

# We Are So Different Now

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A Stage Play with Dance

With her arranged marriage in jeopardy, Sheetal Talwar attempts suicide. The woman who talks her out of it claims to be Draupadi -- *the* Draupadi from the *Mahabharat*, the epic drama about the battle of the Pandava and the Kauravs three millenia ago. When Sheetal recovers and thanks her, Draupadi asks an expensive and difficult favor. Sheetal tries to evade her obligation to reciprocate – but then her life begins to echo Draupadi's. Sheetal's very name means cool, and she believes we are so different now -- are we?

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**Speaking Characters**

Sheetal – 23-24 year old Indian

Draupadi – 45 years old, a bit plump

**Eight Contemporary Indian dancers**

(Fusion dance – Bharatnayam done Alvin Ailey style)

Silent parts. At different times, they will play:

Lord Krishna (male)

Sheetal's Father (male)

Arjun (male)

Arjun's brothers (male/female)

Sheetal's mother in law (female)

Servant (male or female)

Two lawyers (male or female)

Child (male or female)

Sets:

Exterior of Building, Balcony with noose.

Interior – Bedroom area with desk and chair. Kitchen with gas stove area.

Interior – Living room: sofa, sofa chair, backdrop of peeled paint wall, curtained window.

Exterior – Gateway of India Arch as backdrop.

## **ACT I – SCENE 1**

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Exterior of a modest hotel in Mumbai. Sheetal appears on a white balcony, with a rope-noose dangling from it. She's dark, wearing jeans and tight t-shirt, with strappy high heels. Long hair tied in a ponytail. Small purse with a bright yellow strap slung across her body.

Sheetal leans over the balcony, sobbing.

She moves toward the noose. Considers it. Tries it – tosses it off.

She puts the noose around her neck – then flings it off.

She straddles the balcony, then dismounts.

Enter Draupadi, below. (about 45, a little plump, dressed in a bright blue sari. White rhinestone-rimmed sunglasses).

Sheetal puts one leg over the balcony, then the other.

Draupadi sees Sheetal. Takes off her glasses to verify.

Sheetal reaches for the noose, takes a deep breath -- and screams.

Draupadi rushes toward her.

All lights go dark. Huge crash. Somber music.

Spotlight illuminates a crumbled, broken balcony, Sheetal stretched out on the floor beside it. Draupadi, minus sunglasses, on her knees beside Sheetal. The noose is swinging above. It looms over stage all through the scene.

**DRAUPADI**

Are you crazy? What were you trying to do?

[helps Sheetal sit up, loosens the noose]

**SHEETAL**

What do you think I was trying to do?

[coughs]

Another failure added to all the rest.

**DRAUPADI**

[stands]

You should thank the gods for builders who adulterate cement.

[kicks a fragment of the balcony out of the way]

That balcony is mostly sand!

Anyway, you have a life-time ahead of you and many things to accomplish. You young people – some little thing happens -- and it's *earth*-shattering! In my day . . .

**SHEETAL**

[sits up, rubs her neck]

Little thing, Aunty-ji? What do you know about my life? Who are you to stop me? Leave me alone!

**DRAUPADI**

You're not making sense right now. You're too young to have unbearable troubles. Bad things happen, we go on.

**SHEETAL**

Do you know what it's like to find out that your fiancé has been burned alive? Burned alive! My dreams – just shattered.

And those of my family. My father, my uncles – all worrying how to get the engagement gifts returned... how to collect a second dowry for me.

[wailing]

They're right. No one wants to marry a girl with a future as dark as her skin.

**DRAUPADI**

[laughs]

Look at yourself! Forget about anyone marrying you, no one will even want to be with you if you're so unstable.

**SHEETAL**

Unstable? [stunned, shocked by insinuation of "madness"]

**DRAUPADI**

Was that a suicide attempt or were you just trying to get my attention?  
What happened?

**SHEETAL**

You know the wax museum?

**DRAUPADI**

In London? Madame Tussauds?

**SHEETAL**

No, no – here in the new world, right in Mumbai.

**DRAUPADI**

The new world?

**SHEETAL**

Yes, in case you haven't been paying attention, we're in the new world -- Mumbai!

**DRAUPADI**

[pretending]

Yes, yes of course. That wax museum. Has it opened?

**SHEETAL**

No, it was being built.

**DRAUPADI**

[finds her glasses on the ground, dusts them off, polishes them, puts them on]  
And?

**SHEETAL**

My fiancé was carving huge statues of Bollywood stars. Imagine! Raj Kapoor and Naseeruddin Shah, Madhuri Dixit and Aishwarya Rai in wax. Journalists from all over the world wrote about the project. Multinational sponsors gave a hundred crores of rupees for the museum. But they weren't willing to spend a few thousands....

**DRAUPADI**

And? Did a statue break?

**SHEETAL**

Nooo! Not break. Not one statue -- the whole house of wax burned down.

**DRAUPADI**

They found five bodies there.

**SHEETAL**

How did you know there were five?

**DRAUPADI**

[takes off her glasses, faces audience. Surprised, soft]

I just . . .knew.

**SHEETAL**

My fiancé and his four brothers.

Nothing left.

So burned their mother couldn't bear to look.

**DRAUPADI**

So then how do you know your fiancé died?

**SHEETAL**

I know I know! And his mother looked at me with big accusing eyes and said, "You ! You brought him bad luck!"

**DRAUPADI**

Oh – what an uneducated woman.

Poor thing, though.

**SHEETAL**

No, no! She's not uneducated. The poor woman has a Ph.d in psychology.

[shaking her head].

Oh, what have I done! Just leave me please leave.

**DRAUPADI**

Oh don't be silly – a grief stricken woman says you brought her son bad luck and you believe her? Phd or no Phd. Aren't *you* an educated woman? You look like one.

**SHEETAL**

[goaded]

I am Sheetal Talwar and I'm highly educated. And I know my options. And right now all of them point to this --

[jumps up and slips the loose end of the noose over a bracket jutting from the building.

[Draupadi rushes to her. Struggles, shouts]

Don't stop me – I'm going to the next life.

**DRAUPADI**

[urgently]

Your next life might be worse than this one. How can you know?

Talk to me, my dear. We'll find better options – you can change your life till your last breath!

Listen - I too was supposed to be married to a handsome young man. . .and he was... and he was...

[realizes Sheetal is not listening].

I understand you are upset. Your family is only trying to save the situation. What you really need, my dear, is a Plan B.

**SHEETAL**

[wailing]

This *is* Plan B!

Why should you care – what does it matter to anyone if I live or die?

