



# Exploring the Timeless Dimensions of the *Mahabharata* through Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya*: Re-Locating Draupadi in the Modern Indian Imaginary

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**Abstract**— *The Mahabharata, an epic that continues to captivate audiences across generations, presents a rich tapestry of characters and themes that transcend time and space and impact culture even today, centuries after it was written. Draupadi, the central character, stands out as a complex and enigmatic figure whose portrayal has evolved over centuries of retelling. From her birth to 'swayamvara' (self-choice to marry) to her eventual fate, Draupadi's life reflects timeless themes of strength and resilience. Draupadi's character embodies complexities that resonate with contemporary discourses on gender, power, and agency, especially in the Indian subcontinent. She defies limitations in her quest for justice and empowerment and has fuelled the imagination of many writers for years. This paper will explore the portrayal of Draupadi across various retellings and interpretations, particularly drawing from Devdutt Pattanaik's comprehensive narrative in Jaya. Pattanaik's Jaya bridges ancient mythology and modern interpretation, offering readers a fresh perspective on the Mahabharata's relevance to contemporary life. This paper uses feminist theories to analyse and re-locate Draupadi in the modern Indian imagination shaped by the cultural dynamics or politics of the doctrines of Hinduism.*



**Keywords**— *Mythology, Draupadi, cultural dynamics, Dharma, feminism, agency*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In India, feminism often intertwines with cultural narratives, including mythology, profoundly influencing societal values and norms. Indian mythology is rich with complex female figures, such as the Hindu goddesses Durga, Kali, Sita, and Draupadi, who embody a range of qualities from strength and independence to sacrifice and devotion. Feminists in India have sometimes reinterpreted these figures to challenge patriarchal interpretations and to offer alternative narratives of empowerment. Durga and Kali are often reinterpreted as symbols of feminine power and resistance, challenging the notion that women should be passive or submissive. Sita, traditionally seen as the epitome of wifely devotion, has been reimagined by some feminists as a figure who exercises agency within the constraints of her circumstances, particularly in her decision to return to the earth at the end of the great Indian epic,

*Ramayana*. Western feminism, particularly in its second and third waves, has often taken a more critical stance towards cultural myths and traditional narratives, especially those perceived as upholding patriarchal values.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In many cases, Western feminists have sought to deconstruct or challenge these myths to expose and dismantle the underlying power structures. Feminists have critically examined the figure of Eve from the Bible as a symbol of how women have been historically blamed for sin and moral weakness. Feminists like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her work *In Memory of Her* (1984), challenge these narratives by reinterpreting them from a feminist theological perspective. Cinderella and other fairy tales have been critiqued for promoting passive female roles and

the idea that a woman's ultimate happiness lies in marriage. The story of Medusa, traditionally seen as a monstrous figure, has been reinterpreted by feminists as a symbol of female rage and victimhood. This is evident in works like *The Medusa Reader* (2003) by Marjorie Garber, where Medusa's narrative critiques misogyny and explores themes of female empowerment. These examples illustrate how Indian and Western feminists' approach cultural narratives differently, reflecting their unique contexts and priorities in pursuing gender equality. In both contexts, the goal is to achieve gender equality and empower women. The methods, however, are tailored to the specific cultural, historical, and social landscapes in which these feminisms operate.

