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GENDERED SOTEROLOGY
Marriage and the karmayoga

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This chapter explores the interface of gender, analogy, and narrative. The Sanskrit tradition up to and including the Mahābhārata contains certain gendered discourses which, when applied as background to our reading, yield a new perspective on one reiterated Mahābhārata motif: that of the man who, for individual interpersonal circumstantial reasons, wants to leave his wife. I will consider this motif as an allegory of a soteriological situation in which the soul 'wants to leave' saṃsāra, and, vice versa. I will consider that soteriological situation as an allegory of this motif.

By 'soteriology' I mean the post-vedic (or, at the very least, late Vedic, and also non-Vedic) mokṣaśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstrašāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstraśāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstrașāstr
recent European and North American narrative traditions (such as the ‘cop show’, the ‘western’, and the normative presentation and discussion of ‘news’ in the national media) regularly evoke something like rākṣaṇa as a baseline of moral masculinity, particularly in the justification of violent action.

**Gendered genesis and its soteriologic-narrative ramifications**

Our project is complicated because the terms in which the Mahābhārata presents the dualism of ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’ (often puruṣa and prakṛti, though many other words are also used) are often not explicitly gendered within the text, and there is debate over the extent to which we may understand them as such. The general scholarly presumption has been that these are gendered categories (and such an interpretation is encouraged by the feminine grammatical gender of prakṛti and the basic meaning of puruṣa as ‘male person’, as well as by several textual suggestions), but Knut A. Jacobsen has recently suggested — mentioning also the work of Mackenzie Brown (1986) in this regard — that prakṛti was ‘feminized’ only latterly, in a period post-dating the Mahābhārata and the basic philosophical Śāṅkhyā texts, through the influence of tantric ideas of sakti and the goddess (Jacobsen 1996).12

Jacobsen is an expert on prakṛti (Jacobsen 1999), but in the present context it is important that we sidestep certain implications of his work, in two ways.13 Firstly, there are suggestions of prakṛti’s femininity in the philosophical literature even preceding prakṛti’s ‘feminization’: gendered metaphors are used to explain what prakṛti is. Jacobsen mentions some of these, principally the ‘dancing girl’ image of Śāṅkhyakārikā 59, and interprets them as mere metaphors. From this perspective prakṛti, as an impersonal conscious principle, must be non-gendered;14 but this is an analytical philosophical edge of a wider discourse in which two basic principles, variously labelled, feature in narratives many of which emphasize the gendered aspects omitted or at least downplayed by Jacobsen and the Śāṅkhyakārikā. Our concern is narrative interpretation, and hence much of the more philosophical literature is peripheral. Secondly, and relatedly, Jacobsen’s argument that prakṛti was originally non-gendered is in many ways an argument ex silento, and as such is overdependent on the choice of what exactly to listen for. If we listen for basic conceptual patterns, we find evidence in the late Vedic texts, Dharmaśāstrīs, and Mahābhārata that a polarity similar to that expressed in śāṅkhyā texts by the terms prakṛti and puruṣa was narratively portrayed in explicitly gendered terms.

From the Rgveda onwards cosmogony is often presented, by analogy with human son-production, as dependent on a union of gendered entities. This analogy is pervasive, and it is often impossible to tell whether the main subject of discussion is the cosmos, or the individual person within it.15 The gendered entities combining to create the cosmos are also indispensable personal constituents: every person has two parents, and also two metaphysical aspects. Selected quotations will demonstrate the gendered idea of the cosmic parents at some length (although examples could easily be multiplied), as this idea forms an essential backdrop for the remainder of the chapter. Procreation is not the only evident old Indian cosmogonic theory,16 but nonetheless the identifiable gendered cosmo-parental mythology formed an implicit symbolic background for the Mahābhārata’s gendered narratives and metaphysical speculations.

The Mānava Dharmashastra says that ‘the Lord who is Self-existent, himself unmanifest, caused this (universe) to become manifest … he of whom all creatures are made – he is the one who actually appeared’ (1.6.8, 7cd, tr. Doniger with Smith).17 Then we are told how:

first he emitted the waters, and then he emitted his semen in them. That (semen) became a golden egg,18 as bright as the sun with his thousand rays; Brahmā himself, the grandfather of all people, was born in that (egg) … The one who is the first cause, unmanifest, eternal, the essence of what is real and unreal, emitted the Puruṣa, who is known in the world as Brahmā.

(Mānava Dharmashastra 1.8c-9, 11, tr. Doniger with Smith)19

The Lord is male, the waters female,20 and the son (cosmos-as-person) differs from the father only in name, age, and level of manifestation. This cosmogony draws on a tradition of thinking apparent in the Veda in many variations. Sometimes the waters (ātita, satīlā) appear to produce the incipient cosmos by themselves, without fertilization.21 Sometimes both Lord and waters apparently preexist, neither being marked out as primary.22 Sometimes, as here, the preexisting male produces the waters.23 Often, as here, the incipient cosmos is a male person, and the two males are identified.24 The role of the waters as the means for a non-manifest male to become manifest has unilinear implications matching the patrilineal emphasis on the obtaining of a son.25 The unilinear tendency may render the gendered aspect less visible:

... Such is his greatness, and Puruṣa is yet more than this. All creatures are a quarter of him; three quarters are what is immortal in heaven. With three quarters Puruṣa rose upwards, and one quarter of him still remains here. From this [quarter] he spread out in all directions, into that which eats and that which does not eat. From him Virāj was born, and from Virāj came Puruṣa. When he was born, he ranged beyond the earth behind and before.

(Rgveda 10.90.3-5, tr. O’Flaherty)26
Here Virāj appears to be the mother through whom the father manifests one-quarter of himself as the son. In cosmogony, unity is perhaps instinctively more original than duality. Although one might suppose that the pre-cosmic Lord should initially be non-gendered, only latterly polarizing into male and female sexually productive aspects, his gender is prominently marked in advance, and carries over into the cosmic person. Clearly one must be (or become) two before one can be (or become) another one or many; and the prioritization of the pre-cosmic male, requiring as it does his ability independently to create a mate for himself, explains how, if the Lord and the waters only have one cosmic son (per universe), that son might himself manage to procreate.

In the beginning this was self (ātman), in the likeness of a person (puruṣa). Looking round he saw nothing but himself (ātman) . . . He was afraid. But he had no pleasure either. He desired a companion. He became as large as a woman and a man embracing. He made that self split (pati) into two: from that husband (pati) and wife (patni) came to be. Therefore Yājahvaikya used to say, ‘In this respect we are each like a half portion’. So this space is filled up by a wife. He coupled with her, and from that human beings were born.

(Bhādhraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1.4.1–3, tr. Roebuck)

Puruṣa’s way of creating human beings mirrors the way the Lord created him. Only when offspring are multiple and of both genders (as implied here by their being human) can the line continue in the normal manner.

In the Mahābhārata Kṛṣṇa combines the extra-cosmic and intra-cosmic scenarios: ‘Great Brahmā is my womb, I put the embryo in it. Thence arises the production of all beings. Brahmā is the great womb; I am the seed-bearing father of them all’ (Vīmaśīkha 1.4). Here ‘brahmā’ despite its grammatically neuter gender, plays an explicitly female role often played by (maṇḍa or āvatsi) prakṛti or the waters. But Kṛṣṇa claims his fertile companion as a possession or a part of himself.

In the Māṇava Dharmaśāstra, after Puruṣa-Brahmā hatches, he bifurcates and reproduces sexually, and the son is called Virāj; but the text presents another reproductive method: ‘By heating himself up with ascetic toil, that man, Virāj, brought forth a being by himself – know, you best of the twice-born, that I [Manu] am that being, the one who created this whole world’ (1.33, tr. Olivel). Here tapas replaces the ‘other half’, and the female is unnecessary in all but name (‘Virāj’). Manu then uses the same method to produce the ten ‘mind-born’ rūṣis. To be productive the male must polarize into himself plus another (tapas, mind, waters), so some mate/mother may always be identified, however disguised: ‘the general principle of necessary gender complementarity is symbolically maintained’ (Pritchman 1998: 271; see also Zwilling and Sweet 2000: 101). In the Mahābhārata, in microcosmic versions of the cosmogonic scenario where the Lord is paired with his māyā or viṣṇu, Drona, Kṛṣṇa, Sūka et al. are produced when a sage sees an aparā and his consequent seminal emission is incubated in some impersonal or makeshift yoni.

The gendered cosmogonic principles necessarily pre-exist the infant cosmos, but are also integral aspects within it: thus sexual production is iterated at different levels in the ongoing analogical process. The analogy between microcosm and macrocosm is persistent and extensive, and so, like the cosmos (male Puruṣa is male-plus-female), a human person has two essential constituents (prakṛti and puruṣa in sāṃkhya theory), internal representations of the parents.

This analogueical approach, when applied iteratively, throws up a specific type of problem. Although each individual human is physically and nominally unipolar gendered, he/she has two gendered parents, and two gendered aspects (Goldberg 2002: 77). So if male and female characters are narratively to ‘stand for’ the Lord and the waters, or heaven and earth, or puruṣa and the material principle, it appears that there is slight of hand. But we cannot allow this interesting problem to stop us reading in this way, for that would be to scruple where some authors do not, and would impoverish our textual understanding.