**DRAUPADI**

It matters to me.

[points to the yellow strap].

You're a Kshatriya, like me. You're descended from Kings and warriors.

We don't give up! We soldier on.

**SHEETAL**

Aunty-ji, no one will want to marry me. I've become a widow even before my wedding.

What if his family doesn't give our engagement gifts back? How can my family afford a second dowry? I'll be an albatross around my father's neck.

**DRAUPADI**

You are not an albatross – whatever that is.

**SHEETAL**

Do I have to tell you: a woman needs a husband, her own home, children. Only then can you call her father fortunate.

**DRAUPADI**

You're responsible to make your *father* feel fortunate?

**SHEETAL**

Yes, of course I am. Weren't you?

**DRAUPADI**

Me...? [laughs] That's another story. Your father should feel fortunate just to have you.

**SHEETAL**

All Daddy has now is an unmarried daughter. Oh – how can I disappoint him!

[covers her face with her hands, looks up].

At least I don't have a mother to disappoint.

So you see, Aunty-ji, I do know my options. And right now

[picks up noose]

all of them point to this.

**DRAUPADI**



What does it matter what your Daddy expected of you? He doesn't have to live with your husband and his family – you do. No one gives you a medal for getting married, you know. Some women marry one husband, some of us have had five. What's so attractive about getting married, I'd like to know?

**SHEETAL**

The wedding! I was going to wear a scarlet lehnga heavily embroidered in gold. [gestures to show a long gown] I was to receive Kanjeevaram and butter-silk saris. I was to wear new gold jewelry this thick [gestures about four inches wide] and gold jhumkas and anklets. Daddy already ordered cases and cases of Johnny Walker Red Label. He said the guests would sing and dance for a week!

(pause)

And once I was married, everyone would call me a woman, instead of a *girl*.

(pause)

But oh, now I'll never ever wear a gold mangalsutra around my neck.

(pause)

Now I'll never have children! And without children a woman is nothing.

**DRAUPADI**

Nonsense! Maybe in my day, but not in yours.

**SHEETAL**

If only I hadn't turned down that marriage proposal from his cousin ... I'd be married into the same family right now.

**DRAUPADI**

How come?

**SHEETAL**

My fiance and his four brothers are all sculptors. Their statues adorn the homes and office buildings built by their five cousin-brothers. My fiancé's grandfather, who's their grandfather too – built so many buildings in Mumbai.

His cousin-brother's proposal was the only other marriage proposal I had.

Because. . .well, just look at me -- I'm soooo dark.

**DRAUPADI**

Yes, dark as Panchali.

**SHEETAL**

Who's Panchali?

**DRAUPADI**

Me. I used to be called that, years ago. Princess Panchali.

[caustically]

Before people started calling me "Aunty-ji."

**SHEETAL**

[sarcastically]

Oh, of course – as if you look like a princess.

Aunty Panchali – is that what I should call you?

**DRAUPADI**

[with regal dignity]

Princess Panchali. That's what I was called. And before that, Princess Yagyaseni, because I was born from fire.

**SHEETAL**

Born from fire. I know that story -- Daddy bought me a whole collection of Amar-Chitra-Katha comics when I was a child. You're named after Princess Panchali?

**DRAUPADI**

No, I *am* Panchali.

**SHEETAL**

[pause]

[aside] Maybe we're both crazy.

Leave me alone, Princess Panchali or whatever your name is. . .

The feudal days are gone. India doesn't have Maharajas and Maharanis any more.

*All* of us (pointing at her yellow purse) have privy purses now.

**DRAUPADI**

Call me Draupadi. Princess Panchali was also called Draupadi.

Did you know, she too didn't have a mother to tell her how special she was.

**SHEETAL**

If I had a mother, would I be listening to you?

[Overcome, walks away. Turns back]

Do you have nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to meet?

**DRAUPADI**

Listen, Sheetal. When Panchali was growing up, everyone told her she was dark and ugly. When her family went for the annual Siva procession she was too ashamed to join them. She too thought she'd disappoint her father.

**SHEETAL**

[coming back, attracted to the story, despite herself]

I thought her father was so proud of her.

**DRAUPADI**

Her father was only interested in her brother.

What good was I ...

[correcting herself]

... Panchali ... to my father?

**SHEETAL**

[takes a step away again]

What has Panchali to do with me? What does her Shiv Procession have to do with me? I don't need all this – this ancient stuff. We're just not *into* all this nowadays.

**DRAUPADI**

[reminiscing]

The day of the Shiv Procession, Panchali decided she was going to be beautiful. She had seen her father's youngest wife walk with elegance. Confidence! So that day Panchali dressed in a beautiful peacock blue sari, like this one. And wore flowers in her hair. She

felt different, she felt beautiful. She knew the world thinks of you what you think of yourself.

**SHEETAL**

So you're saying, Get a makeover and everything will be just fine?

**DRAUPADI**

[persuading] Think of Naomi Campbell, Tina Turner, Sade, Mariah Carey, Beyoncé, Oprah, Michelle Obama<sup>1</sup>. Beauty is in the eye of beholder -- and in the body of the believer.

**SHEETAL**

Where's your projector? How do you show me these things? Hai Ma! Am I dead or alive?

**DRAUPADI**

You are very much alive, my dear. I'm the one who is not quite dead, yet.

**SHEETAL**

Okay, okay. I'll get a manicure, a pedicure, even a gold facial, if you want. But a makeover's not going to find me a husband. Look at me! And now I may not have a dowry!

**DRAUPADI**

So you have financial difficulties! Even Maharajas and Maharanis, Presidents and PMs, directors and officers have financial problems. What do you think happened to Ramalinga Raju of Satyam? **[note: insert stock scandal of the day here]** He says he can't find 7000 crores of rupees! Is he telling the world he has brought bad luck to his wife? Is he trying to jump from a balcony with a noose around his neck? Is he apologizing for existing?

[Optional: screen images – Ramalinga Raju, headlines BBC: Indian IT scandal boss arrested, MSN Business News: Ramalinga Raju admits fraud, quits Satyam]

**SHEETAL**

Who are you? How do you show me these things? I don't see a TV anywhere -- I see images in my mind. And then . . . oh, it's all dark again. And why do you care?

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<sup>1</sup> Optional: use a projector to show images of these women

**DRAUPADI**

The gods send help in many ways. You fell from the skies before me – maybe I was meant to help you, and you're also meant to help me.

Come home with me for a while, my dear. Rest. Then let's see what happens.

[cups Sheetal's cheek with her palm, turns Sheetal's face to look into her eyes]

You're like water, Sheetal. Cool and adaptable. You'll find your level no matter how strong the storm.

