

Draupadī  
and  
Her Pañcāla



Re-asserting their place in History

*Editors*

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## MESSAGE

The arrow has to be pulled back to release it with the required force in the desired direction. Likewise, knowing the history serves as the tool to provide the strength and direction to move ahead. For making the 'history', one must be aware of it.

The "**Panchal Maha Utsav**" to be organized by **Draupadi Trust** to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the auspicious land of Draupadi or Panchali will be an important occasion to recall our history. "**Draupadi**" is the central character of our epic book – Mahabharat created by Ved Vyas the renowned rishi.

Draupadi is portrayed as a symbol of dignity and self-respect. Standing in embarrassment at Kaurav Sabha, she expressed her extreme faith in the GOD-Krishna to preserve her chastity and proved the power of 'faith'. In fact, the whole 'Mahabharat' is the unique guiding source for human beings to live meaningfully for protection of our cultural values and ethics with the readiness to sacrifice every thing including life for that. The essence of Mahabharat – "Geeta" has been the torch bearer for mankind.

I extend my congratulations to **Draupadi Trust** for organizing "**Panchal Maha Utsav**" on the auspicious land of Draupadi or Panchali, and my best wishes for all the success.



(Narendra Modi)

To,  
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Narendra Modi

Chief Minister, Gujarat State



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are delighted to convey our heartfelt gratitude to Honorable Shri Narendra Modi Ji, the former Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat, and our current Prime Minister of India, for his very valuable words of appreciation of the significance of Draupadī, the Princess of the Pañcāla Mahajanapada. His positive remarks on the learning's from our ancient wisdom are indeed very inspiring for our work on Vedic and Mahābhārata period Cultural Heritage and History. We acknowledge with deep gratefulness, his Message to us for the success of this program.

We express our deep gratitude to all our speakers and contributors who either participated or sent us papers for this 'book of papers' to commemorate our Trust's decade of work, via the Pañcāla Mahotsava 2013. Papers were invited for two Seminars, one on *Revisiting Draupadī*, and the other on *Significance of Pañcāla*.

We take this opportunity to express our regrets that the publication of these papers was delayed due to constraints faced by us, and unavoidable circumstances beyond our control. We thank the scholars for their patience as we finalize the publication of the book

We convey our gratitude to India International Centre for associating with the five day *Pañcāla Mahotsava* programs at IIC venues.

We also acknowledge with thanks the support of Ministry of Culture, Handloom Board (Ministry of Textiles) ONGC, MMTC, GAIL, SAIL, IGL HUDCO, DILLI HAAT (Delhi Tourism) for supporting the *Pañcāla Mahotsava's* five day programs.

We are also thankful to B.R. Publishing Corporation for agreeing to publish this book. Their Co-operation has been encouraging.

Finally, I thank Hemi Sonowal for bearing with us and helping us with corrections and diacriticals, with such patience and poise.

I also thank all our well wishers, whose goodwill encourages us to dig deep into ancient Bhārata and showcase it to our present generation.

## FOREWORD

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B.R. Mani

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**T**he Draupadī Dream Trust had organised an international seminar in December, 2013 on Pañcāla in which main focus was on the character of Draupadī, who represents the divine female energy and who is embodiment of human consciousness and women empowerment. The seminar papers have been collected and presented in the form of proceedings in the present volume which Ms. Neera Misra has edited. It contains twenty four well researched articles presented by eminent scholars who have worked on the land and people, history, archaeology and socio-economic developments of Pañcāla which was a significant zone of cultural assimilation of western and eastern cultural undercurrents in the Indian subcontinent.

Pañcāla was one of the *jonas* of Vedic times and was neighbour of Kuru and both of them are generally mentioned together in different politico-cultural contexts. The formation of a confederacy by five clans resulted into emergence of Pañcāla during the Vedic times which in due course became a strong political power. It was the land where the philosophy of *Upaniṣads* developed in the later Vedic times and sooner it became a prominent mahajanapada amongst the sixteen great states which reached to its cultural and political climax around the first half of the first millennium BCE. During Vedic age, Krivis who were earlier connected with the Kurus, originally ruled between Sindhu (Indus) and Asikni (Chenab) and later moved to the east across Yamunā to the land of Pañcāla and therefore Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa asserts that Krivi was the older name of the Pañcāla. During the early historical period, Pañcāla continued to remain a political power with breaks during Maurya, Śunga and Kuṣāṇa rule and finally merging in the Indian empire under the Guptas as clearly indicated by the numismatic evidence from the city sites of the area, particularly from Ahichchhatra.

