her at bath and the table.]

mayi sarva samāsajya kutumbarṁ bharatarṣabhaḥ ।
upāsanaratāḥ sarve ghatante sma 'subhanane । ।

(Sl. 52, 1194)

[O auspicious faced lady! The great Pandavas left everything in her hands for she made them feel safe and secure about the home.]

What appeals to us is the ring of truth and sincerity of her constant efforts to absorb into her the lives and souls of her men. The whole of her attention is concentrated on her five husbands. Answering Satyabhama’s real doubt how could she please five men, she tells her:

neitāmatisaye jātu vastrabhūṣaṇabhohaiṁ ।
nāpi parivade cāhami tāṁ pṛthāṁ pṛthvisamām । ।

(Sl. 39, 1192)
anisāyāmī nisāyāmī ca sahāyāh kṣutpipāsayōḥ Ⅰ

ārādhayantyaḥ kouravyāṅstutulyā rātrirahas'ca me ⅠⅠ

(Sl. 55, 1194)

[She attends and serves the Pandava Five day and night; she never lets them feel hungry and thirsty; she never sees any difference between day and night in her service to them.]

Draupadi demonstrates how a wife commits herself to the daily chores, woes and weal, physical and spiritual well-being of her husbands. She could spread her being, to accommodate the husbands, their domestic as well as social and professional existence.

But Draupadi is not wife to warriors, intellectuals and heroes: She is wife to the King of Indraprasta and consort to the royal princes. The wife in her is the royal wife. The chores she performs, the duties she discharges are all a part of her totality as queen to the Pandava Kings. The wife is thus the counterpiece of the state; the earth displaying a pattern of human culture and civilization at a particular moment in history. Draupadi performs as a Queen, a royal consort. She triumphs as the Queen when she becomes the Empress of Aryavarta after Yudhisthira's Rajasuya (The ceremony of paying revenue and accepting the Emperorship of Yudhistira). She gets the highest honour as wife and queen. She supervises all details and looms large everywhere during the Rajasuya. Attending to royal guests, priests and ceremonies Draupadi exudes a cultural sophistication that represents the finest virtues of a Queen, wife to the
Emperor; the worthy wife. Even the jealous Duryodhana grudgingly compliments, admitting her vastness and capability of spreading herself everywhere, supervising every arrangement:

\[
\text{bhuktābhuktim kṛtakṛtaṁ sarvamākubjavāmanam} \\
\text{abhuñjanaṁ yajñaseni pratyaveksaṇī pate}
\]

(Dyutaparva, Canto 48, Sl. 41, 240)

[Who has eaten and has not all these were supervised by Draupadi, the daughter of Yajnasen, before she ate.]

Draupadi's pride as wife heightens in her elevation as the Empress. Spreading herself for five diverse tempered intellectual warrior husbands, Draupadi unfolds herself as the multifoliate universe. She penetrates the souls of her men, absorbs their lives and spirits into herself, to display their valour and honour like the earth, the territory of a glorious form of life-management.

Had she shown more voluptuousness her accomplishments and even her beauty would have been short-lived. Men like the Pandavas — Jitendriyas, real ascetics, could not have been enticed by such a frivolous package. And Draupadi is too knowledgeable and scholarly to practise mere coquetry and indulge in absolute voluptuosness. She knows that a wife makes and holds a world in display. After she was crowned as the Empress at the Rajasuya, however, the Emperor Yudhisthira and his royal family was officially invited to a bout of dice at the Hastinapur palace. This episode remains as a puzzle
as well as a revolting incident compounded by human evil. The Empress was lost as property and possession by her husband Yudhisthira, at the dice game with Duryodhana. The crooked dice rolled causing surrender to the triumphant Duryodhana, Yudhisthira's self and all the material and human "possession". As the debate over the interpretation of possession and the right of Yudhisthira to stake them at dice, was not raised by the scholars and gurus present at the Kuru Court, Draupadi herself raises it as the greatest feminist challenge in literature. The humiliation of a Queen, wife and woman to be dragged to the crowded Kuru Court by Dusasan, who by right of rank and relation is low and small, is the meanest of its kind. More so, as Draupadi was menstruating in isolation, when she was dragged by her hair to the uproarious court.