**Dancers enter.**

**Dance of the blue saris, dance of water molding itself, falling, vanishing as vapor, water as cloud, as life source of the world. Lord Krishna, the Blue God, dances. One red sari flows amidst the blue.**

**Draupadi – voice over:**

*Remember me, the woman who rose not from a mother's womb, or her father's desire, but from flickering embers.*

*I am the woman with the never-ending sari.*

*With my brother, I played chess, moving vazeers, ghoras and pyadas across the board.*

*And in the forest our arrows flew swifter than the wind.*

*But -- unlike my brother -- I learned that my words were only for the enchantment of my husbands and Lord Krishna.*

*My father taught me every guest must be fed from the bounty of the earth before I ate.*

*And my husbands gambled me away along with their kingdom.*

*(pause)*

*My father, my brother, my husbands are long gone.*

*My spirit remains.*

## ACT 1 - SCENE 2

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Three weeks later.

Draupadi's home – modest -- Spartan.

A bed, a chair. A bookshelf divider between bedroom and kitchen area.

Draupadi is sitting on her bed, reading.

Amar Chitra Katha comic *Draupadi*.<sup>2</sup>

Draupadi shakes her head, laughs, sighs. Puts it down.

Picks up a children's book.

AV screen close up: *The Mahabharat*, hardcover children's edition. Heavily marked with post-its.

Draupadi shakes her head, laughs, sighs. Puts it down.

Knock at the door. Enter Sheetal, carrying a bouquet of flowers, wearing a pink peasant skirt and a white scoop neck tight t-shirt. And the yellow purse slung across her body. She leaves a box by the door and steps in.

**DRAUPADI**

Aao, aao! My goodness, where are you going with these?

**SHEETAL**

[excited, effervescent]

They're for you.

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<sup>2</sup> If using a projector, focus in closeup to show the book and its title.

**DRAUPADI**

For me? Oh.

[sits down, overcome]

No one has ever given me flowers. Not even my favorite husband, Arjun.

**SHEETAL**

Your favorite husband? Who is also named Arjun like my fiancé? Oh, you must have been a Bollywood star – you certainly stay in character! I'm sure my Daddy would know your movies.

You know, you're very convincing as Draupadi -- I believed you.

And I'm so glad I did, because – you won't believe -- wait till you hear --

[sees Draupadi is wiping her eyes].

My goodness, Aunty-ji, It's just a very small thank you.

**DRAUPADI**

A thank you. It's just strange to me that women get them, nowadays. I like this new custom. And the flowers are beautiful. So – what have you been doing in the last three weeks? You look better, I must say. Did you have that that – what did you call it? – makeover?

**SHEETAL**

[elated]

I'm looking better because you were right.

[slowly, still amazed]

My fiancé and his brothers *weren't* among those killed in the fire at Madame Tussaud's, after all ! All five brothers arrived home an hour after you saved my life and took me home.

**DRAUPADI**

[claps her hands, laughing]

[stops]

Other men died, though, and their families must be grieving.

I will ask Lord Krishna to bless them.

**SHEETAL**

But I want to know -- how did *you* know my fiance and his brothers...?

**DRAUPADI**

[shrugging with arms spread wide]

History has a way of repeating itself, just not completely the same way. Good things, bad things happen in cycles -- sukhmapatitam evum dukhmapatitam thatha. . .

**SHEETAL**

[completing the shloka]

chakravartparivartante, sukhani cha dukhani cha -- I too had to memorize Sanskrit poems in school!

I just wanted to thank you for saving my life, Aunty-ji. Now I'm getting married after all.

I'll be a woman, I'll have children. Celebrate with me!

**DRAUPADI**

[laughs]

First you sit down and have some chai.

[moves to the kitchen area, puts a pan of water on the gas burner. Busies herself with the tea things, becoming rapidly more clumsy. Turns, agitated]

Sheetal, do you know where I was when my Pandav husbands were fighting their Kaurav cousins at Kurukshetra?

**SHEETAL**

[Sighs]

We're back thirty five centuries again.

[humouring her]

Okay. No, I don't.

**DRAUPADI**

I can't find it anywhere.

[points to the books and comics].

They don't say.

**SHEETAL**

[picking up the *Mahabharat*, leafing through]

Really? This must be a bad translation. Maybe you should read the *Mahabharat* in Hindi, Aunty.



**DRAUPADI**

I find it more meaningful and melodious in Sanskrit.

**SHEETAL**

[surprised pause. Turns to the audience and mouths without sound: "...more meaningful and melodious in Sanskrit?" Turns back to Draupadi. Slowly -- ]

Achcha. All right, Okay --

Where *were* you during the Mahabharat war?

**DRAUPADI**

[a little exasperated]

I don't know, that's what I'm asking.

I'm sure I'll remember some day.

Right now, all I remember is after the war. I was between earth and sky, ascending to Swarag along with my husbands and -- I fell.

I've been here ever since. One foot in this world, one foot in the other, just like you, climbing over that balcony. That's why I was so desperately against your taking your own life -- you shouldn't become a bhatakhi hui atma. A ghost, you know. Like me. Believe me, it's terrible to wander the world indefinitely when all your husbands and friends have gone.

**SHEETAL**

You know, I can see why you like Draupadi. She endured so much, but kept her self-respect.

**DRAUPADI**

Why did I *have to* endure so much hardship? Who is responsible for my hardships? Nobody asks that! You girls are just supposed to admire my endurance.

**SHEETAL**

[reading from the blurb on the back of the book in her hand]

"To avenge her honor, a whole nation went to war."

**DRAUPADI**

[picking up a comic book and leafing through]

Oh, yes, yes. I believed everything my father said -- that all I had to do was endure. And that my honor was so important it must be avenged. [shrugs] That was what being a woman was all about in my day.

**SHEETAL**

It isn't?

**DRAUPADI**

[irritated]

No!

**SHEETAL**

Then what is being a woman?

**DRAUPADI**

*You* decide what being a woman means. Every moment of every day. That's why your *atman* took shape. That's why your soul took flesh. Eventually, of course, we all go back to brahman but *not before our time*. We have to live out all the stages of life.

**SHEETAL**

I'm going into the next stage -- you'll come to my wedding, na? See, I brought you an invitation gift.

[steps outside and brings in the gift box]

See? Daddy spent at least four thousand rupees on each one.

**DRAUPADI**

And that tells you he must love you very much?

**SHEETAL**

Yes, of course. What else should it tell me?

**DRAUPADI**

Maybe he needs to show others how much money he has. Maybe he feels he is doing his duty.