Draupadi, the chief female protagonist of the great Indian epic *Mahabharata*, has been reinterpreted and reimagined in various literary works, both within the Indian subcontinent and beyond. The focus of this paper is to relocate Draupadi in the modern Indian imagination shaped by the cultural dynamics or politics of the doctrines of Hinduism. Many authors and playwrights have explored her inner thoughts, emotions, and motivations, adding psychological depth to her character. *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) by Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective. Banerjee challenges traditional narratives that depict Draupadi as a passive victim, instead portraying her as a resilient and assertive woman who navigates the complexities of her world with strength and grace. By giving voice to Draupadi's inner world, Banerjee invites readers to reconsider their perceptions of this iconic figure and appreciate her role's complexity within the *Mahabharata* narrative. In doing so, the novel enriches our understanding of Draupadi as a character. It offers a fresh perspective on the timeless themes of love, loyalty, and destiny that permeate the epic. Throughout the novel, the dynamics between one of the major characters of the epic, Karna, the son of Hindu Sun god Surya, a great warrior, and Draupadi evolves amidst the backdrop of the *Mahabharata*'s political intrigue and epic battles. In Banerjee's narrative, Karna and Draupadi's encounters are emotionally intense as they navigate the complexities of duty, honour, and forbidden desire. In Pratibha Ray's *Yagnaseni* (1984), Draupadi is a figure of immense moral strength who fulfills her duties as a wife to the five Pandavas despite her personal feelings and the injustices she suffers. Ray emphasizes Draupadi's role as a dutiful wife and a symbol of righteousness, portraying her as an ideal woman, unwavering in her adherence to her moral responsibilities. Saiswaroopa Iyer's *"Draupadi: The Tale of an Empress"* (2019), Ira Mukhoty's *Song of Draupadi* (2021) and Koral Dasgupta's *Draupadi* (2022) each offer a unique retelling of the *Mahabharata*, centring on the often-

overlooked perspectives of its women, particularly Draupadi. Mukhoty's narrative focuses on the lives of key female figures, presenting them with a deep historical and psychological lens. Dasgupta's work, interwoven with poetry, provides an intimate exploration of Draupadi's inner world and emotions, creating a lyrical and reflective portrait. Iyer's approach is episodic, focusing on defining moments in Draupadi's life, highlighting her evolution from a queen to an empress. On the contrary, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* (2010) treats Draupadi more as a character within a grand narrative, with her symbolic role in the epic taking precedence over her personal story.

### III. RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship on reinterpretations of the *Mahabharata* has extensively examined Draupadi as a central female figure; however, limited attention has been paid to the manner in which Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* positions her primarily within the broader moral and philosophical framework of the epic rather than as an autonomous narrative voice. Unlike contemporary retellings that foreground Draupadi's personal experiences and subjectivity, Pattanaik's narrative presents her largely as a symbolic figure whose experiences contribute to larger concerns of justice, dharma, and the consequences of human actions. Although Draupadi receives significant narrative attention in *Jaya*, there remains a noticeable gap in critical studies examining how her characterization functions as a vehicle for the epic's ethical and philosophical discourse. Therefore, this paper seeks to address this gap by analysing how Pattanaik emphasizes Draupadi's symbolic significance within the grand narrative structure of the *Mahabharata*.

In *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*, Devdutt Pattanaik provides a subtle portrayal of Draupadi, one of the most complex and pivotal characters in the epic. Draupadi is born out of a sacrificial fire, that makes her a divine figure with a predetermined destiny. Her birth is often seen as a response to her father's desire for revenge against Drona (the warrior Brahmin who instructs the Kuru dynasty), and she is prophesied to bring about great change. As far as marriage and polyandry are concerned, Draupadi becomes the wife of the five Pandavas due to misunderstandings and the peculiar circumstances of their lives. This polyandrous marriage challenges societal norms and is a significant aspect of her identity. It is important to note that despite the complexities of her marriage, Draupadi is portrayed as a devoted wife who maintains her dignity and commands respect from her husbands. Her humiliation in the Kaurava court, where she is disrobed, is one of the most pivotal and traumatic events

in the *Mahabharata*. This incident highlights the themes of powerlessness and injustice. Draupadi vows that she will not tie her hair until it is washed in the blood of those who wronged her. Her vow symbolizes her resolve and the driving force behind the Pandavas' quest for justice. She is depicted as a woman of intelligence and insight, who questions the norms and decisions that affect her life and the lives of her husbands. Throughout the epic, she serves as a moral compass for the Pandavas, challenging them to uphold dharma and seek justice. Her story continues to inspire discussions about women's rights, justice, and empowerment in contemporary society which is dealt with in this article. In *Jaya*, Devdutt Pattanaik emphasizes Draupadi's multifaceted character, highlighting her as a central figure in the narrative of the *Mahabharata*. Her journey is not only of suffering and struggle but also of immense strength and influence, making her one of the epic's most memorable and impactful characters.

