

= Panchakanya =

Panchakanya (पञ्चकन्या , pañcakanyā) is a group of five iconic heroines of Hindu epics , extolled in a hymn and whose names are believed to dispel sin when recited . They are Ahalya , Draupadi , Sita or Kunti , Tara and Mandodari . Ahalya , Tara , Mandodari and Sita are from the epic Ramayana ; while Draupadi and Kunti are from the Mahabharata .

The panchakanya are venerated as ideal women and chaste wives in one view . Their association with more than one man and breaking of traditions in some cases are prescribed as not to be followed by others .

= = Hymn = =

The well @-@ known Sanskrit hymn that defines the Panchakanys runs :

A variant replaces Sita with Kunti :

Differences are underlined .

Practicing Hindus , especially Hindu wives , remember the Panchakanya in this daily morning prayer . Their names are extolled and the prayer is pratah smaraniya , prescribed to be recited in the early hours of the morning .

The panchakanya literally means five kanyas . Kanya may be translated as girl , daughter , maiden or virgin . Though all being married , the choice of the word kanya , not nari (woman) or sati (chaste wife) , seems interesting to Mr Pradip Bhattacharya .

= = From the Ramayana = =

The kanyas , Ahalya , Tara and Mandodari appear in the Hindu epic Ramayana . Sita , its heroine , is sometimes included in the panchakanya list .

= = = Ahalya = = =

Ahalya , also known as Ahilya , is the wife of the sage Gautama . Ahalya is often regarded as the leader of the panchkanya due to the " nobility of her character , her extraordinary beauty and the fact of her being chronologically the first kanya " . Ahalya is often described to be created by the god Brahma as the most beautiful woman in the entire universe , but also sometimes as an earthy princess of the Lunar Dynasty . Ahalya was placed in the care of Gautama , until she gained puberty and was finally married to the elderly sage . The king of the gods , Indra , was infatuated with her beauty and comes disguised as Gautama , when the sage was away , and requests or orders sexual intercourse . In the Ramayana (the earliest full narrative of the tale) , Ahalya falls prey to Indra 's trickery and does not recognize him or is raped . In all narratives , Ahalya and her lover (or rapist) Indra are cursed by Gautama . Although early texts describe how Ahalya must atone by undergoing severe penance while remaining invisible to the world and how she is purified by offering Rama - an avatar of the god Vishnu and hero of the Ramayana - hospitality , in the popular retelling developed over time , Ahalya is cursed to become a stone and regains her human form after she is brushed by Rama 's foot . Some versions also mention that she was turned into a dry stream and that she would be condoned of her guilt when eventually the stream starts flowing and joins the river Gautami (Godavari) . Indra was cursed to be castrated or be covered by a thousand vulvae that ultimately turn into a thousand eyes .

= = = Tara = = =

Tara is the Queen of Kishkindha and wife of the monkey (vanara) King Vali . After being widowed , she becomes the Queen of Sugriva , Vali 's brother . Tara is described as the daughter of the monkey physician Sushena in the Ramayana , and in later sources , as an apsara (celestial nymph) who rises from the churning of the milky ocean . She marries Vali and bears him a son named

Angada . After Vali is presumed dead in a battle with a demon , his brother Sugriva becomes king and appropriates Tara ; however , Vali returns and regains Tara and exiles his brother , accusing him of treachery and also appropriates Sugriva 's wife Ruma . When Sugriva challenges Vali to a duel , Tara wisely advises Vali not to accept because of the former 's alliance with Rama , but Vali does not heed her , and deceptively dies from Rama 's arrow , shot at the behest of Sugriva . In his dying breath , Vali reconciles with Sugriva and instructs him to follow Tara 's wise counsel in all matters . Tara 's lamentation forms an important part in most versions of the tale . While in most vernacular versions , Tara casts a curse on Rama by the power of her chastity , in some versions , Rama enlightens Tara . Sugriva returns to the throne , but spends his time carousing often with now his current chief queen Tara and fails to act on his promise to assist Rama in recovering his kidnapped wife , Sita . Tara ? now Sugriva 's queen and chief diplomat ? is then instrumental in tactfully reconciling Rama with Sugriva after pacifying Lakshmana , Rama 's brother , who was about to destroy Kishkinda in retribution for Sugriva 's perceived treachery .