**SHEETAL**

Maybe he loves me -- you don't know my Daddy.

**DRAUPADI**

True, I don't. But I don't understand ... why are you having an arranged marriage at all?  
In my day we had self-chosen marriages --

**SHEETAL**

Just open it!

**DRAUPADI**

[opens the invitation box. Lifts up a statue of Cupid with an arrow,  
with a card tucked between his legs]  
Oh, this reminds me of Arjun at my swayamvar. Let me show you --

**Enter Dancers**

**SHEETAL**

How -- how do you do this to me? I see, I hear things that aren't here. It's wonderful, but  
...terrifying.

**Dance of the Swayamvar.**

**Dancers reenact Draupadi's husband-selection ceremony in dance --  
Ancient Arjun shoots the arrow while gazing into a reflecting pool, and wins  
Draupadi. Lord Krishna, the Blue God stands by, watching, and when Arjun wins,  
he shakes his head sadly.**

**DRAUPADI**

See? Women used to have more freedom of choice.

**SHEETAL**

[now completely believing Draupadi is Draupadi from the *Mahabharat*]  
You didn't have a choice, Draupadi-ji! Everyone knows your father stage-managed that  
swyamvar ceremony so that only Arjun could pass his test. And you were motherless! I  
know what that means -- no one really cares if you were settled or not . Your father only  
cared about doing his duty. If you'd remained unmarried after that, he could always say  
he'd tried. But we are so different now, Aunty-ji. We have *computers*. [nods triumphantly]

**DRAUPADI**

Remember it, imagine it or feel it again -- I will see it.

**Dance of the Internet Arranged Marriage.**

**Sheetal opens a laptop. Prints off printouts, and dances to her father and the rest of dancers (family). They examine the printout, consider, discuss (dance only). One, two three times -- her father dances over to a board on a cubicle partition, pins the printouts to it. Then he dances back to the family and they gather around as he prepares a dart, targeting one of the printouts. He throws the dart at it, removes it from the wall and hands it to Lord Krishna. The Blue God smiles and hands it to Sheetal.**

**DRAUPADI**

That's not choice either. He told you which boy was acceptable, and only that one.

**SHEETAL**

[shrugs]

It's assisted marriage, not arranged marriage nowadays. But how does it matter? All I need is one man to be my husband – we only have one these days. We're *with-it!* I can't expect you to understand since you were married to five. Besides, men are all alike, aren't they?

**DRAUPADI**

No men are *not* all alike, even brothers. Any more than women are all alike.

**SHEETAL**

[giggling]

You should know, since you have so much experience. Five brothers in turn, one year at a time -- all because your mother-in-law said they must share everything equally.

**DRAUPADI**

[bitterly]

Everything, yes. That's what we women were, just *things* to be traded.

**SHEETAL**

Is it true you became a virgin at the end of each year?

[archly]

That must have been ni-ice.

**DRAUPADI**

Nice? Nice for my husbands, I'm sure.

Very painful for me. How would you like to have your hymen broken every year?

(pauses, remembering pain. Returns to present)

But what good is my experience if women like you absorb whatever you're told, if you keep trusting everyone but yourself.

**SHEETAL**

I don't absorb whatever I'm told.

**DRAUPADI**

For instance?

**SHEETAL**

For instance, just because I see an ad for Pepsi, doesn't mean I choose Pepsi. I might like Coke better.

**DRAUPADI**

But just because your father gives you an ad for a man, you chose that man – what is his name, by the way?

**SHEETAL**

Arjun. Such a romantic name, don't you think?

**Dance of the Jaimala Ceremony**

**Modern Arjun (in suit and tie) enters with barat procession of dancers, takes Sheetal by the hand. Draupadi stands aside watching. A table is wheeled in, laden with wedding gifts and two massive Indian wedding garlands.**

**Lord Krishna, the Blue God, leads Arjun to Sheetal. Sheetal looks at her Arjun with a quizzical expression. She's realizing she doesn't know him at all. Guests (dancers) ignore them. Arjun takes up a garland and puts it around her neck. Sheetal looks up as if accepting a noose.**

**Draupadi puts on her sunglasses and comes forward. She reaches out with her gift of money, circling Sheetal's head in blessing, then presses the money into Sheetal's hand.**

**Arjun is looking forward. He opens his hand – demanding. Sheetal puts the money into it. Arjun puts it in his pocket.**

**Dancers fade to black – only Lord Krishna remains**

**Draupadi returns to her room. Opens a drawer, takes out a gunny sack. Puts the gunny sack over the Cupid statue. Lifts the statue and stands it in the corner. Brushes off her hands, plants them on her hips and shakes her head.**

**Lord Krishna dances.**

**DARK  
INTERMISSION**

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## ACT II - SCENE 1

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Three months later.

Dining room of Sheetal and Arjun's home. Sleek, sumptuous, hi-tech, ornate. Suggest by: crystal goblets, jamavar-print tablecloth. Not nouveau-riche/garish.

Sheetal and Draupadi sit together at one end of a long dining table. Draupadi's simple sari contrasting with the elegant surroundings. Sheetal wears a sari of glossy satin-silk -- very much the lady of the house. A dancer (servant) wheels in a silver tea tray on a trolley (with a flourish) and leaves. Sheetal picks up a notepad and pen.

**SHEETAL**

[Reading from notepad]

The Shivling has to be brought from Narmada.

**DRAUPADI**

Yes, and don't forget the yoni.

**SHEETAL**

Of course.

The havan fire has to be brought from one of the twelve dwadasp places – I don't even know where or what those places are!

The *Mahashiv puran* has to be recited. That alone will take the pandits seven days.

And during this recitation, pandits have to bath the Shivling in milk. Non-stop for a hundred and eight hours! Do you know how much milk I'd have to buy for that?

And then I'd have to perform unnattis. With 29 sticks.

And the pandits would pour milk, yogurt, bhang, bel patra and dhatura in the havan fire.

And you say all this can't be done here in Mumbai. We have to go to Badrinath, where your soul first rose from your body. And there we have to get pandits to perform a Navgraha puja, and read the Bhagvat puran for *another* seven days.

Draupadi-ji, this is not just a puja -- this is a very special puja. And the ceremony can't be done by you, since you're the one who will benefit.

**DRAUPADI**

[pushes her cup forward]

[matter of fact]

Yes.

**SHEETAL**

[begins to pour tea, stops]

I understand that all your sons died in the war – my condolences.

**DRAUPADI**

[Bows her head in acknowledgement]

**SHEETAL**

So they couldn't perform your last rites.