The book contains important papers on the personality of Draupadī in its first part which brings out the remarkable aspects of her character including her intelligence, intrinsic strength while raising her voice against oppressions, her determination, sense of gender equality, capacity to maintain relationships, devotion to Kṛṣṇa, compassion and beauty of body and heart.

It is interesting to mention that this book also contains papers relating to various archaeological investigations bringing new facts to light, particularly in the area of geomorphology, stratigraphical and soil analyses, pottery, material culture, numismatics, art and architecture and literary references corroborating tradition to be understood in the light of archaeology.

— **B.R. Mani**



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## INTRODUCTION TO DRAUPADĪ AND PAÑCĀLA

**P**añcāla region has a rich repository of tangible and intangible heritage and culture with a legacy of deep history and valuable literature, as it was a great centre for Vedic learning during most ancient times. Tangible heritage is being preserved by Archaeological Survey of India (Kāmpilya, Ahichchhatra, Sankīṣa, etc., being Nationally Protected sites under Archaeological Survey of India). However negligible or very little attention has been given to the intangible heritage, arts, traditions or places related to the Pañcāla history.

Pañcāla was one of the most powerful *Mahājanapada* of ancient times. How many of us know that Pañcāla-*desha* was the nurturing ground of many of our literary works, and some of its ancient rulers were the patrons of Vedic knowledge, culture and of matters related to our deep-rooted philosophy of life. Pañcāla, as a distinct kingdom, is known from the *Brāhmaṇas* and the Vedas. Both Pañcāla and Kāmpilya figure in the *Yajur-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda Saṁhitās* (Vedic index, I, 149) and the *Brāhmaṇas*.

“*The Pañcāla Mahotsava*”, a five day program, was organized by our Trust to showcase the immense literary and cultural wealth of Pañcāla region. This being an auspicious land of spiritual knowledge became the pivotal place of some important events that shook the Kuru King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, and also enhanced the envy of his son Duryodhana towards the Pāṇḍava brothers. The relationship between King Drupada and Guru Droṇācārya was played out in the Pañcāla region. Besides, the happy Svayaṁvara here actually increased the rivalry between the Kuru and Pāṇḍava brothers and ended in the unfortunate Kurukṣetra War. Thus the ‘*itihāsa*’ of the ‘Great Bhārata’ or Mahābhārata period, is intrinsically linked to ‘*itihāsa*’ of Pañcāla too. In fact, Pañcāla continued to influence the

history of Indraprastha and north India for centuries after the Kurukṣetra War, as we notice that many rulers of pre-Sultanate Bharata were from Pañcāla region. Only difference was that while Kāmpilya was the political power centre during ancient period, Kannauj later became the central place from where several rulers eyed and ruled at Indraprastha region. Understanding Pañcāla's ancient past and contribution in unfolding our nation's past history and civilization's evolution, made this conference very valuable.

Documented quite well in B.C. Law's *Pañcālas and their capital Ahicchetra*, in *Kāmpilyamahātmya*, *Buddh purva ka Pracheen Bhartiya Itihas* (Misra Bandhu, Allahabad Prakashan) and some such other books, it is worthwhile to know a little about the Pañcāla kingdom.

Pañcāla is an ancient region of northern India, which corresponds to the geographical area around the Ganges and Yamunā rivers; the upper Gangetic plain in particular. This would encompass the modern-day states of central Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. During the ancient times, it was home to a confederacy. The Pañcāla in ca. 6th century BCE was considered as one of the *solasa* (sixteen) *Mahājanapadas*. The Pañcālas occupied the country to the east of the Kurus, between the upper Himalayas and the river Ganges. In ancient times, it roughly corresponded to the Gangetic doāb areas of Uttar Pradesh and parts of Uttarakhand. (Districts of central Uttar Pradesh like Bareilly, Farrukhabad, Badayun, Kannauj, Kanpur, Shahajahanpur, Etah, Etawah etc)

It was home of five Vedic tribes, the Krivis, Turvasas, Keśins, Śrñjayas and Somakas, and is also considered a confederation of five sons of King Bhramyasev named Mudgal, Vardish, Sarnjay, Yavinagar, Kāmpilya.

This land's antiquity goes back far in time of ancient period of Bhārata. Besides the *Yajurveda* and *Yajurveda Saṁhitās*, Pañcāla finds prominence in the *Palī Nikaya* list of 16 *Mahājanapadas* and Pre-Buddhistic *Upaniṣads*. The history and significance of any place comes mainly from its rulers' strengths. Older *Brāhmaṇas* testify that the Pañcāla rulers performed the *Aśvamedha* and *Rājasūya* sacrifices.