Draupadi as woman, suffers unprecedented indignity and ignominy. The individual pride as well as the wifely dignity is mutilated, and trod upon by mean legs. Unpresentable as she was, she was exposed to humiliation and disgrace. Yet, she does not yield to the challenge of her vicious fate, heckling and sneering at her in the Kuru Court. Draupadi refuses to fall with her men. She rises and raises them with her. She could not help the flashes of her individual pride daring out and bursting into fury at her unmerited ignomy. She questions her husbands about their right of pawning her in the dice game:
gachchatvāni kitavaṁ gatvā sabhāyāṁ pṛccha sūtaja ।

kim nu pūrva parājeśirātmānaṁ māṁ nu bharata ।
yetajñātva tvamāgachcha tato māṁ naya sūtaja । ।

(Dyutaparva, Canto 60, Sl. 7, 290)

[Draupadi said to the chariot driver who came to convey the order of the Kauravas: "O son of Suta. Please go once and ask them if he lost himself first or me. Go, ask this and then take me there".]

Demanding to know whether she was pawned before or after Yudhisthira pawned himself, she throws a challenge to her sagelike, Solomon-wise husband Yudhisthira, as to his rights to pawn her. How far can a husband own a wife? Is she a piece of property to be bargained over and sold? What authority does he have to gamble or sell her? All these questions aimed at Yudhisthira are spelt in that one question. To the heckling Kuru brothers, celebrating with lewdness, however, it appeared to be a device. Afraid of the impending disgrace, she appeals to the crowded court, to the wise heads, the grey bearded founders of the Kuru clan, to interfere before her honour was tarnished. But the Kauravas, especially Karna, hurts her more with his derisive and unmannerly taunts. Karna even calls her a prostitute:

eko bhartā striyā deveirvihitah kurunandana ।

eyam tvanekavasagā bandharkāti viniścatā । ।

(Dyutaparva, Canto 60, Sl. 35, 302)
[O Kurunandam! The gods have decided that a woman should have only one husband. But this woman is wife to many husbands, hence she is a prostitute.]

Draupadi stands, even before she is physically denuded, naked of all human help and social support. The queen of the Pandavas, the proud princess of Panchala, the Empress of the vast Aryavarta, stands among men of various status and rank as the unclaimed earth after a deluge. The jeering Kuru brothers and their followers who never had any respect for her; the helpless Pandavas, her men, great heroes and unparalleled warriors, who should have protected her as their honour; the inert and impotent clan heads, who hung their heads in shame; and finally, the stupefied men of the court - all watched the entire scenario of shamelessness and barbarity which reflected the ugliness of a culture that raped a married woman’s honour.

A single individual, a helpless woman against the male society and even her own sex, she stands like the primordial woman against the elements of extortion. The society, the clan, the family, even the divine forces watch helplessly her fight to rise above this singular fall worse than Eve’s. The woman, uncompromising and unyielding, however, rises to glory. She concentrates inward, evokes the divine forces with her senses intensified, and saves herself, protects her chastity. Hurled down to the darkest depths of hellish disgrace at one moment, she rises with triumph to the unattainable
chastity the very next moment. The victory of Draupadi is the victory of a woman who is confident of the powers of woman: who with her single minded devotion and intense concentration could move the invisible divinities and summon the supernatural forces down. The victory of Draupadi is the victory of a wife too, for, abandoned by her helpless husbands who were expected to provide protection to her, she saves herself and saves them. She demonstrates that chastity is not a mere physical phenomenon but a mental concept. She proves herself as the saviour of her husbands' physical and moral beings. Pleased by her steadfast femininity and fearing her wrath which may destroy the Kuru clan like wild fire, King Dhritarastra grants her boons. Draupadi once again establishes her intelligence and uncompromising self respect as wife, her true identity, by asking for the freedom of the eldest Pandava brother. On being granted another, she wins the liberation of others from slavery and gets back their lost treasures and weapons. She refuses to go beyond two boons; saying a prostitute could be granted one boon and a royal woman could be granted two, while a brahmin woman could be given a hundred boons:

\[\text{ekamāhurvesyavaram dvou tu kṣatrastrīyā varou I}\\
\text{trayastu rājno rājendra brāhmaṇasya sātamī varāḥ I} I I\\
\text{(Dyutaparva, Canto 63, S1. 35, 321)}\\
\text{[A prostitute has the right to ask one boon, a royal woman two, brahmin}\\
\text{woman can, however go upto hundred boons.]}\]
Draupadi knows no lowliness. She never stoops down to levity. She never exploits moments to self-advantage. She takes the events and the challenges thrown by time in her stride. She imparts greatness to her miseries and pleases by the solemnity of her thoughts, behaviour and being. She saves not hers and her husbands’ lost honour alone but saves, at that moment, the honour of the entire Kuru Kingdom by averting the threatening battle among the Kaurava and Pandava brothers — the former teasing them to take up their arms and the latter furious to fight out their ignominy. Karna, the man who derides her as a prostitute, recognises this and Draupadi immediately wins admiration from him in place of derision:

\[\begin{align*}
  yā naḥ śṛṭā manuṣeṣyu striyo rūpeṇa samatāḥ &  \\
  tāsāmetādṛṣam karma na kasyāṁcaṇa sūṣumāḥ &  \\
  krodhāviṣēṣu pārthese dhārtaraśtreṣu caṇyati &  \\
  drupadī pānduputraṇāṃ kṛṣṇā śaṁtirīḥbhavaṭ &  \\
  aplavembhaśi magnāṁmapratiṣṭe nimajjatāḥ &  \\
  pāṇcālī pānduputraṇāṃ noureṣā pāṛgābhavaṭ & \\
\end{align*}\]

(Dyutaparva, Canto 64, Sl. 1, 2, & 3, 321)

[Karna said: I had heard about many beautiful women but never had I heard about a woman like Draupadi. It is Kṛṣṇā Draupadi who has been the balm of peace to these agitated Pandavas. For the sinking Pandavas she has become the lifeboat to take them to safe shores.]
The glory to which Draupadi surges up, without compromising her dignity as wife, as royal princess and also as daughter-in-law of the Kuru clan, is greater than what she achieves as the Empress of a nation. She demonstrates to her slanderers, husbands and to the whole world that a wife married to one or many, is neither a prostitute nor a slave, nor a passive receptacle, nor even a dirt absorbing doormat.

All her good work, however, changes when Yudhisthira again weilds the dice to lose a second time all that he thought he possessed. As a consequence the Pandava brothers, mother Kunti and wife Draupadi were to live in the forest for thirteen years, the thirteenth being an underground year. She follows her fate and husbands, as an ideal wife. But this change of the field of action from the cosy comforts of the palace to the forest does not put off her spirits. She emerges as a greater woman and wife. The dolled up queen image she forsakes, and lets her unplaited hair open, flaunting it as a challenge to her husbands, to restore her dignity and beauty. Her field of action is now no longer Varanavata where she was the empress. The family she has to nurture here is not her subjects, children and royal members. The palace mansion now changes to forests where she follows her vanquished husbands to their abode of banishment and disgrace. The Kamyaka is the Kingdom she is to queen, the sage priests and the wild beasts and fowls her guests and family, she is to entertain and feed. She feeds the whole of the
forest universe as well as her husbands with the Aksya Patra (The Bowl of Infinity) given to her by the sun-god. It is she who feeds the men, their guests and friends. She is the food giver, not the men. The men do not hunt or search for food and bring it home to be divided among the members of the family as in the early days of her marriage. They also do not provide her with the means of tending them as in the days of her queenhood in Varanavata. The bowl yields food, as much as wanted, as many varieties as wished for till she ate:

phalamūlamāṇam śākaṁ samskṛtaṁ yanmahānase 1
çatuvriddham tadannādyamakṣyayāṁ te bhaviṣyati 1
dhanam ca vividham tubhyāṁyuktvāntaradhiyata 11

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto V, Sl. 3, 26)

[Leaves, Vegetables and the meat and all that is prepared in the kitchen, and these four varieties of food will never be insufficient to any one at any time.]