But why didn't your grandson – what was his name? Parikshit -- send your soul to brahman?

**DRAUPADI**

I couldn't find him after the war – men only show up once everything is cleaned up. And don't think you can get him to redo my last rites now. He's been reborn as a rock star. In Chile, I hear – bless him. He has my whole image tattooed here

[gestures up and down her arm]

but doesn't even know my name.

**SHEETAL**

[begins to pour tea, stops]

So someone has to do this particular puja to send your soul home to brahman?



**DRAUPADI**

Yes, someone sincere.

It's the only way. At least, that's what Vyasa said.

**SHEETAL**

Vyasa?

The sage who wrote the Mahabharat?

How many centuries ago?

**DRAUPADI**

[speculating]

Before he died in that life, soooo.... Must have been several years *after* I died – Vyasa was a slow writer. It took him years to write our whole long story, you know.

But in my case, he just wasn't too sure how to end it, so in several versions he left me, well – hanging between earth and sky.

**SHEETAL**

Forever?

**DRAUPADI**

[pushes her cup forward]

That's what it feels like. A few centuries ago, I thought I'd look up Vyasa in the library. He's often retold our story, so I know he's been reincarnated several times. But I just can't pinpoint exactly where he is right now. I ask Ganesh-ji for his address so I can enter it in Mapquest -- I ask every time I go to the temple. But he just looks down his nose at me.

**SHEETAL**

[begins to pour tea, stops]

I have no idea what such a puja ceremony costs. Not just going to Badrinath, getting the Shiv lingam, the milk, the pandits making the offerings, but also feeding the pandits, and the poor.

**DRAUPADI**

Oh yes, but --

[gesturing around the room]

I think you can manage it.

**SHEETAL**

Draupadi-ji, if I need to spend more than ten thousand rupees, I have to take permission from my mother-in-law, my father-in-law and my husband. My mother-in-law gave my dowry money to my eldest brother-in-law, and he's such a gambler, he bought shares in Satyam [or stock scandal of the day] and now he says it's all lost.

**DRAUPADI**

But . . .

**SHEETAL**

[pours tea in Draupadi's cup]

I know, I know, you saved my life.

**DRAUPADI**

[pulls cup toward her]

I didn't want to mention it.

**SHEETAL**

I suppose a bouquet of flowers isn't really thanks enough.

[pause].

I get an allowance – everything has to stay within that. Meat, vegetables, daal-roti. And my makeup, my hair, my clothes –

Did Vyasa mention any other ways?

**DRAUPADI**

[sipping tea]

The only other way he mentions in the Mahabharat is to start another war, but I don't want more bloodshed.

**SHEETAL**

No, many people live in Kurukshetra, now. You can't just have a battle on that plain, these days.

Oh – what am I saying? I can't be taking you seriously.

**DRAUPADI**

No one took me seriously, until I started a war.

**SHEETAL**

*You* didn't start a war, Draupadi-ji. I've been rereading my comics since I met you. You were an *excuse* for a war.

And don't say people didn't take you seriously. They worshipped you. Women worship you.

**DRAUPADI**

[sadly]

Not these days.

**SHEETAL**

Okay, but not long ago either. The replica of Madame Tussaud's House of Wax was built on the site of an ancient Draupadi temple here in Mumbai.

**DRAUPADI**

Impossible. I've never received any prayers.

**SHEETAL**

It says so here.

[picking up newspaper]

And it says: "some Dalit men became angry at how they were treated when they tried to enter Madame Tussaud's and set the fire. Other sources say the fire was set by a foreign hand."

**DRAUPADI**

The authorities will eventually decide which version of the story should be told -- they always do. And you need to decide which version *you* believe.

Well, If you can't do a special puja ceremony for my soul, Sheetal, there's nothing more for me here.

[rises]

**SHEETAL**

[pulling her down]

No, that's not true. Don't go!

I – oh, Draupadi-ji. (breaks down)

**DRAUPADI**

Now what happened? Tell me.

Can't?

Achcha, show me – remember it, imagine it, see it again so I'll see it.

**Enter dancers**

**DRAUPADI**

Who are they? Ah, your husband's cousin-brothers. Oh, and there's the one whose marriage proposal you turned down. Ttt-ttt-ttt. I see, I see...

**Dance: Holi Hai!**

**Enter Arjun and his brothers stage left.**

**Enter the five cousin-brothers, stage right. Enter Krishna, dancing his own dance.**

**Dance – they smear color on each other, then sit down to play cards.**

**Enter Sheetal. The cousin-brothers paw her, pass her from one to the other in a modern repeat of Draupadi's cheer-haran.**

**(But worse – no neverending sari, no intervention from Lord Krishna – Lord Krishna is oblivious, wrapt in his own dance)**

**Arjun and his brothers clench their fists, start forward, but do nothing. Eventually the cousins leave. Sheetal is left on the floor between Arjun and his brothers.**

**[Fade to black. Exit all ]**

**DRAUPADI**

[gently]

What did your husband say?

**SHEETAL**

Nothing. His sculptures adorn the homes and office buildings his cousin-brothers build. My Arjun depends on the family business for all this [gesturing around]. Everything we own is because of it.

And his elder brothers said nothing, so he said nothing.

**DRAUPADI.**

And what did your mother-in-law say?

**SHEETAL**

[begins to weep again]

She told me I had imagined all this. That Arjun's cousins would never do such things – these things only happen in other people's families, she said. Not ours. The boys, as she calls them, were not violent.

But I didn't imagine it. Just like I'm not imagining you – am I?

**DRAUPADI**

We're all in Vishnu's dream, Sheetal. But in my experience when people want to control you, they first tell you you're deluded.

What did your Daddy say?

**SHEETAL**

Daddy! He said I mustn't shame him by leaving my husband, because what will people say?

And my father-in-law said I should see a psychiatrist.

[Uniformed servant wheels in Living room sofa and chair ]

**DRAUPADI**

I'm better than a psychiatrist – you don't have to pay me to listen.

[Sheetal lies down on the sofa, Draupadi takes the chair  
and puts on her large white rhine-stoned sunglasses ]

**SHEETAL**

Maybe he meant I should talk to my mother-in-law.

Draupadi-ji, I'll do a puja ceremony for you, but not yet. Just – please -- don't leave me  
alone right now.

**DRAUPADI**

I've waited this long --

[glances at her wrist watch]

**SHEETAL**

[sitting up]

Is that a Rolex or a Movado?

**DRAUPADI**

It's a Millennium. Keeps time from the start of Kalyug to now.

I suppose I can wait a few days more.