### Violation of Dharma in Marriage:

Draupadi's character in the *Mahabharata* indeed presents a contrast to many of the prescriptions found in the *Manusmriti* or *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, ancient text on principles governing Hindu society. The *Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, generally promotes monogamy but allows polygamy under certain conditions. According to *Manusmriti*:

वन्द्याष्टमेऽधिवेद्याब्दे दशमे तु मृतप्रजा ।

एकादशे स्त्रीजननी सद्यस्त्वप्रियवादिनी ॥ ८१ ॥

*vandhyāṣṭame'dhivedyābde daśame tu mṛtaprajā |*

*ekādaśe strījananī sadyastvapriyavādinī || 81 ||* (Tr. Jha

9.81)

It does not explicitly mention polyandry but provides rules for supersession, where a husband may take another wife if the first wife is barren, produces only daughters, or has children who die. Polyandry does not fit within these prescriptions, as the text is primarily concerned with a man having multiple wives for specific reasons related to progeny and household duties. Unlike the *Mahabharata*, where polyandry serves as a tool for unity and divine justice, the *Manusmriti* focuses on practicalities related to lineage and male offspring, with no explicit mention of polyandry as an acceptable practice. While *Manusmriti* advocates for monogamy, Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandavas significantly departs from this norm. Her unique marital situation does not align with the monogamous ideal presented in the *Manusmriti*. The concept of polyandry in the *Mahabharata* and the rules laid down in the *Manusmriti* present two distinct perspectives on the practice of a woman having multiple husbands. In the *Mahabharata*, the story of Kunti, the mother of Pandavas, inadvertently instructing her

sons to share Draupadi is a result of a misunderstanding when Kunti, without looking, tells Arjuna to share what he has brought home with his brothers. Despite realizing her mistake, Kunti insists on her words being followed, citing the need for unity among her sons, the Pandavas. Yudhishthira, the eldest of Pandavas and protector of dharma supports this decision by narrating an ancient story of Vidula, who married the ten Prachetas brothers, showing that such arrangements have historical precedent. It is worth noting that dharma related to marriage is changed as per convenience as described in the narrative. By removing the element of choice, Draupadi is presented as a woman fulfilling a divine role rather than exercising personal agency in her marital arrangement. In contemporary society, the story of Draupadi raises questions about how power and agency are wielded in relationships and how societal norms can limit women's choices. It reflects ongoing struggles for gender equality and the fight against patriarchal structures that restrict women's autonomy. The *Mahabharata* narrative reflects how power can be used to justify women's roles and decisions, often without their consent. Nowadays, similar justifications are used to control and limit women's choices, using cultural, religious, or social norms as rationale. Draupadi's marriage in the *Mahabharata* is justified through the power dynamics of her time, reflecting broader themes of duty and destiny. Her marriage also highlights issues of gender inequality and the use of power to control women's lives. The condition that Draupadi would walk through fire to regain her virginity before moving to the next husband symbolically highlights the objectification and ritualistic treatment of her role as a wife, emphasizing purity and service rather than personal agency or desire.

The Pandavas were allowed to marry other women during the years they were not with Draupadi, highlights a disparity in the freedoms afforded to men and women. The Pandavas' ability to seek other partners contrasts with Draupadi's more constrained marital obligations. It is clearly stated by Pattanaik in *Jaya* that "In Indonesia, Arjuna is said to have married seven women besides Draupadi" (Pattanaik 120). Likewise,

Yudhistira married Devika, the daughter of Govasana of the Saivya tribe, and begat a son called Yaudheya upon her. Bhima married Valandhara, the daughter of the king of Kashi, and begat upon her a son named Sarvaga. Nakula married Karenumati, the princess of Chedi, and begat a son named Niramitra upon her. Sahadeva obtained Vijaya, the daughter of Dyutimat, the king of Madra, and begat a son named Suhotra upon her. (116)

Draupadi's demand that these other wives should not reside in Indraprastha represents one of her few assertions of

agency, which is later violated with the arrival of Subhadra, Arjuna's wife. It suggests a desire to maintain her position and control within the household, but it also underscores her limited power, as the arrangement still primarily benefits the Pandavas. In modern contexts, similar issues arise when women's roles are defined by familial duties and societal norms, leading to suppressed identities and constrained freedoms. The treatment of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* reflects the complexities of power dynamics, gender roles, and agency. While she had certain demands met, the overall structure of her marriage underscores the suppression of her identity in favour of familial harmony and duty.