As Draupadi never eats till all her husbands are served, she fasted till every one was fed. Draupadi provided the energy to sustain life in the forest. Birds, beasts and men got their sustaining fire from the fire-born. The fire-born is the fire of life, the fire that sustains, that lights up, that purifies, protects and preserves. She is the radiant energy that intensifies their desire to live and fight for their rights and duties. Fire-like, she inflames their
ambitions, kindles their hopes. She constantly goads them up against their enemies and ignominy, reminds them of the indignities suffered unmeritedly; stirs them to manifest themselves in glory. Draupadi is the havan fire of the yajna of life. Fire, of all the five elements, is seminal to human life. It stands for lust, love, viraha, hatred, vengeance and soul fire. All intensities are said to burn like fire. Fire is a purifying and purgatorial element. The moon, stars and sun are all the various manifestations of fire; again, of all the elements, fire is the only element that goes up and raises one to the cosmic level.

Draupadi is that fire which kept aglow the desire for excellence, the desire to fight, the desire to attain the heights of glory in the Pandavas. In the Kamyaka forest, not a single day passed without her poking the fury of her men at the indignities suffered in the hands of the Kuru brothers. She asks Yudhisthira how does he bear the pitiable sight of his young brothers, wasting their lives, skills and energies as the price of his mistakes?

bhimasenīṁ hi kārmāṇī svayam kuruṇaṁmaṭyuta
sukhārha dukhitaṁ dṛṣṭvā kasmāṁmanyurna vardhate

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto 27, Sl. 20, 142)

[O Lord, Bhima your brother, who deserves all luxury is now doing everything by himself and is sad and morose: does this not raise your passions to anger?]
[Why don't you react to the pleasure loving Bhimasen wandering barefoot in the forest?]

[That Bhimasen who alone can destroy all the sons of Dhritarashtra is tolerating all torture and inconvenience waiting for your commands.]

She asks Yudhisthira how he tolerates the great Arjun's talents being wasted in the woods:

[Why don't you react to the pleasure loving Bhimasen wandering barefoot in the forest?]

[That Bhimasen who alone can destroy all the sons of Dhritarashtra is tolerating all torture and inconvenience waiting for your commands.]
yo devāṁśca manuṣyāṁśca sarpāśćeikarathojayat

tāṁ te vanagataṁ drṣṭvā kasmāṁmanyurna vardhate

(Sl. 27, 143)

kṣipatyekena vegena panḍa banāśatāṇi yaḥ
tāṁ te vanagataṁ drṣṭvā kasmāṁmanyurna vardhate

(Sl. 29, 143)

[The two armed Arjun, who is equal in strength and ability to the
hundred armed Kartaveeryarjuna; he who in his striking power is like the
king of Death; he on whose strength of arms all the kings of this region,
served the brahmins in the Rajasuya Yajna; worshipped by gods and
demons — this lion of a man Arjuna is mired in agony: Are you not
moved to anger by that?]

On one hand, she provokes Yudhisthira's otherwise unruffled calmness and on
the other, she reminds the other brothers of their talents and inflames their
vengeance. She does not, however, at any moment, instigate one against the
other. While stirring up Yudhisthira's dormant temper, she evokes his pity for
his brothers' misery. Yet, she does not let others think that the cause of their
misery and disgrace is Yudhisthira alone. She subtly points out to Kṛṣṇa who
comes to visit them in the forest that being such an unsurparssable,
unparalleled woman she was put to such shame:
garhayē pāṇḍavaṁnikastaveva yudhi śreṣṭhāṁ mahābalāṁ ।

ye klisāyamanāṁ prekṣante dharmapatnīṁ yaśasvinīṁ ।

(Aranyakaparva, Canto 13, Sl. 58, 72)

[I accuse all these great champions of war tolerating unmanfully the pains of their glorious wife.]

dhigbalāṁ bhimaśenaśya dhiKPārthasya dhanuṁmatāṁ ।
yo māṁ viprakṛtāṁ kṣudreimṛṣayetāṁ janārdana ।

(Aranyakaparva, Canto 13, Sl. 59, 72)

[Fie on him, O Janardan! Fie on Bhima’s proverbial strength; Fie on the great Gandiva of Arjun; those who tolerated my humiliation at the hands of the laity.]