If the cosmic parents are ranked (the male creates the waters), so are the two constituents of humans: the microcosmic Lord (soul‘, deha, ēkānātha, puruṣa, prāna) is presented as essential; the body-stuff is not. The mokṣa soteriology attempts to re-claim the essence entirely: traditionally, according to the nivṛtti impulse, to be saved is to abandon materiality, the cosmic and microcosmic representation of the female principle – by analogy, the wife of the soteriological subject. We see this in the Svetāśtrāra Upaniṣad, where the three colours of the female goat remind us of prakṛti’s gunas: ‘With the man’s power. While the white and black, who brings forth man, is my offspring, like herself, lies one billy-goat, taking pleasure. The other billy-goat abandons her, who has had her enjoyment’ (4.5, tr. Roebuck). Old Indian narrative traditions prominently juxtapose soteriological attainment and wife-abandonment: Yājahvaikya, Mahāvīra and the Buddha abandoned their wives.

The Buddhacarita makes this into a general rule: ‘All the bodhisattvas of matchless character, knowing sensual enjoyments, pleasures and delights, went to the forest once a son was born to them’ (2.56). This allows a man’s wholehearted pursuit of mokṣajñānāna to follow the fulfilment of patrilineal duties within one lifetime, and resembles the classical Hindu scheme of four successive āśramas, which however values social duties more highly, prohibiting renunciation until much later (when the man’s sons are independent, Mahābhārata 12.277.8, when he has grandchildren, Māṇava Dharmaśāstra 6.2). In all these cases a wife is necessary because sons are necessary.

When, in the Mahābhārata, we see men ambivalent towards their wives, we can read this, on one level, as discussion of the mokṣa soteriology (which
resembles the gendered cosmogony in reverse). However, in the Bhagavadgītā, Kṛṣṇa proposes a soteriological variant whereby one need not abandon one’s wife to attain mokṣa.40 In allowing both procreation and mokṣa-attainment, the karmayoga – or the sprāvyāda41 – parallels the mature āśrama system and the bodhisattva rule; but it is more thoroughgoing, obviating in principle the need ever to renounce the wife.42 Hence many Mahābhārata stories dramatize the possibility of the man abandoning the wife she is sometimes temporarily abandoned, but never for long. Our heroes must learn to live with her. The next two sections of the chapter will explore several such stories in terms of the soteriological dynamic between purusa and the material principle; but this is only possible now that we have established that there is already a long narrative tradition of presenting this dynamic in hierarchically gendered terms.

In emphasizing the wife, we single out one of several female symbolic units in the Mahābhārata which may stand for that which must be physically abandoned, according to the traditional soteriology, for salvation to occur. Others are Śrī (the goddess of fortune) and Earth (Pṛthvī, Bhūmi, Mātī). The king husbands Earth (his realm),43 and Śrī is his consort; the queen represents his being Lord of Earth (mahāpāti) and Śrī’s favourite.44 Because the Mahābhārata’s main characters are royal kṣatriyas, it exemplifies the renunciative impulse in terms of abandonment of the duties and trappings of kingship (including the citizens), and/or the wife. Wife-abandonment is sometimes partial or implicit, since she may still be there with the husband in emaciated form, suffering, without her finery.

The matter is complicated because in the Mahābhārata the wife is not just an cipher, an object in connection with male subjects; she is also a subject herself. As Olivelle has made clear (1997: 437-42), the traditional mokṣa soteriology implies every person’s soteriological independence. The Mahābhārata is probably the earliest Sanskrit text explicitly to anticipate Sanskrit-knowing subsets of women and the ‘lower’ classes amongst its audience, and Kṛṣṇa’s new soteriology is universally available.45 The brief for women and śādras is one of unostentation; but the pūtimāt wife, who cleaves to her husband for better, for worse (even if and as he rejects her), and who refuses to be abandoned because her destiny depends on him, could be a soteriological exemplar herself, regardless of her symbolic role in his story.

The case of Yudhiṣṭhira

Our primary example is the story of Yudhiṣṭhira, who becomes Dharmarāja.46 As mentioned earlier, we are particularly interested in aspects of his masculinity bearing on the duty of rākṣasa, which in his case – his being a king – is theorized in specific symbolic and gendered terms, whereby his relations with his queen are glossed with his relations with the seven prakṛtis that constitute kingship (‘The king, the minister, the country, the fortified city, the treasury, the army and the ally’, Arthasāstra 6.1.11, tr. Kang).47 In light of the dialogue with the renunciative traditions, particular attention will be paid to the ideas of loss or abandonment of one’s wife, and loss or abandonment of one’s (i.e. the king’s, the good protector’s) proper self, the primary ordinal of the prakṛtis, the prakṛti-that-is-pūrṇa-too.

We will survey Yudhiṣṭhira’s biography selectively, highlighting events particularly indicative of his character and his attitude to wife and kingdom, and comparing the stories of Pāṇḍu, the Buddha, Nāla, and Rāma along the way. We will see that in Yudhiṣṭhira’s case, focused as it is through these allied stories, brief wife-abandonment, despite and through being a failure of rākṣasa in the face of āśrama ideology, marks the way to self-knowledge and eventual dutiful success. But the dilemma arises for Yudhiṣṭhira repeatedly, and in different forms, and in my view the cumulative effect cannot possibly be captured unless the dramatic situations are seen in Yudhiṣṭhira’s biographical context. Hence this section is organized chronologically, like Norbert Klase’s book of 1975, with details of the story sketched in when required. The section is further broken down into subsections dealing with Yudhiṣṭhira’s father; Yudhiṣṭhira’s acquisition of a spouse and the Khāḍḍa kingdom; his loss of the same; his rehabilitation while in exile; his acquisition of the united kingdom; and his last days.

Yudhiṣṭhira’s father Pāṇḍu (1.105–16)

Yudhiṣṭhira hardly knows his father Pāṇḍu, since he has problems coming to terms with his masculinity, this omission seems significant. It would then also be significant that Pāṇḍu doesn’t know his father (Vicitravīrya) either.48 Pāṇḍu’s story may be viewed in light of the absence of a paternal example; and, only be adapted with unless the dramatic situations are seen in Yudhiṣṭhira’s biographical context. Hence this section is organized chronologically, like Norbert Klase’s book of 1975, with details of the story sketched in when required. The section is further broken down into subsections dealing with Yudhiṣṭhira’s father; Yudhiṣṭhira’s acquisition of a spouse and the Khāḍḍa kingdom; his loss of the same; his rehabilitation while in exile; his acquisition of the united kingdom; and his last days.

Pāṇḍu, tired of kingship, retired childless, with his wives, to a forest life of hunting. Dhṛtarāṣṭra, regent in his absence, obtains many sons, and the narrators explain Pāṇḍu’s childlessness: after a hunting accident, he is cursed to celibacy or death, and decides on a solitary ascetic life, striving for mokṣa. His wives are ‘intent on the world’s of our husband’ (1.110.27)49 and insist on joining him in the ascetic life, and he agrees with apparent indifference; but when eventually ‘he set out together with his wives from the hundred-peaked (mountains) facing north, wanting to cross to the other side of heaven’ (1.111.5),50 the ṛṣis prevent him, saying the path is too hard for women. But Pāṇḍu blames his childlessness, which now obsesses him, and eventually sons are produced via celestial sperm-donation, Yudhiṣṭhira’s ‘biological’ father being the god Dharma. ‘Then Pāṇḍu, seeing those five beautiful sons guarded by the strength of his own arms in the great mountain forest, became happy’ (1.116.1),51 but his death by sexual misadventure follows immediately.
Pându shows no desire for children until the rśis check his progress, even though one might have expected the king's childlessness to have caused concern much earlier. The text describes three separate renunciations: of the kingdom, of sex (enforced, with one fatal exception), and of hunting (in favour of mokṣa). We might superimpose these renunciations, imagining that Pându's accident and curse led to his renouncing the kingdom, sex, and hunting all together. The narrators are particularly concerned with the question of royal heirs (Pându's premature renunciation of the kingdom helps set up the conflict between the cousins), but Pându's triple renunciation is due to dūḥka, the down-side of knowledge about mortality; you may enjoy yourself, but it can't last (Piatigorsky 1993: 111–25). Pându 'misunderstands' the rśis, whose reason for intervening fits the traditional renunciative soteriology: perhaps they would expect Pându to dismiss his wives and continue alone, but instead he comes to terms with his ancestors, his wives, and his sexuality. His career has three phases: comparatively carefree early days; asceticism; and dharma compromise. His death in Mädrś' arms, though ostensibly the result of desire, is also a paradigm of desirelessness: we know from the Bhārataśāstra Upaniṣad that 'As a man embraced by a woman he loves is oblivious to everything within or without, so this person embraced by the ārman consisting of knowledge is oblivious to everything within or without' (4.3.21, tr. Olivelle); and in a karmayogic light this may be seen as more than a simile.