= = = Mandodari = = =

Mandodari is the queen consort of Ravana , the Rakshasa (demon) king of Lanka . The Hindu epics describe her as beautiful , pious , and righteous . Mandodari is the daughter of Mayasura , the King of the Asuras (demons) , and the apsara (celestial nymph) Hema . Some tales narrate how an apsara called Madhura was cursed to become a frog and imprisoned in a well for 12 years , after which regains her beauty or a frog , blessed to a beautiful maiden ; in both cases , she is adopted by Mayasura as his daughter Mandodari . Ravana comes to the house of Mayasura and falls in love with Mandodari and then marries her . Mandodari bears him three sons : Meghanada (Indrajit) , Atikaya , and Akshayakumara . According to some Ramayana adaptations , Mandodari is also the mother of Rama 's wife Sita , who is infamously kidnapped by Ravana . Despite her husband 's faults , Mandodari loves him and advises him to follow the path of righteousness . Mandodari repeatedly advises Ravana to return Sita to Rama , but her advice falls on deaf ears . Her love and loyalty to Ravana are praised in the Ramayana . Different versions of the Ramayana record her ill @-@ treatment at the hands of Rama 's monkey generals . Some versions say they humiliate her , while disturbing a sacrifice by Ravana , while others narrate how they destroy her chastity , which protects Ravana 's life . Hanuman tricks her into disclosing the location of a magical arrow which Rama uses to kill Ravana . After Ravana 's death , Vibhishana ? Ravana 's younger brother who joins forces with Rama and is responsible for Ravana 's death ? marries Mandodari on the advice of Rama . In some versions , Mandodari curses Sita that Rama would abandon her .

= = = Sita = = =

Sita is the heroine of the Ramayana and the consort of the Hindu god Rama (avatar of Vishnu) and is an avatar of Lakshmi , goddess of wealth and wife of Vishnu . She is esteemed as a standard @-@ setter for wifely and womanly virtues for all Hindu women . Sita is the adopted daughter of Janaka , king of Videha , found while he was furrowing the earth . The prince of Ayodhya , Rama wins Sita in her svayamvara . Years later , when Rama is sentenced to a fourteen @-@ year exile , Sita joins Rama and his brother Lakshmana in exile , despite Rama 's wish for her to remain in Ayodhya . While in exile in Dandaka forest , she falls prey to Ravana 's scheme and sends Rama away in quest of a golden deer , while she is kidnapped by Ravana . Sita is imprisoned in the Ashoka Vatika grove of Lanka , until she is rescued by Rama , who slays Ravana in war . Sita proves her chastity by undergoing a trial by fire . Rama and Sita return to Ayodhya , where Rama is coronated as king . When a washerman casts doubts about her chastity , Rama abandons a pregnant Sita in the forest . Sita gives birth to twins Lava and Kusha in the hermitage of sage Valmiki , who protects her . Her sons grow and reunite with Rama and again Sita is asked to prove her chastity before Rama can take her back . However , Sita chooses to return to the womb of her mother , Earth .

= = From the Mahabharata = =

The Hindu epic Mahabharata features the kanya Draupadi and Kunti , sometimes included in the panchakanya .

= = = Draupadi = = =

Draupadi is the heroine of the Mahabharata . She is the common wife of the five Pandava brothers and queen of Hastinapur , in their reign . Born from a fire @-@ sacrifice of king of Panchala - Drupada , Draupadi was prophesied to lead to the end of Drona and the Kauravas . Though the middle Pandava Arjuna - disguised as a brahmin - wins her in her swayamvara , Draupadi is compelled to marry all the five brothers on command of her mother @-@ in @-@ law Kunti . The pandavas agree to the plan that draupadi will always be the chief consort of all brothers and always the empress . She will be in personal union with one brother every year and may bear him a child . Anyone of the other 4 , who interrupts them during a private time within that one year , must go on a 11 @-@ month prilgrimage . She insults the Kaurava general Karna in the swayamvara and laughs at Duryodhana - the leader of the Kauravas - when he falls in her Pandava palace at Indraprastha . She mothers five sons from each of the Pandavas , regaining her virginity after every year . The Kauravas take their revenge when the eldest Pandava Yudhishtira loses her to Kauravas in a game of dice . The Kaurava Dushasana tries to disrobe her in the royal court , however divine intervention saves her dignity by making her wrapped cloth infinite in length . Draupadi pledges to keep her hair untied till they were drenched by Dushasana 's blood and mocks her husbands and all present in the court . The Pandavas and Draupadi finally accept 13 @-@ year exile for losing the game . While in exile in the forest , her second husband Bhima rescued her from various demons and Jayadratha , who abducted her . She also instructed Krishna 's queen Satyabhama on the duties of a wife . In the 13th year of exile , Draupadi and her husbands spent life incognito in Virata 's court . She served as the maid of the queen and is harassed by the queen 's brother Kichaka , who she desires to be killed by Bhima . After life in exile , a war breaks between the Kauravas and Pandavas , in which the Kauravas are slain and her insult avenged , but Draupadi also loses her father , brothers and sons . Yudhishtira became the emperor of Hastinapur with Draupadi as the chief consort . At the end of their lives , Draupadi and her husbands set off to the Himalayas to walk to heaven ; but Draupadi falls in the middle , as she loved Arjuna more than her other husbands . She is venerated as a village goddess and described at times an avatar of the fierce goddess Kali or the goddess of wealth , Lakshmi .