She points out that they allowed Yudhisthira to intimidate her, and did not think of avenging her misfortune. Without hurting their male ego by directly charging them with rude and scornful words nor treating them contemptuously, she tells Lord Kṛṣṇa what a wife is and how a wife should be protected. It is usual in the society, that even a weak man protects his woman:

śaśvatoṣyaṁ dharmapathah sadbhīrācaritaḥ sādaḥ ।

yadbhārya parirakṣanti bhṛtārolpabala api ।

(Canto 13, Sl. 60, 73)
[The law and part of duty prescribed for husbands is that even the weakest would protect his wife.]

When the wife is protected and honoured, the man's children are also protected and hence the soul of the husband is protected:

bharyāyāṁ rakṣayamāṇāyāṁ praJayā bhavati rakṣitaḥ
prajayāṁ rakṣyamāṇayāmātmā bhavati rakṣitaḥ

(Canto 13, Sl. 61, 73)

[If the wife is protected, the children feel secure and when the children are secure and protected the soul too is saved.]

It is so because, the soul of the husband is reinvented through the wife and hence she is called "Jāya". If the husband is not saved from ignominy, how could he be conceived in her womb. So the wife too has to protect the husband and his honour:

atmā hi jāyate tasyaṁ tasmajāya bhavatyuta
bharta ca bhāryayā rakṣyaḥ katham āyāṁmamodare

(Sl. 62, 73)

[It is the soul of the husband that the wife generates, hence she is called "Jāya". With the thought that "if the husband is not protected how can a wife generate a soul", the wife too protects the husband.]

The tone of the entire conversation is maintained in a low and subdued key as though she is talking to Kṛṣṇa casually. An aesthetic detachment, a
neutral observer's critical view, untinged by any other passion except genuine unhappiness over a helpless woman disgraced in the crowded court, ring in her words. Finally, she tells Kṛṣṇa that the Pandavas who never desert or refuse any destitute coming for help, did not come to her rescue. Their wife was abandoned to her own device at the most fateful moment of her need.

Her piteous appeal for rescue was not heeded:

\[
\text{nānvime śāraṇāṁ prāptānṇa tyajanti kadaçana} \\
\text{te māṁ śāraṇamāpannāṁ nānvyadjaṁta pāṇdvāḥ} \\
\text{(Canto 13, Sl. 63, 73)}
\]

[These Pandavas always grant asylum to whoever came to surrender, but this poor me they have not protected.]

Without throwing tantrums, or hurling sulky harsh remarks, with sober grief she tells her men that a wife and husband are each others' soul and they should keep each others' honour. If the wife is the last resortable treasure to be pawned to keep a man's honour, then, such a treasure should be zealously guarded. And she demonstrates it by demanding her honour to be vindicated. Leaving her hair unplaited, she moves around for fourteen years, reminding her men their purpose of life, sharpening their sense of honour, keeping alive the fire of revenge in them. The purpose of life, vindicating the Pandava honour and glorifying the Pandava Sati's eclipsed dignity by punishing their enemies and winning back her lost empire to her, becomes almost a mission of
life for these men. All the five, including the usually unruffled Yudhisthira
take to heart her miseries, her ignominy and her defeat.