Yudhiṣṭhira before the dicing

Kuntī brings the children to the Hāsinapura court, but they soon find themselves in exile for their own safety (1.137ff.). Disguised as brahmins, the Pândavas attend Draupadi's swayamvara, where all five fall in love with her and Arjuna wins her hand. They already know that Draupadi was born from a womb, but was summoned from the fire for kṣatriya doom in a rite of black magic (1.154–5). Yudhiṣṭhira, perhaps fearful of trouble, perhaps green with envy, hastens from the swayamvara scene even before Draupadi has given Arjuna the garland. Kuntī proposes that they share Draupadi; Yudhiṣṭhira tells Arjuna to have her; Arjuna, speaking also for the others, tells Yudhiṣṭhira to have her; and Yudhiṣṭhira, realizing they all love her, and mindful of Vyāsa's earlier advice, acquiesces to Kuntī's proposal. Drupada is persuade that this is dharmic, the marriage is held (1,190–1), and the Pândava juggernaut has begun to roll, with Yudhiṣṭhira, bewitched by Draupadi and bound by his priority, inadvertently in the van.

Yudhiṣṭhira's other wife is Devikā, mentioned only once (1.90.83), daughter of Govāsana Saibya, she chose him at her swayamvara, and they have a son Yaudheyā. Draupadi, princess of Pāñcalá, Yudhiṣṭhira's royal wife, is first his brother's wife, when he later tries to leave her and the kingdom, Yudhiṣṭhira might regret how things have turned out.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra partitions the kingdom between his own sons and Pându's, who found Indraprastha. Ārjuna, sensitive to Yudhiṣṭhira over their wife, spends some time away, contracting various other marriages; when he seeks Yudhiṣṭhira's blessing for his abduction of Kṛṣṇa's sister Subhadra, it is immediately provided. Subhadra produces Abhimanyu, and Draupadi (only later?) five sons, one per husband (1.215.38–82). The juggernaut rolls: Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa burn Kuśāṇḍa Forest; asura Maya builds the Pândavas a subha (at Kṛṣṇa's suggestion) - the deal is done before Yudhiṣṭhira knows of it; Indraprastha hosts celebrities (2.1–4). Nārada reports Pându's post-mortem wish for Yudhiṣṭhira to perform the rājasūya, and Yudhiṣṭhira considers the idea. He is urged by brothers, friends, and ministers; Kṛṣṇa proposes to canvass support by killing Jarāśandha in his name. Yudhiṣṭhira is uneasy (1 'I think that if it is begun, the principal object will not be obtainable', 2.14.5), but Kṛṣṇa uses emotional blackmail for his assent; his brothers perform the dīgviṭṭha for him, and, overtaken by the momentum of events, Yudhiṣṭhira orders the rājasūya.

At the ceremony, the host is unsure which kṣatriya guest should receive his primary honour: his choice of Kṛṣṇa, proposed by Bhīma, is opposed by Sūṇapāla, and a rumpus ensues, during which Kṛṣṇa kills Śīśupāla (2.33–42). Welcome to the hot seat, samrāṭ (universal monarch)!

Yudhiṣṭhira the gambler

Dhṛtarāṣṭra invites Yudhiṣṭhira to Hāsinapura to dice with Duryodhana (2.44–67). Yudhiṣṭhira accepts the invitation, despite Vidura's warnings and his own uneasiness. Finding that Sakuni, a dice expert, will be playing for Duryodhana, he still goes ahead. He stakes and loses his wealth and land, his brothers, himself, and finally, at Sakuni's suggestion, Draupadi. But she will not be lost, and protests that her staking was unlawful, Yudhiṣṭhira having already lost himself and thus any claim over her; and Dhṛtarāṣṭra is convinced (by her protest, by Karpa, Duryodhana, and Duhṣāsana's insults to her during the ensuing debate, and by other omens) to grant her boon and annul the match. Duryodhana persuades his father to recall the Pândavas for a shorter game: the stake this time is exile for thirteen years, with Draupadi, and when Yudhiṣṭhira loses she accepts the result. During their exile Bhāradvaśa tells them the story of Nala and Damayantī (3.50–78), after Yudhiṣṭhira calls himself the unluckiest man, and Mārkandeya tells them the story of Rāma and Siṭā (3.258–75, after Yudhiṣṭhira repeats the claim), amongst others.

Yudhiṣṭhira gives Vidura several explanations for his initial acceptance of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's invitation (2.52.14–18): the kṣatriyasuddharma of accepting challenges, the kulaḥdharma of obeying one's uncle, and the inexorability of Dīrṛ (the 'Placer') and dūra (the business of the gods). Such dharmic-explanatory details are a Mahābhārata specialty, but may obscure a more
lost, however ephemeral and (now) hollow the prize? This is not his first-choice option.

Yuddhiṣṭhira stakes himself, and loses. Śakuni says, "This is the worst you could have done, losing yourself! Self-loss is wicked, king, when a stake remains" (2:58.29). Draupadi is "something lost," and now becomes Yuddhiṣṭhira's final stake at Śakuni's suggestion. Śakuni's critique fits the Mahābhārata's quarrel with the śramaṇa paradigm: accepted responsibilities must be taken seriously, or others suffer — the resouncer leaves someone behind. Yuddhiṣṭhira cannot choose the quiet life now; he is already rolling on other tracks. From Draupadi's perspective, if Yuddhiṣṭhira lost himself while another stake remained, he forfeited rights over that remainder: she had better now seek protection (rākṣa) elsewhere, or even take charge of herself, rather than remaining "his." Yuddhiṣṭhira errs in ordering his stakes, but perhaps only having lost himself is he able to stake his wife. To illuminate this suggestion, which implies a severe critique of renunciation, we will compare Nala's story, where loss of self precedes loss (i.e. renunciation) of wife. King Nala is possessed by the demon Kali, and falls prey to gambling; challenged by his brother, he loses his kingdom (the dice are possessed by another demon, Dvāpara); retaining only himself and his wife Damayantī (whom he would not stake), the two of them go to the forest. Nala, ashamed, cannot persuade Damayantī to abandon him, and others over abandoning her: "But he was dragged away by Kali; Nala, deluded, fled, moaning pitifully again and again, leaving that wife sleeping" (3:59.24).

Kali makes Nala abandon Damayantī: he is not himself (hence, perhaps, the question of staking himself never arises). Yuddhiṣṭhira, sans demon, must lose himself to get to this point. The renunciative urge, marked by wife-abandonment, requires loss of self. Thus the text can reverse events by having the wife take the lead.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra intervenes and restores to Yuddhiṣṭhira whatever was lost; then, when called back for the re-match (his stated reasons for accepting are the same as for the first match), Yuddhiṣṭhira stakes neither himself nor his family members. The Pāṇḍavas and Draupadi are exiled in rags, but though down they are not out.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra's role is played in Nala's story by the snake Karṇotakā, who, rescued by Nala from a forest fire, bites him, turning him temporarily into a hunchback but also poisoning Kali within him, thus initiating his gradual restoration. By returning for the second dice match Yuddhiṣṭhira rescues Dhṛtarāṣṭra from the Duryodhana-fire; by losing it he is bitten, and temporarly transformed, distorted, and diminished. Yuddhiṣṭhira's Kali to conquer is Duryodhana (who incarnates him), and the urge to abandon self and wife.

Nala is apart from Damayantī for some time before she engineers their reconciliation, but Draupadi wins back Yuddhiṣṭhira on the spot, through
Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s boon. After this they are somewhat estranged: Draupadī, without regal apparel, says that until her humiliation is redressed she will have no husbands at all.30 While Draupadī fears that Yudhishṭhīra has no intention of activating his patrilineal kṣatriya self and demanding that redress,31 this seems appropriate; but ‘he thought about it for almost an hour and worked out the proper thing to do’ (3.37.2).32 She accepts that he is just biding time, and after the exile they are a public couple again, and scores are settled. As Paul Bowly observes, ‘the war between the Pāṇḍavas and their cousins . . . is the completion of the . . . dice match for Yudhishṭhīra and his brothers’ (1991: 4). Structurally, the Kurukṣetra war matches Nālā’s second, triumphant dice game, at which, after reuniting with his wife, he wins back his kingdom. On that occasion Nālā stakes Damayanti and himself, both at once; but by that stage he is self-possessed and has learned to play expertly.

Comparing Yudhishṭhīra and Nālā’s wife-abandonment with the Buddha’s, we note that in the former, dicing frames the motif, and no soteriological goal is explicitly mentioned. But because of this second difference, the stories converge: each man succeeds, in rajadharmaic or in soteriological terms. In the Mahābhārata’s terms, wife-abandonment is a failure of rākṣasa, but for all three characters it marks the way to self-knowledge and eventual success. The Mahābhārata’s dharmaic kṣatriya may lose self, wife, and kingdom through death in battle; but if they lose these through folly or mistaken attraction to the āśrama life, they must surive and come back the stronger for it. According to Kṛṣṇa’s soteriological variant, discarding proper self, wife, and kingdom in hope of avoiding further embodiment just leads to further, probably degraded, embodiment; but a dharmaic kṣatriya death leads to glorious heavens, and, for karma yogins, perhaps mokṣa too. And in Yudhishṭhīra’s case, though he leaves the kingdom, he keeps his self and wife,33 a preferable option should one’s career involve dharma, leading as it does to this subsequent restoration.