#### IV. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy is a key aspect of soft power, and just as soft power relies on the attractiveness of culture, ideals, and policies to influence others, Draupadi's interactions and decisions reflect the influence of cultural values and wisdom in shaping outcomes. Soft power "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced" (Nye X). Kunti's role in facilitating the polyandrous marriage of her sons to Draupadi can indeed be seen as an exercise of *soft power*. Kunti's influence over her sons and Draupadi is not based on coercion but rather on the power of her authority as a mother, her wisdom, and her ability to appeal to the higher ideals of unity and family duty. Kunti's role in orchestrating the polyandrous marriage of her sons to Draupadi is a clear example of soft power at work when Kunti uses her influence, wisdom, and emotional appeal to achieve her goal of keeping her sons united. Kunti's approach is a masterful use of persuasion and attraction, rather than force, to maintain family unity. Draupadi's acceptance can be read as a response to Kunti's soft power, where cultural values, maternal authority, and the appeal to family unity and harmony influence her decision.

According to Joseph Nye, "Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (5). Draupadi's narrative can be considered a case in point of analysis to explore how similar forms of soft power like social expectations, cultural traditions, and internalised patriarchy continue to shape women's experiences and limit their autonomy. Draupadi's story is not just about her suffering but also about how her identity is constructed through her relationships with the men in her life: her husbands, her father, and her tormentors. This story reflects the broader societal tendency to define women in relation to men. The soft power exercised on Draupadi in the *Mahabharata*

offers a rich narrative for examining the subtleties of power, gender, and resistance. Her story is a powerful lens to explore ongoing struggles for women's autonomy and equality in historical and contemporary contexts.

**Voice of Draupadi:** Draupadi's questioning of the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudhishtira's right to stake her after losing himself in the gambling game, can be seen as an assertion of her agency, challenging the patriarchal norms of her time. Her refusal to remain silent and passive in the face of injustice aligns with modern feminist ideals, where a woman's right to question authority and assert her dignity is central. It is pertinent to note that Draupadi's question about Yudhishtira's right to stake her after losing himself in the gambling game irked Duryodhana. "He felt it was beneath him to be answerable to any woman, even Draupadi" (Pattanaik 145). The act of staking Draupadi in a gambling game and her subsequent humiliation by Duryodhana and Dusshasana are emblematic of how women have historically been treated as property or objects within patriarchal societies. Draupadi's question, "Is this dharma, to treat a woman so?" (145) during her public humiliation in the Kaurava court, is a powerful moment that resonates deeply with issues of injustice and the denial of voice, both in her context and in contemporary society. Draupadi's question is timeless, embodying the struggle against injustice and the demand for a voice in a world that often seeks to silence the marginalized. Motswapong Pulane Elizabeth rightly mentioned in her article "Understanding Draupadi as a paragon of gender and resistance" that "Through subversion, she becomes that which resists 'counter' male knowledge, power and glory. By so doing, Draupadi rejects the binary structures of patriarchal discourses of the political, social, and ideological forces of the society, hence subverting commodification in the society and preceding her identity as a human, not a commodity." Her courage in the face of overwhelming odds continues to inspire and resonate with contemporary movements for justice, equality, and human dignity. Draupadi is often denied agency and voice in crucial moments despite being a powerful and intelligent woman. Feminist theorist Martha C. Nussbaum critiques this objectification in her article "Objectification," where she highlights seven features of objectification. The seven features are:

1. *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;
2. *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
3. *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;

4. *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;
5. *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;
6. *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold);
7. *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account. (Nussbaum 257)