It is as though she is the queen and they are her soldiers and their life's
mission is to fight for her honour, her lost queenhood and glory. They take
her name, spur themselves against their formidable rivals by recollecting how
they humiliated her, in the great Kuru battle while killing the Kurus. The
Kurus are treated and punished more as her wrong doers than as their
enemies. The war is fought more to restore her lost honour and queendom
than to regain their rights betrayed. At this point, Iravati Karve's somewhat
modern and rationalistic understanding of Draupadi as woman is relevant.
Karve, however, maintains that Draupadi is a flawed character. Her attack on
Draupadi is on two counts: one, the question which Draupadi asks
Yudhisthira at the Kuru court where she was dragged forcibly after
Yudhisthira lost his everything including wife Draupadi is a "mistake" (Iravati
Karve, Yuganta). The only justification for this observation is the norms of
social morality of a society which accepts women behind the curtains only.
Draupadi was not challenging the very idea of Yudhisthira playing dice; her
attack was on the basic principles in history about the rights of woman and
wife. She is the first woman perhaps in history to have raised such an issue,
whether a woman is a stakeable property owned by a husband. This question
hits at the very roots of the society which follows a civilization where woman
has no right to speak, least of all challenge, the current socio-ethical norms, in a public court in the presence of kings, sages, scholars and warriors. Iravati Karve subscribes to this kind of civilization where the wife and her other identity in Hindu joint families, the daughter-in-law (Bahu) can not and should not interfere with the decisions taken by the male world. Vyasa's Draupadi in world literature is the first woman who has expressed a quest for identity as a female self. Her central argument is built around the concept of femininity and its position in the human society. The observation of Iravati Karve, however, confines Draupadi to a legal moral-frame:

The question Draupadi asked rested on a difficult and complicated legal point. Even Bhisma who had often taken the part of the Pandavas in quarrels with Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana was unable to give an answer, perhaps for fear of compromising Draupadi. What Draupadi was contending was that once Dharma had become a slave he had lost his freedom and had no right to claim anything as his own; a slave has nothing he can stake. Then how could Dharma stake her freedom? Although her argument seems plausible from one point of view, even a slave has a wife, and the fact of slavery does not destroy his authority over her. Moreover, from the most ancient times a slave had the right to accumulate certain property that was entirely his own. The question was
thus a tangled one, involving the rights of a master over a slave and a
slave over his wife.

(Karve, 125-126)

Karve's argument is that even a slave has a wife, and the "fact of slavery does not destroy his authority over her". Karve introduces the concepts of freedom and slavery and believes that a slave has authority over his wife and property. If this authority bestowed on man, empowers the husband even to sell his wife as Harischandra, one of the ancient Kings of India did, following one set of laws of appeasing saints and scholars and sacrificing personal comforts and powers, should not a woman challenge it? Is it not the freedom of woman to have her identity, psycho-social and real? Draupadi has emerged from being a slave's wife, as a free woman asking the primordial question; what is the position of woman, especially a wife in a clan and joint family system. Is she a free woman or a slave's wife? Karve's second attack is on Draupadi's very soul, her feminine personality. Karve observes that the question Draupadi asked was "not only foolish; it was terrible":

Draupadi's question was not only foolish; it was terrible. No matter what answer was given her position was desperate. If Bhisma told her that her husband's rights over her did not cease, that even though he became a slave, she was in his power and he has the right to stake her, her slavery would have been confirmed. If Bhīṣma had argued that because of his
slavery her husband had no more rights over her, then her plight would have been truly pitiable. Draupadi was described as *nathavati anathavat* - "with husbands but like a widow". and if her relation with her husband was destroyed she would have been truly widowed. From Rigvedic times there are references to the abandoned wives living wretchedly in the house of their father. But there is not a single case in which a woman, of her own accord, had denied her husband. For such a woman, getting even a lowly position in her father's house would have been impossible, to say nothing of an honourable one. (126)

Karve's suggestion is that as Draupadi was in Yudhisthira's powers, even though he became a slave, he does not cease to own his wife. This logic stems from a world view where woman has no free existence. She is the property of even a slave. Her own independent soul has no identity. Karve's contention that if Bhisma had answered her question that a slave had no right over anything, then also, Draupadi's position would have been further pitiable; she is a married widow of five husbands and could have been destituted by Bhisma's answer. The proposition does not seem to be quite tenable because in view of the total personality and soul force of Draupadi even destitution would have paved the way for a revolutionary order of civilisation where the woman is accepted as a separate human being with certain rights of her own. Had she denied her husbands, as Karve indirectly
suggests, Draupadi's question would have amounted to a denial of her very existence as wife. In such an event, the structure of the epic world have been different. But Draupadi does not deny her husbands as she is a proud wife. It is fortunate that the plot of *Mahabharat* did not take any such turn because Draupadi's question did not implicate a denial of her husbands.