Sheetal, all I'm saying is -- [look of desperation] -- there has to be some end to this.

**SHEETAL**

Listen, please stay. Just till things are better. I promise I will not only do a puja ceremony  
for you, but build a new temple to you -- if I can.

Just tell me, what should I do?

**DRAUPADI**

[psychiatrist style]

You're so modern, you're so with-it -- what do *you* think you should do?

**SHEETAL**

Talk to my father, and in-laws? They should tell Arjun's cousin-brothers to behave  
themselves.

**DRAUPADI**

Why should someone else confront them for you? Can't you talk to your husband? Tell him he needs to do his duty towards you, not just towards his elders. Tell him he can't expect you to take harassment while he sits quiet. Talk to your cousin-brothers-in-law. Tell them you'll carve them up and eat them for lunch if they misbehave again. Especially that one whose proposal you turned down.

**SHEETAL**

[sitting up for a girl to girl chat]

Oh, that's a change. Why didn't *you* do that?

**DRAUPADI**

I never expected I'd have to ask my elders and my husband to protect me. I thought it was obvious. I didn't have the law on my side, either. In those days a woman belonged to her husband – she was a pretty face and a womb, that's all.

**SHEETAL**

And I should find the courage to do what you couldn't? What if they throw me out? I should risk my marriage, my family, my unborn children?"

**DRAUPADI**

If you want the world to respect you, you need to respect yourself.

**SHEETAL**

I did try.

[her eyes dart left and right]

Don't tell anyone, but I tried to leave.

**DRAUPADI**

Then?

**SHEETAL**

I went apartment hunting. I went everywhere. All I could afford with my savings from the house money was a hole in the wall. The place actually had rats. And no one would rent to a single woman.

Draupadiji -- how come *you* live alone?

**DRAUPADI**

I found a modern landlord, that's all. There *are* people who don't care what others will say.

**SHEETAL**

And you don't care what people will say? Well, you're not so young any more.

**DRAUPADI**

You can say old, I don't mind. Still I'm more with-it than you.

**SHEETAL**

[suddenly imperious]

Watch what you say, or I won't pray or do a puja ceremony for your soul.

Achcha, I always heard you were the incarnation of Lakshmi – tell me where you got the money you gave me at my wedding?

**DRAUPADI**

Vyasa. He pays for telling me all my suffering was caused by something I did in my past lives. You know, he made up stories about how I'd wanted a husband with so many qualities that no one man could satisfy me. In one version, he said I'd been insatiable -- some kind of nymphomaniac in a past life. Said that's why I needed five husbands – *chi!* So I told Lord Krishna to tell him: I don't care how you send it, but you pay me from your royalties. He pays – not very much, but enough for my needs.

**SHEETAL**

So you just make money from thin air. Well, I can't. I can't even type -- how will I ever learn the computer?

**DRAUPADI**

Oh, stop complaining. I'm taking computer classes – you can, too. You know, I go ego-surfing on Google. I just type in Draupadi and see what strange things people say.

**SHEETAL**

I don't like computers.

**DRAUPADI**

Drive a taxi, then. You young women, you are so afraid of life, so afraid to be alone, you trade your independence for a home like this one, for a husband, servants, a car, a driver, a bathroom with running water – an I-pod! And though I enjoy not having to fetch



wood and carry water, I also enjoy owning my own soul. I've had a long time to think about it, and

[sarcastically]

just maybe over the centuries, I've learned a thing or two.

**SHEETAL**

[ignoring the lecture]

But it's not safe for a woman to drive a taxi.

**DRAUPADI**

So what will happen? Five men will come and attack you? And your family will be dishonored? Or *you'll* be dishonored?

You've already been dishonored just sitting at home.

[sees she has hurt Sheetal]

I'm sorry. It's just that you don't seem aware there's been a women's revolution all over the world. Fear is still holding you back, just as it held me.

[gently]

Even if you were raped, Sheetal, you still own your own body.

Your soul, your jeev-atman is yours – claim it!

[long pause]

Well?

**SHEETAL**

No. Don't you see? This is everything I ever wanted. A house like this, a car, a driver. Look at this beautiful sari Arjun bought for me? This purse is designed by a man in Paris: Yves St. Laurent. See these shoes? They're by Fendi.

And the parties we go to! I love how people look at me.

**DRAUPADI**

Look at you or look at your husband?

**SHEETAL**

At me because of him. Yes, yes, yes.

I'm not leaving!

I'll do just what *you* did. I will accept my kismat, I can be quiet and obedient. Isn't that a woman's kismat?

**DRAUPADI**

(takes off sunglasses, rises. Begins to pace the stage)

This, from a modern Kshatriya woman? I can't do anything for you if you refuse to help yourself. No -- arrange the puja for me or I will...

[stops, turns toward Sheetal]

**SHEETAL**

You'll curse me, right?

I don't believe that.

You wouldn't. You can't.

[Draupadi folds her arms over her chest and looks implacable]

You'd curse *me*? But I thought we ...

[change in tone]

Maybe you can curse me.

But Draupadiji, you can't leave me now. At least, not yet.

[pause]

I'm pregnant.

**DRAUPADI**

[horrified]

Hai Krishna! Ooffo! The age old story . You can't leave for the sake of your children.

[thought strikes her]

Sheetal, do you know who the father is?

**SHEETAL**

[shrugs with palms open in an I-don't-know gesture]

**Dance of the Mirror-world.**

**Five dancers enter, each carrying a mirror. Lord Krishna presents Sheetal with a mirror. The dancers hold up mirrors before her.**

**Sheetal dances, searching for her courage, her real self. Enter mother-in-law, father, modern Arjun, all wagging their fingers at Sheetal. She dances with each of them and they exit in turn.**

**Only Lord Krishna is left, and now he dances for and with her.**

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## ACT II - SCENE 2

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**Five years later.**

**A very simple (poor) living room, backdrop of peeled-paint wall with a curtained window.**

**Sheetal, wearing a simple salwar kameez, stands at the window, waving. She drops the corner of the curtain, and turns back, smiling.**

**SHEETAL**

[thinking out loud]

My boys. Both standing in line for the school bus. I can't believe it's the first day in school for my youngest.

**DRAUPADI**

Yes. And I'm here to remind you it has been five years since your promise.

**SHEETAL**

[with brittle humor]

And here I thought you'd come to see me.

**DRAUPADI**

I've been patient. No curses, no telling your secrets.

**SHEETAL**

[with barely suppressed rage]

Draupadi-ji, look around at this apartment.

We can't afford to pay our cook any more. So this morning I chopped onions. Onions!!!