Treatment of Draupadi, especially during the disrobing incident at the assembly hall in *Mahabharata*, aligns with the features of objectification. There is a denial of subjectivity, and she is treated as an enslaved person who can be traded. Further, she also serves as a tool for the objectifier's purposes. In the assembly hall Karna, whom Draupadi had disqualified from participating in her 'Swayamvara,' calls her "a whore, public property, to be treated as your master's will" (Pattanaik 146). Here, Draupadi is treated as an object of trade in the game of dice. It is pertinent to note Pattanaik's point about situating this incident in contemporary society. Pattanaik interprets Draupadi's disrobing as more than just a physical act of violence; he sees it as a symbolic representation of the collapse of civilization. He says, "The unclenching of Draupadi is not merely the unclenching of a woman; it represents the collapse of civilization, the move from field to forest, from Gauri to Kali, when dharma is abandoned and Matsya Nyaya reigns supreme, so that might dominates the meek" (147). Gauri, representing the nurturing and gentle aspect of the feminine, is replaced by Kali, who embodies destruction and rage. This metaphor illustrates the destruction of dharma (righteousness) and the rise of adharma (unrighteousness) in society. (147)

In the modern context, this metaphor can be applied to situations where societal norms and ethical values are eroded, leading to chaos and injustice. For instance, when human rights are violated, the rule of law is subverted, or when power is used to exploit the vulnerable, it represents a "collapse of civilization" (147) in Pattanaik's terms. The rise of authoritarian regimes, the marginalization of minorities, and the exploitation of natural resources without regard for future generations are modern parallels to the Matsya Nyaya (the law of the fish, where the big fish eats the small fish) that Pattanaik mentions. Matsya Nyaya reflects a world where might makes right, and the powerful dominate the weak, abandoning the principles of justice and equity. Pattanaik's critique of the "hair-splitting arguments" (147) regarding whether a man can gamble his wife after losing himself speaks to a broader issue of how legal and moral justifications are often used to obscure the

fundamental injustice of a situation. In the story, Draupadi is treated as chattel, a mere object to be gambled away, which raises questions about her agency, autonomy, and the value of women in that society. Mistreatment of Draupadi can be read as the way legal systems and societal norms often fail to protect women and marginalized groups from exploitation. For example, debates about the legality of certain actions (such as marital rape, domestic violence, or human trafficking) can sometimes distract from the underlying moral issue: the treatment of human beings as property or commodities. The focus on legal technicalities can obscure the fact that, fundamentally, people are being dehumanized and their rights violated.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the 'subaltern' from her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* offers another lens to understand Draupadi's humiliation. Spivak examines how marginalized voices, particularly women are often silenced or misrepresented in dominant discourses. Draupadi, as a woman in a patriarchal society, occupies a subaltern position where the male characters around her constantly undermine her agency. When Karna insults Draupadi, he effectively silences her by reducing her to a mere object of male discourse. Despite her earlier act of agency in choosing her husband, Draupadi's voice and choice are disregarded in the public sphere, illustrating the broader cultural pattern Spivak identifies, where subaltern women are not allowed to articulate their identities and desires. While Draupadi's actions challenge patriarchal norms, Karna's response seeks to reassert those norms through the mechanisms of shame and control.

## V. DHARMA CONSEQUENTIALITY

The consequences of actions, particularly those taken in the name of dharma (moral duty or righteousness), are significant and far-reaching, often extending beyond the immediate context to impact the broader moral and social order. In the context of the *Mahabharata*, particularly in the case of Draupadi's story, this concept plays a crucial role in understanding the ethical dilemmas the characters face and the outcomes of their decisions. Yudhishtira's choice to gamble Draupadi away in the dice game is a pivotal example of dharma consequentiality. While Yudhishtira might have believed he was acting according to his duty as a Kshatriya (warrior) by participating in the game, the consequences of this action were catastrophic not just for Draupadi but for the entire Kuru dynasty. Draupadi's humiliation leads to the eventual downfall of the Kauravas and the great war of Kurukshetra. Similarly, Yudhishtira's decision to maintain the secrecy of the Pandavas' identities during their exile, even at the cost of Draupadi's safety and dignity, is another example of dharma consequentiality. His