In other words, Draupadi's question was not a sacrifice of her identity of wife, the royal consort. She was on the other hand demanding the rights of a wife, who in a marriage is not enslaved. Earlier at her marriage she had absorbed the humiliation of being called 'alms', now she can not be a slave's property to be staked or auctioned at will. Draupadi has asserted her sense of honour as woman and wife. Instead of condemning her on her rebellious traits of personality we should rather compliment her that at the most critical juncture where feminine honour was at stake, she did not accept her contrived fate meekly as other women in history and literature have done.

She is no dust absorbing doormat. The sage poet has wrought her on different dimensions altogether:

priyā ca darsanīyā ca panditā ca pativrataḥ

(Aryanyakaparva-I, Canto 28, Sl. 2, 139)

[Draupadi is beautiful, sweet, scholarly and a chaste wife.]

She is neither boastful nor arrogant; she is neither pretentious nor ostentatious; she is an extremely truthful woman. After a prolonged discourse


on Dharma, political order, kingly duties with Yudhisthira in the

Aranyakaparva, she states with a simplicity devoid of pride:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{bṛāhmaṇaṁ me pīta pūrva vāsayaṁśa panditaṁ} \quad & \\
sosmā arthanimaṁ praḥa pitre me bharataṁśabhah \quad & \\
nītīṁ bṛahaspatriproktāṁ bhrāṭrmeghāhayatpurā \quad & \\
teṣāṁ sāṅkathyamasrouṣamahetattadā grhe
\end{align*}
\]

(Aranyakaparva-I, Canto 33, Sl. 56 & 57, 177-178)

[O Yudhistir, long back my father kept a brahmin at home who told him these meaningful things. When that brahmin taught my brothers the ethical codes and moral laws proscribed by Brihaspati, I too sitting near them heard all those things.]

Draupadi perhaps is the only woman in literature who describes a full circle of life. She rises, falls and rises again. Her honour is vindicated.

Throughout the thirteen years of exile she accepts all life as hers. When she moves as Sairandhri to the Virata palace during the underground period, she is not the docile role-player; playing beautician to the Virata Queen. She is the centre of attraction and the cause of critical action in the intricate episode of the death of Keechak. She is the most desirable woman, even as a servant, hair-dresser to the queen. And for her honour her husband rises to destroy evil. Draupadi is, in one sense, the plot of the Mahabharat after her svayamvar. She inspires them to resurface again in glory after the underground period, as
she had done at her svayamvara when the mendicants were identified as Pandavas.

The great Mahabharat war starts. She does not hesitate to embrace her husbands with her wifely nobility and queenly determination for fiery revenge. She stakes her all to get back the glory of the Empress: for thereby she would be compensated for the ignominy that was 'lavished' on her at the dice game. All her husbands come back to her with victory, the revenger's victory, by trouncing the Kauravas in the field of dharma and its bloody encounters.

She wins, she plaits her hair, wears ornaments and rises as the Empress again. She lives life in its totality: moves, rules, guides, and administers as wife. She is one of the completest women in literature; except Sakuntala, in Kalidas's drama, no other woman is vindicated and restored to happy life. But Sakuntala reaches the peak experience of her life by divine interference, and reaches it only once. Draupadi describes another cycle: Peak to Nadir to Zenith. She was born beautiful and aesthetically refined and wise; brought fortune to the Pandavas. They became Chkravartis and she became the Chakravartini, the Empress. Then she fell into the worst disgrace a woman could ever suffer being the wife of the great Pandavas. She did not give up in despair her sworn cause: nor did she take her revenge out of the five husbands discarding them as unworthy of her being. She could have turned away in pique (a shade inferior to Abhimana) to seek her own revenge. But
Draupadi is a wife. Her womanhood is complete as wife. The woman in her
has the identity of *wife*; the wife and Empress of the Pandavas. The wife could
not run away. Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, left home and family for lesser
humiliation. Nora's honour was not protected by her moralist husband
Hjalmer. Nora had committed a forgery to save her husband's life. Hjalmer,
however, did not stand by, the not so unreasonable transgressions of the
moral order by wife Nora. The honour - shock of Nora compared to the
honour - shock of Draupadi (what the Americans say, peanuts) is less intense.
In the case of Nora one individual suddenly loses her personal universe when
the bond of operational faith in her family breaks because of her husbands'
refusal to commit another transgression of the moral order by supporting the
guilt of his wife. This drop of the illusory faith between wife and husband
kills the relationship and makes the woman withdraw from family. Her
withdrawal is her protest, her revenge on her tormentors. Nora loses home,
husband, family and society by going away.