Whatever potlatch-esque or men’s-club scenarios may lie behind an inferred tradition of high-stakes gambling,34 the Mahābhārata dicing stories comment on the āśrama option in the context of kingship as well as exploring the marital responsibilities of both genders in terms of the twin ideologies of rākṣasa and patrīvarta. The interrelationship of these two is shown when a failure of the former is answered by a demonstration of the latter, and the former’s resumption. (Presumably a similar story can be told with the boot on the other foot – i.e. a negligent wife won back through her husband’s faith in his duty – but we do not see that here.) Whilst wife and kingdom fall out of the Buddha’s story before the main event occurs, the Mahābhārata, using the same pieces, focuses elsewhere.

Compare Rāma’s career. Like Yudhishṭhīra, he seems initially uninterested in kingship; he goes into exile with his wife and brother ostensibly in fidelity to his father’s word, but this may be a dharmaic mask, concealing dis-taste for the throne the squabbles for which have killed his father. Due to a political error of Rāma’s, Śītā is abducted; eventually he locates her and kills her captor Rāvana. At the reunion, Rāma takes a good look, and rejects Śītā.

Rāma suspected her of having been touched, and he said to Vaiśeṣī, ‘Go, Vaiśeṣī, you are free. I have done what I had to do. Once you found me as a husband, good woman, you were not to grow old in a Rākṣasa’s house – that is why I killed the night-stalker. For how would a man like me, who knows the decision of the dharma, maintain even for an instant a woman who had been in another man’s hands? Whether you are innocent or guilty, Maithilī, I can no more enjoy you, no more than an obligation that has been licked by a dog.’

(Mahābhārata 3.275.10–13, tr. van Buitenen)35

Here again is the dharmaic mask. Perhaps Rāma wants no longer to do what he had/has to do. After kingdom troubles, he left the kingdom; after wife troubles, he would leave the wife. Perhaps Lāyusmāna would have been next – but Śītā, like Draupadī, will not be abandoned: at her call, Wind, Fire et al. confirm her purity, and Rāma’s deceased father bids him take back the kingdom too. He cannot refuse.

If Rāma is to be seen in allegorical terms, like Yudhishṭhīra and Nālā, as a mokṣa seeker, a would-be renouncer, then Śītā and the kingdom are his prakṛti, his body – Śītā is replete with telluric symbolism. Like Yudhishṭhīra, Rāma shies away from the burden of kingship (of patrilineal householdership wīte large, and/or of embodiment wīte sideways – the burden of rākṣasa). Like Yudhishṭhīra and Nālā, after suffering he tries unsuccessfully to throw it all away. But while Rāma’s scene with Śītā ends his exile, and he takes up his kingdom forthwith, Yudhishṭhīra must wait, and fight.36

With regard to the stories of Yudhishṭhīra, Nālā, and Rāma, one might wonder whether the Mahābhārata sets up renunciation/exile/attempted wife-abandonment as a necessary and prescribed stage in the archetypal king’s career, in the manner of the āśrama system with its successive stages. On the whole I think not. Although at some level there is a symbolic need for the king to experience and subdue the wilderness (Falk 1973; Parkhill 1995), this can happen in a variety of ways. The drama of the wife-abandonment stories adds to their didactic effect, but surely they are told at least partly in hope that audience members and future kings may learn from these characters’ mistakes, and not repeat them. We see such a possibility when the Pāṇḍavas hear the story of how Sunda and Upasunda fought over a woman, and so take measures not to fight over Draupadī (1.200–4). On the other hand, the situation in which Yudhishṭhīra hears Nālā’s story and Rāma’s shows that these stories may also reassure kings who have made grave mistakes, demonstrating that it is not all over yet.
Draupadi's other indignities

While exiled Yudhishthira recovers composure and resolve for kingship, partly due to Draupadi’s promptings. But the locus of his shame drifts easily from Draupadi’s plight to his own self-image: when she faints at high altitude on their tīrtheyādṛi, he comforts himself with self-pity, and Dhaumya and other brahmins minister to him, Draupadi’s recovery being secondary (3.144). This example may show Yudhishthira’s love for Draupadi (Mary Brockington 2001: 257), but also reveals his self-absorption – rare now is the crisis in which he does not make himself the centre of attention. It seems that the authors are trying to keep Yudhishthira at the centre of audience attention, and to emphasize, in his case, the existential negotiations attendant upon being a dharmic actor.

Draupadi is abducted by Jayadratha (3.248–56),18 and molested at Virāṭa’s court (by the sūta Kīcaka and family, 4.13–23) as she was at the dicing (2.60–3). During Draupadi’s dice-match molestation Yudhishthira remained silent; Bhīma came to her defence, thirsting for vengeance; and Arjuna steered a middle course, sympathetic to Bhīma’s instincts but mindful of Yudhishthira’s authority. But when Jayadratha abducts Draupadi, Yudhishthira, sensing trouble, brings the Pāṇḍavas home from their hunting trip. He scolds the maid for reminding them to rescue her, and all the brothers fight against Jayadratha. Once Draupadi is safe, Yudhishthira makes Bhīma spare Jayadratha.19 So here Yudhishthira demonstrates rākṣasa towards Draupadi.

When Kīcaka molests Draupadi,20 their need to remain unrecognized during the last year of exile – Draupadi blames Yudhishthira21 – compromises the Pāṇḍavas’ ability to protect her. However, through virtue and piety Draupadi has obtained an invisible rākṣasa bodyguard from the sun,22 so her ‘husbands’ need not intervene: Yudhishthira restrains Bhīma, and Draupadi’s public outrage targets Virāṭa, the host. Yudhishthira’s frustration is clear, but when Bhīma privately kills Kīcaka, this is impolitic: Kīcaka’s kin now seek Draupadi’s death, so Bhīma kills them too, making Virāṭa wary of continuing to host Draupadi.

King Yudhishthira

After the exile, Yudhishthira’s old kṣatriya advisors and allies reappear. Unprompted, Yudhishthira asks Śālva, who will fight on Duryodhana’s side, to turn this to the Pāṇḍavas’ advantage by weakening Karna somehow (5.8). To Saṅjaya, the Hāśtinapura emissary, Yudhishthira proposes to regain his kingdom whatever it takes; but just as Saṅjaya is leaving, Yudhishthira offers to settle for five villages (5.31), and then he sends Kṛṣṇa on a similarly futile peace mission. These gestures suggest ambivalence towards needless slaughter rather than towards rākṣasa – and the strength of Duryodhana’s armies is well known. Overall, in Books 5–11, Yudhishthira follows Kṛṣṇa’s advice (Klaes 1975: 88–107).

Yudhishthira fights valiantly but loses relatives, allies, and his son Pratīvindhyā. Afterwards, discovering Karna to have been his elder brother, he is overcome by dukkha, curses all women (for Kunti’s secret), and wants to retire.23 His brothers reason with him. Draupadi takes it personally, calls him mad (i.e. not himself), and groups him with the nāstikas:

My mother-in-law, who knows all and sees all, lied to me. ‘Yudhishthira will bring you the highest happiness, O princess of Pāṇḍu, after he who is so quickly aggressive kills many thousands of kings.’ I see that that was wrong, because your mind is muddled, O lord of people. When the eldest in a group is insane, all the others follow after him; so all the Pāṇḍavas are insane, O Indra among kings, because you are insane. If they were not insane, O lord of people, your brothers would imprison you along with the unbelieving nāstikas, and govern the earth. (Mahābhārata 12.14.30–3, tr. Fitzgerald)24

She then recommends pharmaceutical treatment. Nāstikas recur in these rajadharmic arguments against Yudhishthira:25 this brahmanical objection to kṣatriya renunciation highlights the failure to protect and please females (kingdom and citizens being symbolically female).

Arjuna tells Yudhishthira about Janaka (12.18), who exchanged wife and kingdom for asceticism as Yudhishthira threatens to, but did so with clear soteriological intent – his story can help us understand Yudhishthira’s otherwise vague intentions.26 Janaka’s wife seeks out Janaka and scolds him for irresponsibility, using – as do the other Pāṇḍavas27 – karmayogic arguments already heard by Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā in a similar situation. Allegedly Janaka, presumably after his wife’s speech, became a karmayogin,28 although Arjuna does not say so here.