adherence to the vow of anonymity (a key aspect of their dharma during the exile) results in Draupadi being subjected to further suffering, which fuels the rage and desire for revenge that drives much of the epic's later events. Draupadi's experiences reflect how the violation of dharma, particularly through the mistreatment of women, has broader social and moral consequences. The epic suggests that when dharma is not upheld, especially in treating the vulnerable, it leads to societal collapse and widespread suffering. Singh's article "Jurisprudence in and As 'Mahabharata': An Edifying Epic" (2010) aptly mentions that Sati (burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband) and slavery was abolished not with "an approach of avoidance but owing to society's ability and willingness to come to grips with reasonableness" (173). On the contrary, the approach of avoidance citing dharma was adopted by the members of the royalty at the assembly hall. At the same time, the disrobing incident occurred, objectifying Draupadi as an entity to be gambled.

Dhritarashtra, the blind king of the Kuru clan, attempts to stop Draupadi from cursing his family, reflecting his recognition of the grave injustice that has occurred in his court. By admitting that it was a disgrace that he could not stop the dice game, Dhritarashtra acknowledges his failure as the patriarch of the Kuru dynasty. His powerlessness to prevent the humiliation of Draupadi underscores his moral weakness and the erosion of dharma within his court. He offers three boons to Draupadi in order to stop her from cursing. Draupadi's first request for the freedom of her husbands demonstrate her primary concern for their well-being and their restoration to dignity. Draupadi's decision to forgo the third boon, stating that "greed is unbecoming of a warrior's wife," (148) reveals her deep moral integrity and wisdom. In a moment where she could have asked for anything, she chooses to exercise restraint. This act of renunciation is significant as it distinguishes Draupadi from others in the epic who are driven by greed or desire for power. It also reinforces her commitment to dharma and the principles of honour that guide her actions. Draupadi's actions in this episode exemplify the ideal of restraint, a key aspect of dharma. Her refusal to ask for more than what is necessary demonstrates her understanding that true strength lies not in the accumulation of power or wealth but in the adherence to righteous principles. Her restraint contrasts sharply with the greed and ambition that drive many other characters in the *Mahabharata*, particularly the Kauravas.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The study of Draupadi's portrayal in *Mahabharata* with special reference to *Jaya* reveals how cultural narratives

have been used to reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles. Devdutt Pattanaik's analysis of Draupadi's disrobing in the *Mahabharata* serves as a potent reminder of the dangers of abandoning ethical principles in favour of power and control. In the modern context, it makes us reflect on how legal systems, cultural norms, and societal values can be manipulated to justify exploitation and injustice. It calls for a deeper commitment to dharma, not just as a legal or religious principle, but as a fundamental ethical guideline for ensuring that all members of society are treated with dignity and respect. This reflection is especially relevant in a world where power dynamics favour the strong over the weak, often at the cost of justice and humanity.

The worship of Draupadi as Virapanchali in the Tamil tradition, particularly in the folk and rural cultures of Tamil Nadu, offers a fascinating lens through which to view her character in a modern context. Draupadi's transformation from a historical and mythological figure into a deity revered for her strength, resilience, and warrior-like qualities reflects broader societal values and the role of mythology in shaping cultural identity. The reverence for Draupadi as Virapanchali can be seen as a form of cultural resistance to patriarchal norms that often seek to limit or control women's roles. By elevating Draupadi to the status of a goddess, Tamil culture acknowledges and venerates her struggles, assertiveness, and unwavering demand for justice, which resonates with modern feminist ideals. Likewise, the worship of Draupadi as a 'fierce virgin-goddess in South India' (Pattanaik 150), especially through the re-enactment of the *Mahabharata* and the ritual of fire-walking, offers a unique perspective on the themes of gender, responsibility, and justice. The ritual of fire-walking at the end of the festival, where young men walk on fire, is believed to symbolize an act of collective expiation for the failure of Draupadi's five husbands to protect her. These practices highlight the deep cultural and religious significance of Draupadi's story, emphasizing the need for collective accountability and the power of ritual in addressing moral and ethical failures. In the modern context, this tradition serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender justice and the importance of acknowledging and atoning for past wrongs.

## DECLARATION

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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