It was an early centre of Vedic learning and important home of poetry during the reign of Bhoja. Literary personalities from Pañcāla have been famous from ancient to modern periods. Pravāhana Jaivali, the Philosopher king of Pañcāla patronized seekers of truth, knowledge and teaching. The Pañcāla people took a leading part in fixing and arranging the text of the *Rigveda*. Vatsyayana admits that his own treatise, the *Kāmasūtra* was only a later digest of an earlier elaborate treatise composed by Babhravya of Pañcāla. The *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya mentions Pañcālas as a ruling clan who represented a Sangha or Oligarchic form of government. Pañcāla remained an independent state at least for a century after the demise of the Buddha. The *Gargi-Saṁhitā* composed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. alludes to a Greek (Yavana) invasion of Saketa, Pañcāla and Mathura. Hiuen Tsang left behind an account of Pañcāla and its capitals in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. Pañcāla again became the



principal kingdom in northern India from about 840-910 CE under Bhoja and his son. Once again, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century under the Gaharwar Kings, we read of Pañcāla's importance. The MITRA coins of Pañcāla are an archaeological treasure. (B.C. Law)

Pañcāla came into much prominence during the Mahābhārata period as Draupadī's birth and *Svayamvara* took place here, and changed the course of Kuru Kingdom's history, and the '*itihāsa*' of Bhārata. Draupadī became the pawn and victim of political rivalry and actually shines as the first ever known liberated woman who raised her voice against injustice and disrespect to woman. Few are aware that Kāmpilya, the capital of South Pañcāla, is also the place where the Ayurvedic gospel of Indian medical system, the *Charac Saṁhitā*'s compilation was finalized by the ṛṣis. Also being a place of kings and queens, crafts too flourished here, prominent being Zari work and Block Printing.

Another little-thought-of, but very interesting fact, is that the Uttar Pradesh state symbol represents the scene of the revolving fish and bow and arrow, associated with Arjun's feat at Svayamvara ceremony of Draupadī at Kāmpilya. This is a symbol of dedication, determination and concentration, which gives the desired results. Meenpur gram in Kāmpilya still cherishes that significant event that re-wrote the history of Kuru kingdom.

So much is the significance of Pañcāla that it is time we delve deeper, learn from the scholars' works and find ways to disseminate this knowledge for a better 'present' and 'future' for Pañcāla and try to help it regain its past glory, via development, and preserving its legacies.

Papers here cover a wide range of topics and will surely generate much interest for further and wider research.

It is important to learn about Pañcāla for another reason. To understand the personae of Draupadī, it is important to know the backdrop of the land of her upbringing, which was this region of rich cultural legacies, and which gave her the moral and spiritual strength to fight for 'Dharma' of the state to respect and protect women.

As the Draupadī Trust completed ten years in 2013, we made an effort to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of this historic land of Pañcāla, along with our eternal progressive woman Draupadī, who is considered the avatar of Pārvatī, was *sakha* of Kṛṣṇa and is revered among the '*pañca kanyās*'. We organized a "Pañcāla Mahā-Utsav" with special focus on the Vedic city Kāmpilya. The *Mahotsava* highlighted the culture, crafts and other tangible and intangible heritage of this rich land on the banks of Gaṅgā, this reverend land of '*Kāmpilvāsini*', of sage Kapil muni, where Buddha came and gained the 'heavenly' knowledge of '*swarga*', and where also were Jain *Tīrthānkaras* who attained '*nirvaṇa*'. It was the land visited by Hiüen Tsang and Alexander Cunningham, and many more. The program was structured for five days of activities that highlighted the History, Archaeology, Literature, Crafts of Pañcāla through a daylong Conference, and also had an interesting Panel Discussion on *Revisiting*

*Draupadī*, to understand the enviable legacy and antiquity, and also the socio-cultural dimension of empowered women.

The programs flowered as planned, spreading the fragrances of colorful folk performances, enriching knowledge, showcasing the beautiful crafts, and with inspiring participation, creating awareness of our heritage, history and cultural repository. The very high quality papers presented at Panel Discussion on *Revisiting Draupadī* and at the seminar on *Significance of Pañcāla* were first documented in 2014, in the Report of the Pañcāla Mahā-Utsav. The academic value of these papers is so significant, and thus it was decided to publish them as a book to make them accessible to researchers and general public interested in ancient history.