Earlier, Yudhishthira has heard hints of the karmayoga and mentioned it to Draupadi (3.20; 3.32.2–5, 24). Yudhishthira and Arjuna trust Kṛṣṇa; but do they become karmayogins? The text, describing deeds and words only, will not tell us, for karmayogins are externally unmarked. Kṛṣṇa says, ‘As the unknowing ones act, attached to action, Bhrāratā, just so should the knowing, non-attached one act, desiring to effect the holding-together of the world’s’ (Bhagavadgītā 3.25).29 Arjuna says (for Janaka’s wife), ‘Behaving as if attached, though non-attached, aloof, free of bonds, impartial towards enemy and friend: that one indeed is released, O lord of the earth’ (Mahābhārata 12.18.30).30

Yudhishthira is persuaded to rule the reunited kingdom from the Hāśtinapura throne.31 After his coronation he receives the local trade secrets from Bhīma at length. The noksadharma section of these teachings, despite
occasional karmayogic moments, has a nivṛtti tone contrasting with the rājadharmā, āpuddharmā and dānadharmā sections and the Bhagavadgītā. The two teaching sessions — Kṛṣṇa’s to Arjuna in the Bhagavadgītā, and Bhīṣma’s to Yuddhiṣṭhīra in the Sāmparvan and Aṃsāsānaparvan — fit their characters. Arjuna’s Bhagavadgītā paralysis and nivṛtti impulse are uncharacteristic of him (except when referring to Yuddhiṣṭhīra), and Kṛṣṇa is a pṛavrṛtti paradigm (Great Brahman’s impregnator, his incarnation corrects the local dharmic balance in protection of Earth). Bhīṣma, however, who rejected kingship and swore celibacy years earlier, is an imperfect sovereign representing a kṣatriya problem, so his mokṣadharmā is hardly surprising. That he also teaches the family rājadharmā he has personally refused matches his geriatric conversion to Kṛṣṇa-bhakti before Bhīṣma teaches, Kṛṣṇa puts his buddhi into him (12.54.27–30). Yuddhiṣṭhīra represents the same kṣatriya problem (von Simson 2000a: 311, 316), but is also on the turn, having rallied after his latest lapse. However, after Bhīṣma’s mokṣadharmā and death, Yuddhiṣṭhīra again wants to renounce (14.2.11–13). Kṛṣṇa repeats the gist of the Bhagavadgītā (minus the bhakti, which has served its purpose), recommending that Yuddhiṣṭhīra conquer his inner enemy (14.11–13); but although Yuddhiṣṭhīra performs the avesamudha rules, he is unhappy, burdened by his grisy past and denied his preferred tonic. Yuddhiṣṭhīra’s rule is something of a biographical gap. He did not like being king, but we hardly see him since; his reign’s salient feature is his distaste for it. Practically, he acquiesces, and his idealistic instincts have been inessential, except (there’s the rub) as a tale for others: he is paternalistically commanded from beyond the grave, pushed around by teachers, spooked by his indomitable devoted wife. His self-assertions are fancies — the identity he proposes is not his. He joins the ancient dharmic kings who were beloved of Śri, sponsored rituals, overcame difficulties, made donations, fought glorious battles, and went to heaven. But reading Yuddhiṣṭhīra’s story we suspect they might not have liked it; after the dicing, Yuddhiṣṭhīra never believes the hype. Those kings are in stories, we now suspect, to encourage others — otherwise (the story goes) the world degenerates, women are molested, and brahmīns go hungry. Perhaps this message is subversive. Yuddhiṣṭhīra, like the war-widows, is royally ruined; resistance is futile, but also right somehow — and so Yuddhiṣṭhīra can be a hero (Mary Brockington 2001: 256–7). His integrity as Dharma-rāja requires him to distrust his rājadharmā.

**Yuddhiṣṭhīra’s retirement and death**

When Dīrtarāṣṭra asks permission to retire, finally leaving him in sole charge (Dīrtarāṣṭra has been King Yuddhiṣṭhīra’s close consultant), Yuddhiṣṭhīra says the kingdom is a disease, and if Dīrtarāṣṭra is retiring, he will too — Yuyutsu, for example, should be king (15.6.5–8). Yuddhiṣṭhīra allows Dīrtarāṣṭra’s retirement because Vyās insists. Later, while visiting the elders in the forest, Yuddhiṣṭhīra is weirdly entered by Vidura, whose body is left lifeless. At the end of the visit Yuddhiṣṭhīra, loath to return to Hāśtinapura, tells Gāndhāra: ‘O queen, my heart [budhi] no longer turns as of old towards kingdom. My mind [manas] is wholly set upon penances now’ (15.44.30, tr. Ganguli 15.36, p. 57) — he must again be ordered to rule, this time by Kuṭṭī. But eventually he does retire, with his brothers, Draupadī, and a dog, to circumambulate the subcontinent (17.1).

Beyond the Hīṇavat, Yuddhiṣṭhīra’s human companions severely fall and die. Draupadī falls first, and Bhīma asks why; Yuddhiṣṭhīra identifies her partiality for Arjuna. Is he jealous? Does his ambivalence suggest he thinks Draupadī is ambivalent towards him? Do his explanations for his brothers’ deaths suggest jealousy of their qualities and skills? Yuddhiṣṭhīra continues without looking back, finally alone with the beasts; but while becoming alone he demonstrates desire and aversion.

After the latest lapse of dharma, will not let Indra take him to heaven without the dog (he must protect it — or he is clinging to life). He says he did not abandon his brothers and Draupadī while they were alive, which we suspect for a lie; but the dog reveals itself as Dharma, whose test he has just passed. He ascends to heaven in his own body, apparently a rare honour (but a prakṛti connection nonetheless), and he is immediately desperate to find Draupadī and his brothers. He wanted to do without them, but now cannot do without them; the renunciative impulse is presented as symptomatic of attachment. Indra and Nārada rib Yuddhiṣṭhīra for retaining human affections and enmities, but he is furious that Duryodhana et al. are in heaven, and when he finds Draupadī and his brothers in hell he resolves to stay with them, censuring Dharma and the gods (he cannot remain non-attached to the fruits of their deeds). This is a key double response; now hell becomes heaven, Indra says Yuddhiṣṭhīra may cease fretting. Dharma says he has passed another test by choosing hell for love, and Yuddhiṣṭhīra batheres in the celestial Ganga, obtains a celestial body, and sheds all grief and enmity.

Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the moment of death:

> The ancient governor-sage, more minute than the minute, dhūṣṭ of all, of unthinkable form, the colour of the sun beyond the darkness: the one who, at the time of death, thinks about this one with unwavering, devoted mind, yoked with the forces of yogo, delivering the entire breath between the eyebrows, attains to that divine highest puruṣa.

(Bhagavadgītā 8.9–10)

Yuddhiṣṭhīra may have died when he went to heaven after the dog test; but he still has his body. His death comes after he passes the next test by censoring Dharma and accepting dākṣhā. It is unclear whether we should view this as
the death of a human, or the end of a karmic life-chain; if the latter, then this implies a framing mokṣa validation, a definitive level outside what is said to be dharmic. But the end is as fluid and various as the beginning. Yudhiṣṭhira has passed Dharma’s third test; but having rebuked Dharma, what can this mean? Is Yudhiṣṭhira pleased to be para-dharmically dharmic? Is there any interval in which to react? No indication is given: he is told, and he bathes. Perhaps the key double response, and bathing in the celestial Ganges, are somehow the same, not successive events. And are the two prongs of the response successive? Does he accept hell before or after censoring Dharma, or neither?

After his celestial bath ‘Yudhiṣṭhira’ is shown his old earthly acquaintances in their celestial bodies, and is told who incarnated whom. He has a question for Draupadi, but, out of time, he dissolves into Dharma. This final episode, expanding out of logical nowhere, hardly provides Yudhiṣṭhira (it is no longer him) with closure over deta’s mysteries, and leaves the first two ‘levels of death’—respectively, a pravṛtti frame, and a nivṛtti frame with two prongs (traditional mokṣa soteriology and the karmayoga variant) —undercut and contextualized by an axiomatically unformulable question from the male to the female.

Listening to the wife

When a king is inclined to abandon his wife, Mahābhārata stories often trace his failure to do so (his success not to do so) to that wife.1 We see this with Pându, Yudhiṣṭhira, Rāma, Janaka, and also Duḥṣanta. Duḥṣanta promises the kingdom to the son of his brief liaison with Sakuntalā, but when mother and child come to court he refuses them both (1.62–9). His stated doubts resemble Rāma’s — tongues will wag if he accepts Bharata as his on her authority — but Sakuntalā unleashes a detailed pravṛtti defense invoking the need for sons, the benefits of conjugality, and the evils of deception, particularly self-deception. As with Draupadi and Sītā (who wastes few words of her own), her perspective is accredited through a hypernatural intervention. Sakuntalā is justified by a voice from the sky (the celestials speaking through a messenger, Vaśiṃpadāyana suggests); Draupadi is protected from Duḥśāsana by an unseen hand, and from Kīcaka by the sun’s raktarśa; Sītā calls upon the five elements.14

In other stories too a man’s failure of raksāna is remedied by instigation of the neglected female: Kaśyapa and Earth (12.49.56–79); Indra and Saṁ & Śāvarat and Śāvīrī (3.277–83).15 Rāma Jāmadagnya, who has massacred the ksatriyas, gives Earth to Kaśyapa, who banishes Jāmadagnya, gives Earth to ‘the brahmmins’, and retires. (Kaśyapa’s initial negligence is qualified — he is no ksatriya.) Suffering unprotected, Earth finds Kaśyapa and says: ‘Brahmin, there are some ksatriyas bulls who were born in the clan of the Haihayas whom I have

preserved in the midst of other men; let them guard me, sage’ (12.49.66, tr. Fitzgerald).16 Kaśyapa installs these and other survivors as kings.