[traces tears sliding down cheeks]

Arjun has gone out looking for work at a stone quarry. He said I should try making daal. He said it's very easy, but he doesn't know how to make it. He said definitely make rice -- I don't even know how to make rice! Maybe he'll come home and make it himself. No -- he'll expect it to be made. Perfectly.

Having a sweeper has become a luxury. So this week I had to clean the toilets myself. Me! Sheetal Talwar.

I'm worrying about how we're going to pay our next month's rent. And you're here asking me to perform a huge puja ceremony?

**DRAUPADI**

If I could ask for a small puja, I would. But this is a very special puja.

[voice rising]

It's not for my health, my birthday or a new business. It's not for a long life, or good fortune. It's for my *atman* – you understand? My *soul*.

**SHEETAL**

We haven't entertained anyone since we left our old home and came to this place. How can we? All our servants had to find other jobs or go back to their villages. Of course, even if we could entertain guests, our old friends don't call us.

We are just not cool any more.

*I'm* not cool anymore.

[sees Draupadi is looking dejected, tearing up]

I told you long ago I would do it, *if I can*. When I can. Believe me, I had made up my mind to do it, I had even drawn up a guest list when –

**DRAUPADI**

When what?

[turns away, blows her nose].

I never did get the full story.

**SHEETAL**

My Arjun's brothers and cousins lost crores in the crash of Satyam. Then the newspapers began reporting building accidents – Arjun's cousins had been adulterating cement. The family's construction business began losing customers. There were government inquiries -- and then of course we had to pay off politicians and government officials.

**DRAUPADI**

[drily]

Of course.

**SHEETAL**

Profits fell, and Arjun's cousins began taking a larger share, then an even larger share. Arjun and his brothers aren't builders or businessmen – they are sculptors! Their cousins don't need their art. One argument led to another. And here we are.

**DRAUPADI**

[reminiscing]

My Arjun and his brothers and I were sent into real exile, you know. We lived in a forest for twelve long years.

**SHEETAL**

[shouting]

I know, I know. If I complain, my mother-in-law and now you say it was worse in your day. Next you'll say other women have worse problems. I know that.

Last night I called the police when I heard the screams of a woman whose drunk husband tried to kill her because she kept a little money from him for milk for his children.

And next door, there's a woman whose husband works for an IT company. Do you know, he threw their four-day-old child in a well just because it was a girl?!

But why should I be in a competition for suffering? With you or any other woman.

**DRAUPADI**

[gently]

We're not in competition. I was trying to comfort you.

I'm sorry. I'll come back some other time.

**SHEETAL**

Don't go!

[fighting to control herself]

Sometimes I think if I had a mother, I might talk to her as I talk to you.

**DRAUPADI**

I'm listening.

How is your Arjun fighting his cousins?

**SHEETAL**

He isn't. They have grabbed his share, treated him like a lackey.

**DRAUPADI**

And raped you, or has everyone forgotten?

**SHEETAL**

[turns away. Gets control of herself. Turns back]

I told Arjun he must persuade his elder brothers to take their cousins to court –

**DRAUPADI**

Which Maharaja's court. . .? Oh, a court of law.

**SHEETAL**

But he says, How can we sue them? They're our cousins.

How can I make him understand?

**DRAUPADI**

Pray to Lord Krishna. I find him very understanding.

**SHEETAL**

Oh, that's really helpful! I should read the *Bhagvadgita* too, right?

Why don't you just ask Lord Krishna what he thinks? He was your friend, you must have a hot line to him.

**DRAUPADI**

As a matter of fact, I do.

[pulls out a red cell phone and calls].

Hé Krishna. What? I know, you've been listening –

[to Sheetal]

He's soooo mischievous!

[head wobbling, nodding] Yes-ji Yes-ji, Yes.

What? I'll tell her.

[clicks off, pops the red cell phone down her sari blouse.]

He says he's given you many options that didn't exist in my time.

**SHEETAL**

What options?

**DRAUPADI**

The Rule of law. Not the old convoluted Kshatriya caste code of conduct, but a code all the same. You know, in the Constitution.

**SHEETAL**

That will bring justice? Ha!

**DRAUPADI**

Depends on what you call Justice. If you mean vengeance -- well, maybe yes, maybe no. I never found vengeance as satisfying as I expected.

Did you know I had to comfort my Arjun after he returned from battle. He felt so disturbed that he'd killed his cousins.

**SHEETAL**

[bitterly]

The law is not interested in justice, Draupadi-ji. Arjun's cousins will just lie because there's not a single penalty for lying under oath.

**DRAUPADI**

Yes, it will seem so. Every story is just one version of the truth.

I didn't say it would be easy.



**SHEETAL**

[idea dawning]

Draupadi-ji, where's your phone?

**DRAUPADI**

[patting her breast on the heart-side]

Here.

**SHEETAL**

Call Lord Krishna again. Redial -- please!

**DRAUPADI**

Why?

**SHEETAL**

You know Krishna-ji – who better than you! He has the power to help my Arjun win back our home.

**DRAUPADI**

He's a God, Sheetal. Gods are not reliable. During our war, he gave powerful advice to one side, powerful weapons to the other. Like -- like the CIA –

**SHEETAL**

He told you I have options. Well, *he's* one of them.

[Draupadi doesn't move.]

Sheetal folds her hands before her]

I'll do the special puja for your soul.

[Draupadi doesn't move. Wheedling in little girl voice]

I'll do a very very special puja if you call on Krishna.

Please, please?

[Draupadi sighs and wobbles her head, meaning I-really-don't-want-to-but-achcha/okay.]

Takes out her red cell phone and dials.]

**Dance of the Court Room.**

**Arjun and dancers as his four brothers, Two female dancers as lawyers in black robes, legal collars. All come before a judge.**

**Lord Krishna is off to the side, watching.**

**Sheetal mounts the witness stand. Lord Krishna comes to her side.**

**Sheetal steps down.**

**Judge gives Lord Krishna his decision.**

**Arjun raises his arms in triumph.**

**Arjun dances with Sheetal.**

## ACT III

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**Soon after trial.**

**Gateway of India arches above Sheetal and Draupadi. People (dancers) are sitting around, walking chatting, feeding the pigeons, some flying a kite, child-beggars (dancers) are begging.**

**SHEETAL**

We're moving home tomorrow. Arjun and the children are so excited.

**DRAUPADI**

And you?

**SHEETAL**

I wish I was too. It's just that Arjun seems different. Harder in some way, inside.

(pause)

I told him if he wanted me to return to his old home with him, we need some new rules.