= = = Kunti = = =

Kunti is the queen of Pandu , the king of Hastinapur and mother of the three eldest Pandavas . Kunti was daughter of the Yadava king Shurasena and was adopted by the childless Kuntibhoja , king of Kunti Kingdom . By her service , she propitiated the sage Durvasa , who granted her a mantra by which she could summon a god and have a child by him . She recklessly tests the boon and invites the Sun @-@ god Surya , who grants a son named Karna , whom she abandons . In due course of time , Kunti chooses Pandu in her swayamvara . Pandu abdicates after being cursed by a sage that union with a woman will result in his death . At Pandu 's behest , Kunti uses Durvasa 's boon to mother Yudhishtira , from the god Dharma , then Bhima from the god Vayu , and thirdly Arjuna , from the god Indra . Her co @-@ wife Madri bears the twins Nakula and Sahadeva , from the Asvins . After the death of Pandu , Madri being cause of Pandu 's death commits sati on same pyre while Kunti returns to Hastinapur and takes care of the five Pandavas . Kunti befriends Vidura , the stepbrother of Pandu and the advisor of the king . When Kauravas , the princes of Hastinapur and the cousins of the Pandavas , try to kill Kunti and her sons , however they escape . She prevents Bhima from killing the demoness Hidimbi and advices him to marry her and beget a son , Ghatotkacha . She instructs her children to take care of the common people and orders Bhima to kill the demon Bakasura . When Arjuna wins Draupadi , Kunti instructs the brothers to share the prize .

Kunti and the Pandavas return to Hastinapur . When Pandavas are sent to 12 @-@ year exile when defeated in a game of dice by the Kauravas , Kunti stays in Vidura 's refuge . When an epic war between the Pandavas and Kauravas is to ensue , Kunti reveals to Karna - now a Kaurava general - about being his mother and gets him to promise her that he will not kill any other Pandava , except Arjuna . After the war , in which the Kauravas and Karna were killed , Kunti with the parents of the Kauravas left for the forest and spent rest of her life in prayer . She was killed in a forest fire and attained heaven .

= = Common features = =

All kanyas lack mothers in their life . Ahalya , Tara , Mandodari , Sita and Draupadi have supernatural births , while Kunti is adopted at birth and separated from a mother . Though all of the kanyas are described as mothers , except Kunti , no kanya 's motherhood is emphasized in their tales . Another common element is the theme of loss in their legends . Ahalya is cursed and abandoned by her family . Tara loses her husband , Draupadi her sons and Mandodari her husband , sons and kin in war . Each of them suffers a tragedy and used by men , but battles on with life and society . They are considered by Mr Pradip Bhattacharya as victims of patriarchal myth @-@ making , however orthodox Hindus usually oppose such theoretical speculation and consider such speculation distorting the message . A free @-@ spirited Ahalya is punished for her adultery . Draupadi , who challenges and mocks even her husbands , has her dignity repeatedly violated by men .

The Mahari dance tradition equates the panchakanya with the five elements . Ahalya , Draupadi , Kunti , Tara and Mandodari represent water , fire , earth , wind and ether respectively . In similar analogy , writer Vimla Patil associates Ahalya , Draupadi , Sita , Tara and Mandodari with wind , fire , earth , ether and water respectively .

= = Assessment and remembrance = =

Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore wrote a collection of poems titled " Pancha Kanya " with themes of episodes from mythology of the panchakanya . The tales of the panchakanya remain popular motifs in the Mahari dance tradition of Odisha .

The panchakanya are regarded by one view as ideal women . George M. Williams remarks , " They are not perfect but they fulfil their dharma (duty) as mothers , sisters , wives and occasionally leaders in their own right . " Another view considers them exemplary chaste women or mahasatis (" great chaste women ") as per the Mahari dance tradition , and worthy as an ideal for " displaying some outstanding quality " .

Another view does not regard the panchakanya as ideal women who should be emulated . Bhattacharya , author of Panch @-@ Kanya : The Five Virgins of Indian Epics contrasts the panchakanya with the five satis enlisted in another traditional prayer : Sati , Sita , Savitri , Damayanti and Arundhati . He rhetorically asks , " Are then Ahalya , Draupadi , Kunti , Tara , and Mandodari not chaste wives because each has ' known ' a man , or more than one , other than her husband ? " .

Women who suffered most in their lives and who had followed the dictate and regulations prescribed in the scriptures for women were considered . They , as prescribed in the Manu Smriti , the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics , were considered as the Five ideal Woman , all married .