Indra, mortified at having killed Viśvarāpa and Yṛtra, re-tries. ‘He lived hidden in the water, moving like a snake’ (5.10.43).17 We recall Yudhiṣṭhira and Nala’s ophidian encounters; living hidden in the water suggests the disguised state of the defected ksatriya, as well as the gestation of the true ksatriya-to-be. New king Nahaśa coverts Indra’s abandoned wife Śāvarī; after stalling him at Bhraspati’s suggestion, she invokes her wisely dharmicness and truthfulness, and with the aid of Night and Whisper (upāśruti) visits Indra beyond the Himavat. After giving him her news, Śāvarī agrees to facilitate Indra’s plan for overcoming Nahaśa; but on returning she also, through Bhraspati, sends Agni in the form of a woman17 to find Indra so that he might come and fight Nahaśa. By the time Indra is ready Nahaśa has already fallen thanks to Indra’s plan.18 These parallel plans for Nahaśa’s defeat have different gendered emphases, but each requires both genders; in any case, Śāvarī starts the ball rolling.

Sāvīrī marries Satyavatī, knowing that he has one year to live and that his blind father has lost his kingdom. She performs an ascetic vrata and insists on accompanying Satyavatī into the forest on what should be his last day alive; when Yama comes for Satyavatī, Sāvīrī’s pithy sway makes him grant her boons, eventually including the restoration of Satyavatī’s family’s kingdom and his life.19 Satyavatī’s loss of kingdom and impending loss of life and wife are involuntary — the renunciation is impersonal, not his — but Sāvīrī reverses them.

We return now to the analogy between a person’s origin (mother plus father) and composition (prakṛti plus puruṣa), and to the karmayoga soteriology. By viewing narrative through philosophy and philosophy through narrative, that is, by seeing how the Mahābhārata discursively superimposes (as just juxtaposes) these categories, we can move towards a description of the text’s gendered soteriology.

Kṛṣṇa locates the salvation process (leading to the isolation of ātman or puruṣa) within the person’s buddhi, that is, within the female, material pole.

Action is far less important than being yoked with buddhi. Seek refuge in buddhi! The miserable ones are those whose motive is the fruit. The one yoked with buddhi leaves both good and bad actions here. So be yoked for yopā. Yopā is skilfulness in actions. The wise, yoked with buddhi, having renounced the fruit of action, free from the bond of [re]birth, go to the undiseased station.

(Bhagavadgītā 2.49–51)20

This fits our stories. If the person is composed as a polarized couple, the husband cannot be saved except through his wife. If he attempts solitory salvation, abandoning her physically while still prey to kāma and krodha,
he will be joined to another body, another parcel of materiality, the wife. Similarly, suicide (body-abandonment) results in rebirth whenever kāma and krodha are operating (Sullivan 2006).

In fact ātman cannot act, nor try, however futilely, to save himself.122 So whence is the attempt at renunciation, the urge to separate from prakṛti? It comes from prakṛti, not ātman. As Kṛṣṇa points out (Bhagavadgītā 3.6), renouncers can be as self-centred as anyone. So counter-productive renunciation and salvific karmayoga may be correlated with, respectively, mental ascendencies of āhākāra and of buddhi.124 Within the person-couple, one of two competing females gets her way. Sulabhā, descendant of Pradhanā, appearing as a belle, says that, to be saved, Janaka must renounce (12.308); his wife says he must come home (12.18). These separate events are not explicitly linked – we cannot say which comes first123 – and this seems to emphasize (as Yudhishthira’s story does) the recurring nature of the internal battle.124

In the Mahābhārata’s principal statement of the karmayoga soteriology, Arjuna’s renunciatory impulse is refuted and varṇadharma enforced by Kṛṣṇa, a man.125 Kṛṣṇā Draupadi, Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, and Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa are united in name and, at least partly, in effect (Hiltebeitel 1976: 60–76; 1984; 1991b). Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva is Arjuna’s charioteer at Kurukṣetra; this role, following the chariot metaphor of Kaṭha Upaniṣad 3.3–9, would make him buddhi to Arjuna’s ātman.126 Kṛṣṇā, as mentioned earlier, spans both genders: ‘Kṛṣṇa’ plants the world-seed; ‘Kṛṣṇā’ is the womb; ‘Kṛṣṇa/Kāla sustains then devours the product.127 When he revives the stillborn Parikṣit, Yudhishthira’s non-biological heir (14.65–8), Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva appears to be the only man in the delivery room. Using a truth-act (a technique elsewhere in the text used largely by women), he invokes his own dharmic record to miraculous effect.

Collins writes that ‘enlightenment for a man connotes a sex-change’ (2000: 61): it is the realization that āhākāra, part of prakṛti, has been mistaken for buddhi’s. If this marked-male body-and-mind is to be the last in an ātman’s career, it must feature, in buddhi, correct discrimination between ātman and non-ātman, and the knowledge that ātman, the subject of potential mokṣa, is soteriologically helpless; thus it must feature coexistence with the consort, without contrary ideals. Perhaps ātman will become henceforth non-embodied, but making this happen is none of his business. We see that the karmayoga soteriology is a logical concomitant of ātman’s non-agency, and an analogical concomitant of the almost infinitely attenuated role of the father in reproduction. But it is no longer clear that a separative soteriological ideal can be sustained.

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Conclusion

In the Vedic and epic traditions traced here, cosmos and person have gendered parents. Cosmic pravṛtti implies cosmic-parental superimposition; cosmic nirvṛtti follows cosmos-parental disjunction (the ‘night of brotherhood’). People have personal parents (father and mother) and metaphysical ‘parents’ (ātmanpurāṇa, and prakritic karmic stains from before); together these compose a person as ātmanpurāṇa plus mind-and-body. Personal nirvṛtti is the physical death of a mind-and-body; the nirvṛtti of a karmic life-chain is the wiping-off of karmic stains and the removal of ātmanpurāṇa from prakṛti.

In disjunction, the perspective of either gender is unbalanced. But in Vedic and epic cosmogonies, the duality is usually not original: first there was an incipiently male tād ēkam. Or, what was ātman before it met (or made and mated with) the material principle, making a karmic life-chain (or cosmos)? If ātman can attain mokṣa, this must be a return, not just a departure. The initial solitary male features at the (pre-)cosmic level, but, because dvebhūta is existential, the final solitary male features on the (post-)personal level (the days and nights of brāhmaṇa continue indefinitely). In any case the subject is male, so, irrespective of the karmayoga variant, female mokṣa-seekers are symbolically anomalous,131 and we see longstanding debates elsewhere over whether or not a karmic life-chain can end in a female body. In the Mahābhārata’s royal patrilineal, too, the paradigmatic person – the protective kṣatriya king – is male, as are his origins and ends: he may have female relatives, but his cultural who’s who is largely male,132 and his main task is to obtain an heir.

What would it be to say that the text’s patrilineal, androcentric concerns are self-selected by its authorial culture? Ostensibly it would be to say nothing about my gender or culture! Elsewhere in Indian tradition there are gynocentric cosmologies and soteriologies (this is labelled, ‘śakti-ism’). Some might suggest that their stellar role in the procreative process makes the production of such discourses less pressing for women as a whole than for men. Though it has no special connection with female seekers, philosophical sāṅkhyā-yoga texts mention the salvation-state of prakṛtis (dissolution into prakriti, Jacobsen 1999: 273–320), attainable without knowledge of puruṣa; but this is trumped as merely penultimate.

We can imagine a tradition of seeking mokṣaṁvīrajana, and by analogy a tradition, which threatens the brahmanical economy/ideology, of (thinking of) abandoning wives, kingdoms, bodies, or other prakṛtis. The karmayoga response, stressing ātman’s non-agency, makes the female the leading partner in the male’s salvation, combines pravṛtti and nirvṛtti impulses in one lifestyle, and elevates the gendered ideologies of rakṣana and pattrītā to soteriological as well as practical importance. But there is now a means-end paradox dogging Yudhishthira and his alter egos, who doubt whether being dutiful is really worth it. And if the mutually supportive ideologies of rakṣana and
pativrata are especially orientable to noksya through karmayoga, might they not become external markers just like physical renunciation? Perhaps Yudhishthira and Draupadi, slightly ambivalent towards rakṣaṇa and pativrata,13 fear their becoming ideal pathologies.

Krṣṇa states that women also are soteriological subjects (Bhagavadgītā 9.32). This remains fully to be explored: might the hypothetical unitary gendered extremities (beginning and end) somehow lose rhetorical power, even while they are gendered bodies, extrapolating wildly from the fact of sexual reproduction in past, present, and future generations, prey to possibilities, anxieties, holy dharma, and its standard emblems? A Godhead or a soteriological subject, to have an existential analogical counterpart, cannot be non-unitary or neuter,14 since from birth we are unitary and non-neuter. In theory certain Buddhist philosophies tackle this problem most thoroughly (by dismantling the soteriological subject, dismissing cosmogony as speculatio, and setting up the bodhisattva paradigm of remaining in saṃsāra voluntarily even after enlightenment), but with mixed results.