**DRAUPADI**

What kind of rules?

**SHEETAL**

He has to stay away from his adulterous rapist cousins. We should begin our own sculpture museum.

**DRAUPADI**

I can see it now -- Madame Sheetal's.

**SHEETAL**

Our sons will be brought up to respect girls, whether they are their sisters, cousin-sisters or strangers.

**DRAUPADI**

Oh-ho. Even strangers? That means girls who are not blood relatives? Girls *not related to your family*? Vah!

But -- what do you mean by respect?

**SHEETAL**

Our boys will learn that when a girl says no she doesn't mean maybe. And if she says maybe, she doesn't mean yes.

It means a boy should be taught that his future wife can and will control her own money -- a wife should be able to pay for ten puja ceremonies from her own money without asking anyone's permission.

It means...a man shouldn't show respect for his mother by disrespecting his wife.

**DRAUPADI**

That is Quantum Physics for boys and men -- very difficult for them to understand. But I like the idea. Wish we'd had this in my day.

**SHEETAL**

You didn't have condoms or the pill either. Well, we're so different now -- we have them, but our mothers-in-law and husbands refuse to let us use them.

I told Arjun, that has to change. Two is enough!

**DRAUPADI**

[claps]

**SHEETAL**

And I said, No playing cards and no drinking bhang. At Holi or any other festival.

**DRAUPADI**

[rolling her eyes]

That won't last.

**SHEETAL**

Maybe, maybe not. But if it comes back, I leave.

I've now warned my father, and Arjun's parents.

**DRAUPADI**

You're not afraid anymore?

**SHEETAL**

No. When I fell so low that I had to clean my own toilet, I could do it. I *did* do it. And do you know, Draupadi-ji, it wasn't the worst that could happen. I cut my fingers chopping onions, I swept the floor and cleaned the toilets – so what? Up and down the apartment building, I saw so many women who do much harder work, every day. And so many terrible things that happen to poorer women.

**DRAUPADI**

[quietly]

*You* are so different now.

[pause]

**SHEETAL**

And the Shivaling has been brought from Narmada, The havan fire has been brought from Triambakeshwar, one of those twelve dwadasp places.

[raising her hand to stop Draupadi who is trying to interrupt]

I said to myself: I remember what it felt like to fall from the sky back to earth, just when I thought I could leave all my troubles behind. So -- the pandits who will recite the Mahashiv puran for seven days are ready.

I've bought eight hundred liters of milk to bathe the Shivaling non-stop for a hundred and eight hours. It's being delivered to a refrigerated warehouse. Maybe I'll get more – that doesn't seem enough.

And the sweets-seller delivered mishti doi instead of plain yogurt, but I'll return it.

And here's your ticket: Mumbai – Delhi –Kuruksheetra. . . the pandits tell me they must pray for your soul at Kuruksheetra because your death was unnatural like all who died on that battlefield.

**DRAUPADI**

Stop, Sheetal, stop.

[groans]

Oh, I'm so sorry.

I should have said something earlier. Stop the pandits, return the offerings.

**SHEETAL**

What?!

**DRAUPADI**

Return the Shivling – very politely. Don't forget the yoni.

Tell the pandits I will recite the Mahashiv puran myself.

And the milk – eight hundred liters! Please distribute it to street children in my name. They need it more than Lord Shiva.

I've decided I'm staying right here.

**SHEETAL**

With me? Oh Draupadiji, that's wonderful.

**DRAUPADI**

No, no, not with you. Can you imagine me haunting your home? I don't think your mother-in-law and I would get along.

I mean just -- here.

**SHEETAL**

Okay, not with me. Stay in your own home – I'll come and visit you every day.

**DRAUPADI**

Sheetal, I still have work to do on Earth. You no longer need my help, but other women do. I have to be their fighting spirit – I know that now.

**SHEETAL**

So if you're not staying, where are you going?

**DRAUPADI**

Where I'm needed most. To women in villages, women in the chawls. There are women and men all over India who are feeling right now, as you felt – total despair. I've been reading reports on the net. – we have a hundred thousand suicides a year. Farmers, unemployed people, retired people. People your age. So many young girls, Sheetal, so many women.

**SHEETAL**

Achcha? I thought it was just me. I didn't know it was so bad. Maybe they feel as I did, that they'll return in a new life, a better life. Yes – you can help them.

[preening]

you can tell them about me.

[Sees Draupadi's raised eyebrow]

How you helped me, I mean.

[pause]

But -- you'll come and see me again?

**DRAUPADI**

Yes, of course, Sheetal. Sometimes even spirits need vacations. I'll come and see how you raise your sons, and how they turn out. I'll check to see if you're following your own rules or falling into old patterns or back into despair.

**SHEETAL**

Isn't there anything I can do for you, give you?

**DRAUPADI**

[pointing to the yellow purse]

This. I'll wear it like you do, as a remembrance of our friendship. It's not every day I'll find a woman who needs her handbag designed by a man in Paris *and* needs to be persuaded not to commit suicide.

[Sheetal takes off the purse, takes her wallet out, and ceremoniously drapes the the purse around Draupadi's neck and across her body]

[Seeing the wallet, a beggar girl runs forward]

**SHEETAL**

[Giving girl a coin. To beggar-girl, promising:]

Kal aana – yahan bachon ko doodh milega. Ja! Sare bachon ko keh do.

[girl grins and runs off. To Draupadi]

It has taken days to collect eight hundred liters of milk, but it will take hours to distribute it to as many needy children as I can.

Have you called Lord Krishna lately? Ask how long it will take to give so many women your fighting spirit?

**DRAUPADI**

I did. He said only Lord Vishnu knows – it could happen tomorrow, or it could happen in the next millennium. You just never know with us Indian women.

Oh – by the way – don't return my train ticket – I can start my work from Kurukshetra.

[Takes the train ticket from Sheetal. Sheetal holds out her arm. Draupadi takes it.]

Something about that battleground always inspires me.

**[They turn and walk through the Gateway of India].**

**Farewell Dance**

**Dancers rise, freeze.**

**Lord Krishna moves between them briefly, and wanders across with his flute.**

**Dancers click, begin to dance around and through the Gateway of India.**

**LIGHTS DOWN**

***Dedicated to the surviving family and friends of Pragya Mehrotra***

And with deepest gratitude to my husband David J. Baldwin who is patient with the creative process.



**Shauna Singh Baldwin's** first novel, *What the Body Remembers*, was published in 1999 by Knopf Canada, Transworld UK, and Doubleday USA. It received the 2000 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best Book (Canada-Caribbean region) and has been translated into fourteen languages.

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