Draupadi does not turn away from her husbands in spite of despair.
when they in helpless silence watch (with heads downcast for relief) the wife,
the mother and the Queen being denuded in the open court. The Queen falls
into public ignominy. Nature was being raped by barbarity while the heroes
of nature remained unmoved. Her cause is definitely greater. If she walks out
on her husbands, woman would forever be damned; her pride would be
darkened. She therefore rises to prove that she can argue in the court, show
herself as a great woman, wife and Queen. In her worst days in the forest she
wives nature. She becomes identified with nature. She becomes the universal
mother. She lives with them, drawing all the five to her central purpose. It is
through her personal purpose the universe would become a new order where
truth and mercy would build a new civilization. She succeeds in making the
vision come true by her dominating personal theme. She succeeds as woman,
gaining the identity of a royal wife, who does not despair in suffering and
rises again to share the presiding seat by her own rights. She is integrated
into the universe.

She completes the great cycle of life by finally falling on the snow, at
the foothills of the snow clad Himalayas (in the Swargarohanaparva). The fire-
born gets the shroud and bed of snow - perhaps to keep her fresh and
glowing for a long time. From fire to snow she describes the mandala (circle),
of life and death. She was the first to fall among the journeyers to heaven.
None turned back, nor rushed to caress her. She too had no need of heaven:
for the greatest work of woman on earth is to send her husband to heaven
with glory which she has accomplished. In the Mahaprasthanikaparva when the
Pandavas decide to renounce their worldly abode and walk to heaven,
Draupadi follows them happily and dutifully:

prṣṭhataṣtu varāroḥā syāmā padmadalekṣaṇā ।
draupadī yoṣitāṃ sreṣṭhā yaśou bharatasattama । ।

(Mahaprasthanikaparva, Sl. 30, 5)

[O great son of Bharata! The lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, beautiful and the best
among women, Draupadi too followed them.]

Moreover, she dies a married woman, a wife, with her bangles and make up
(vermillion etc.) aglow. In the Hindu faith there is no better death for woman.

It is held in popular belief as well as critical evaluation that Draupadi is evil; she causes war, death and destruction. Such a view emerges when we look at the surface of the Mahabharat plot. The epic's vast design of a universe moves from disorder to order. The war is symbolic of a bloody dispensation of justice in a heroic structure of life. It is shown that violence and death is one of the ways of enforcing order when things become gangrenous and rotten. Draupadi in this design is an order figure. She brings or causes to bring, an order where rationality and values operate in logical measure. If she causes destruction, she does so because she is a great "hero" by her own feminine grace. If archery and sword skills, political sharpness are the virtues of the Pandavas, she has the virtues of beauty, taste, ambition, pride, tenacity of purpose, determination, challenging spirit and patience to integrate a vision. If she causes war she does so to destroy the dross. In any process of
change sacrifices have to be made and innocents have to die like her own sons being killed by Asvatthama in a fit of irrational anger. She too sacrifices motherhood to rise to be the order figure. The royal wife wears the crown till the end.

Draupadi is the supreme illustration of the feminine principle as wife who builds and creates a totality, coursing through the veriegated pastures of reality. She takes birth to become the Pandava-wife and to set up order through war. The fire in her purges the dross and evil. She has a life-energy that moulds and motivates the brightest men of her times to a great cause. She is the nucleus of the structure of life raised in the Mahabharat. Draupadi's life dynamism is the greatest and the most complete form of feminine manifestation, in the socio-moral role of wife.