In closing, we visit the scene where Arjuna and Śiṅkhaṅḍin fell Bhīṣma.135 Bhīṣma cannot consider union with a woman, and is non-committal with regard to pravṛtti, but Arjuna, Krṣṇa’s friend and disciple and Krṣṇa Draupadi’s favourite husband, represents—whether or not he actualizes it—the new karmayoga soteriology, a spiritualized pravṛtti outlook requiring union with the female. Having spent a year in female guise, he moves the Bhāratas beyond Bhīṣma (and dharmic neglect) by standing behind Draupadi’s brother-sister Śiṅkhaṅḍin, whom Bhīṣma regards as female and will not face. Bhīṣma is defeated through Arjuna’s partnership with the female Bhīṣma has rejected (Śiṅkhaṅḍin was previously Śiṅkhaṅḍinī, the reincarnation of Bhīṣma’s would-be wife Ambā), a partnership that involves each sharing the other’s gender. Arjuna receives Śiṅkhaṅḍin’s rakṣaṇa, and Ambā, having given up looking for a pari, finds one in Arjuna. But this is Ambā’s revenge against Bhīṣma, and if instead of pursuing it she had set itself for the forest, then Arjuna would not have had the power to fell Bhīṣma alone.

Notes

1 The chapter contains what to scholars will be some shocking generalizations; but it does so on the supposition that the Mahābhārata’s formative cultural context did so too. Some of these ideas have been aired in papers given at the 213th Annual Meeting of the American Oriental Society, Nashville, April 2003, and at the Annual Spalding Symposium on Indian Religions, Harris Manchester College, Oxford, April 2005. I am grateful to those who responded to those papers; and also to Stan Hawthorne, Adam Bowles, and Knut Jacobsen.


3 1 Corinthians (King James version) 13:12.
chronologically (‘The mystery of Agni’s birth is unquestionably the central motif of the Indo-Iranian mythology’, 1983: 29). Neither judgment is material to our purpose.

Swaroṣ: see Ṛgveda 10.90.6–10; Māṇava Dharmasūtra 1.3.1; John Brockington 1998: 13 (for Mahābhārata examples).

Amma yantrimahābhūtānā tāta lañātāhā dhāvyān āhām āmaṃ samabhavā dvāt mahāyuvā dvāt mahāyuvā samasvanā tānānaṃ māyāṃ ātmanāṃ tānaṃ mahāyuvā?

See also Bhagavadgītā 7.4; 9.8, 17. Sat and asat at Bhagavadgītā 11.37 (also Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 6.2; Ṛgveda 10.129) could denote male and female principles.

See also Bhagavadgītā 8.17–19 matches the death of one body and ātmā’s taking another. The ‘evolutionary’ cosmic model, whereby the material principle is gradually ‘unpacked’, fits the sexual model: the fertilized egg/notus develops and grows. The four sets of five in the sāṃkhya tattvakalas are like fingers and toes. For other embryological connections see Ṛgveda 10.162.3; Satapatha Brāhmaṇa 6.1.3; Mahābhārata 12.308.116–

20; Kuiper 1970, 1973: 134, 90, 135–6. Knowledge of the emanation-process ‘is a condition or a help for turning śravīṁ śrīdī for advising towards the goal of isolated worldliness, unworlly isolation’ (Schréiner 1994a: 775). Asceticism may burn off their limbs: see 3.135.28; 9.47.20–4.

Mahābhārata 12.293–12.19 presents prokṣita and pursa as female and male, and indicates which physical aspects of the person come from which human parent. The female constituent is often multifarious: consider the proliferation of the material principle into the various tattvas; see Kośalakāṇṭha Upaniṣad 4.3–18; Bṛhadāyukā Āranyakopaniṣad 2.1.1–3; Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣad 5.2.1–2. ‘Plurality is mentioned as one of the characteristics of the perishable, unity of the imperishable’ (Schréiner 1994a: 768). On ‘She-of-a-hundred-forms’, see Pritchman 1998: 272–4.


For example, consider Bhagavadgītā 8.23–6. Rebirth and mokṣa are correlated with time of death: death during the daytime, the waxing fortnight, or the year’s first half (after the winter solstice, before the summer) means no rebirth; death during the night, the waning fortnight, or the year’s second half means rebirth. Added up, the auspicious times comprise seven-eighths of the year, as do the inauspicious times; six-eighths are ambiguous. Yet each ending life must either have or not have a karmic sequel. This is the quandary. Similar interrelated analogical interference could indefinitely reproject the pre-cosmic male’s solitudo: to make Puruṣa he needs the waters, to make them he needs Vāc, to make Vāc... But although this colossal cosmogonic strings, the concept ‘beginning’ is nonetheless retained (Mahābhārata 12.175–55). Semantically parallel items appear in series; a poet describes a scene of simultaneous birds and bees by using words in sequence.


Agni ekānā bhūtakālaṃkārya bhūrya prājñā yasyānaṃ sarūpyaḥ/a jayo hy ekānā śamādibhāgāna jayo ‘nāthāa/Ajya also means ‘unborn’ (see above, p. 133); married goats/unborns are unknown.

For Yājñavalkya see Bṛhadāyukā Āranyakopaniṣad 2.4 and 4.5; for Mahāvīra
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56 Moreover, after Bhājana's abduction, Śāntanu died while his new heir Citrāṅgada and Viśvaviṣṇu were yet young (1.95.4). Pāṇḍu and Yudhiṣṭhira are both produced through nitya; there are specified biological fathers and adoptive fathers in both cases, but one aspect of the net result is the marking of a contrast with the (narratively) normative patrilocal situation in which the son is raised to adulthood by the biological father; in his patriline. I am grateful to Paul de Villiers for stimulating discussions of Pāṇḍu's story.

57 harénykara; see Olivelle 1997: 436-7.

58 svapunāpya tiśāna sa satāśṛṣṭān udbhāsakalāh | pratisāorrow sitrātāhān... | 11
dariyānāyaś tatāh putrān pāṇḍuḥ putrāḥ mahāvane | tān pāṇyaḥ paraute reme
svabhāsagāpān||

59 tud yāhī paryāyā stṝṣām sampāryākṣendya na bhāyaṇa kiṃ ca na veda naṁtara evāyaṃ paramaḥ śṛṣṭaṁ samprāyākṣendya na bhāyaṇa kiṃ ca na veda naṁtaraṃ; see also Bhāddarāyana Upaniṣad 2.1.19.

60 Though also a river (6.10.15; 13.26.9; 13.134.16; 13.151.14; Māṇava Dharmāṣṭra 3.9), 'Devī' has brahmin connections (2.47.5; 3.80.110-15; 3.122.20-4).

61 Yudhiṣṭhira is not mentioned again, although 'the Yuddheya's' attend Yudhiṣṭhira's rājaśīvay (2.48.13) and fight at Kurukṣetra (7.18.6; 7.132.25 — against Yudhiṣṭhira himself; 7.126.5; 8.4.46).

62 This triangle, see Hitheiteiti 2001a: 246ff. Later, during the thirteen-year exile, while the family visit tirtha, Arjuna visits Indra.

63 'If your heart knows, if you have confidence in me...! (yaddi te ekanaya te prityayo mayi 2.18,7; tr. van Buiten). Gōc Moacanin says 'Yudhiṣṭhira did nothing on his own. He acquired the title of suvarāj with the help of Kṛṣṇa who obviously had his own plan'; as she points out, these are implicit in Kṛṣṇa's speech at 2.30.23 (2005: 153).

64 For bibliographical references on the dicing episode, see Gōc Moacanin 2005: 149. On Yudhiṣṭhira in the dicing scene, see Mary Brockington 2001; 2003.

65 At 2.4.18 and 2.45.38 Sakuni says Yudhiṣṭhira loves gambling; at 2.60.43 Draupadi says he is inexperienced.

66 Commentators have pointed out that Sakuni does not seem to cheat (Gōc Moacanin 2005: 156), but nonetheless there is a common misconception that did.

67 See van Buiten. 1972. The main weakness of this position is that it is the Mahābhārata dicing is not part of the rajasūrya, and not a formality. Claiming dicing as a cultural norm in different regions is extravagant.

68 'If your heart knows, if you have confidence in me...! (yaddi te ekanaya te prityayo mayi 2.18,7; tr. van Buiten). Gōc Moacanin says 'Yudhiṣṭhira did nothing on his own. He acquired the title of suvarāj with the help of Kṛṣṇa who obviously had his own plan'; as she points out, these are implicit in Kṛṣṇa's speech at 2.30.23 (2005: 153).

69 Discrepancies between the two accounts of Yudhishtīri's motives may or may not indicate that different versions (or texts) of the dicing have been combined. Such is Meherdele's conclusion from these and other data, but he does not factor in Yudhishtīri's addresses.

70 This is to the gambler's role. However eroticism is the most conspicuous of victory, the universe could provide it; definitive agency falls beyond the gambler. Cf. Jarākara, n. 45 above.

71 While 187 dānāraṇāya parājīvaḥ/1 liṣṭe sati dhaṁ rājan pāpa dānapārājīyaḥ/1 follow van Buiten for the first half of the dōka.

72 Youthful renouncers leave parents bereft (e.g. Vyāsā: see Hitheiteiti 2001a: 278-322, esp. the final page). For proud kṣatriya parents, any son refusing familial expectations is effectively renouncing — (although) the Mahābhārata's main parental losses are military.

73 Draupadi calling on Kṛṣṇa for help (2.60.26; also 5.88.21; 5.80.26) compares with Earth calling on Brahmā when asava kings oppress her (1.58.25-51), and with
AMBAM calling on RAMA JAMADAGNA and SIVA after BHIMA rejects her (5.176, 188). The substitute PUTI's identity is often ambiguous or multiple. On DRAUPADHI in the dicing scene, see HITHEBEITEL 1980a: 103, 108 (contrasting and comparing Earth); 2000: 114-15; and Chapter 6. See ARTEREA BRADMUNA 7.16 for a similar scene.

75 On NALA (with further references), see HITHEBEITEL 2001a: 215-39 (also comparing Nala and YUDHIKSHA; von SIMSON 2005).

76 so paṚkuya tu kalīna moJhītā paṚkūrava naIhā suPaṁ haTuja tuṁ bhūrya tuVa rīppīkya kaMpaKtyam brahmatya hātu[r]ah.

77 We are reminded of BUDDHA's anuttam theory, and of the possibility of faulty discrimination of prakṛti and purusā, ahankāra and atman (see further below).

78 In exile YUDHIKSHA hears NALA's story of a lost kingdom regained through acquisition and use of the akṣobhya, the heart (or secret) of the dīrgha; YUDHIKSHA receives the akṣobhya, and uses it for his disguise in the Vitāraparvan. As ADAM Bowles says, 'akṣobhya may reflect the adage that "the king makes the age."' (personal communication, February 2006); see GONZÁLEZ-REINMANN 2002: 118-37.

79 Paul Bowly, following Heerstern, sees akṣobhya as the knowledge and ability to rule dharmically, passions conquered, and mediated by ritual with unseen powers to prosper the lokā (Bowly 1991). This looks like the rājārāṣṭra, but lacks the soteriological context. Bowly suggests that a king really needs various specific skills (the akṣobhya, knowledge of weapons, etc.) and the karmayoga (pp. 16-17). On akṣobhya as text-receptive competence, see Hegarty 2001: 19-20; Bowdbeck 2006: 16 n. 46.

80 'Dhārārastra' is also a snake: see 1.3.142; 1.3.13; 1.52.13; 2.9.9; 5.10.15; MINKOWSKI 1991: 388-9, 396.

81 And SAKUNI incarnerates Dvāparī: see 1.61.72, 80. On Kali and kings, see 12.12.27 (Nakula defines Kali as any non-protective king); GONZÁLEZ-REINMANN 2002: 53-62.

82 See 3.13.112; 10.16.28. Draupadī is labelled anāthavat (as though unprotected / husbandless) at 1.1.106; 2.60.24; 2.61.52; 4.17.29; 5.88.66.

83 3.31.1; see again Chapter 4.

84 sa mahātaratva iva dihyād vimāśītyāyaṁ / The interpretation of mahātarat is uncertain (it may mean just a moment, or a 48-minute measure); see also n. 86 below. Some manuscripts add a speech to self-just before this line.

85 In exile, YUDHIKSHA builds on self-knowledge. See 3.2.66.

86 For the potlatch theory, see MAUSS 1990; HELD 1935; TIEKEN 2004; GÖNCZ MAČÁKIN 2005.

87 anuca rāma vaiśehin pariśamātāvāsātkāla / guccah vaiśeha mtarmā tuva yat kuryan ta nayāt kṛtan ti māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo- viniyayam / parihasatastam naṁ nāṁ mahātarat agi dhāyati / asyāyam aśrayetaṁ iti nihaṁ tuva māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo-viniyayam / parihasatastam naṁ nāṁ mahātarat agi dhāyati / asyāyam aśrayetaṁ iti nihaṁ tuva māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo-viniyayam / parihasatastam naṁ nāṁ mahātarat agi dhāyati / asyāyam aśrayetaṁ iti nihaṁ tuva māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo-viniyayam / parihasatastam naṁ nāṁ mahātarat agi dhāyati / asyāyam aśrayetaṁ iti nihaṁ tuva māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo-viniyayam / parihasatastam naṁ nāṁ mahātarat agi dhāyati / asyāyam aśrayetaṁ iti nihaṁ tuva māyām āśādhi putū bhāde na tuva āśāvasāvalai i jāraṁ vrajēta iti ne nhitau 'sau mārcahon iti kañahu hy asmodhiho jīta jīnaṁ dharmo-

88 Compare SCHRÖTER 2003: 24-5: 'Rama represents pure consciousness (puruṣa) ... Sūta represents the individual body, senses, mind, and intellect which are the immanent evolutions of original nature (prakriti) ... In the stage of enlightenment known as cosmic consciousness (kaivalya), the self, identified with pure consciousness, recognizing its own purity, views the body and other evolutions of nature as belonging to the field of change from which it dissociates itself. However, in the ultimate stage of development of consciousness (brahma), the self recognizes the transcendent original pure state of nature in all the active states of nature and embraces all levels of nature as one with itself.'

89 This event provides the opportunity for the Rāma-Upākārya to be told.

90 Although Jayadrātha's grudge later contributes to Abhimanyu's death (3.256.24-9; 7.41-2), we must factor in Bhīma's humiliating him as well as Yudhiṣṭhira's leniency.
if on the other hand he goes there freed from passion, and hesitantly, wishing for the highest immutable, he enters exactly that: (atha tatra viśeṣa sa yacchati tv atha santāyam/ param avayayam itcinā taṃ evāvadante pānāḥ) // 12.192.121. But Yuddhiṣṭhira reacts to others' deserts, not his own. He reminds us of Bhagavad-gītā 18.66: ‘Abandon all dharmas and go to me [Krṣṇa], the only refuge. I will free you from all misfortunes: grieve not’ (svarudhrātmā pariṣodhāya mānuḥ iva svarā̄ṇam vṛjai luhams tv sarvaparekṣaya mokṣasā̄yanam tvā tatas. Bhārāṇa was cursed, for being unfair; to be born as Vidura (1.101), who is now Yuddhiṣṭhira — so perhaps Yuddhiṣṭhira's curse of Dharmas is pre-discharged.

111 He has been doing this all along, in his way, but for the odd lapse — and these become increasingly theatrical. For Yuddhiṣṭhira voicing renunciative intent, see Klaas 1975: 99, 109-13.

112 ka śīrśa pāramān unāśātārām anūṇiṣṭhānām annamarṣaḥ yāt sarvaśa dhītārām acaryāryāpi dīhatārām sanātām purāṇoḥ parīśwartiḥ // paryāptatāke māmadabhidhāna bhaktir yatva yogyadhena caiva 1 bhūtvar madhye purāṇam āveva sansuk sa tataḥ parama paurāṇo apahit dīvam // See also Bhagavad-gītā 2.72; 7.30; 8.5; Mahābhārata 5.44.16; 5.61.2; 12.207.25; 12.210.13; 20; 13.17.18; 14.46.54; Chānḍogya Upaniṣad 3.17.6; Edgerton 1926.


114 Damayanti's predator (see n. 92) dies 'like a tree burned by fire'; she later calls upon wind, sun, and moon that Nala may be assured of her purity. For discussion of the authoring effect of the 'outside intervention' in the stories of Draupadi, Sakuntālā, and Gārgi, see Black 2007: 154-5.

115 See also 12.215-21. Prabhālā says rādhāka, not Indra, has caused Indra's success (and also causes knowledge of ātman, 12.215.23); other defeated asuras identify the agent as Kāla or, usually, Sīrī.

116 sansy bhūmanasya yāpī ived kṛṣṇaya-palabhāv 1 hāvihābhāyān kule jātiṣa te sarvārakṣāna mūnī nāme //

117 'New' to the Pāṇḍava narrative's symbolic version of this ancient battle is the assistance given to Indra by Sīrī (i.e. in the Pāṇḍava narrative, the energizing of the Pāṇḍavas by Draupādī) (Fitzgerald 2004b: 62). On this story see also Hiltebeitel 1977; Thomas 2006b. Indra's withdrawal links with the Pāṇḍavas' exile and with Yuddhiṣṭhira's plans after the war.

118 pratīcchano vasya apsar āsya ca saṁbhava itakarṇ —//

119 bhūdāvām/ sthitvām abhāvām kyādā//

120 This corresponds to what Sālva, the story's narrator, is hoping may happen with Kṛṣṇa. Naḥaha, having angered the rṣis, goes down the snake: see 3.175-8.

121 On this story, see also Akhijākar 1991; Charpelle 2006: 107-9.

122 dhāraṇa by avaram karma bhuddhesvaya dhamājaya 1 buddhān sarvān antiviśeṣa kṛpaṇāḥ phaladhiṣṭāḥ 1 buddhāyuktā jahalāhārh udbhāsakāṇḍe kṣā­vārī yuddhaḥ yuddhā īlaśa karēyaḥ iva karmāṇa kāṅgāla kāṅgaḥ dhis phalam śrīyuktaḥ māyājaya śa jannābhuddhihārinām dvisyat paday guḍcchya avānāyam // See also 2.41-2, 52-3, 63-6.

123 See 12.337.16-27 (creator Brahmi is impotent until Nārāyaṇa sends Buddha); Bhagavad-gītā 3.27-8; 5.8-9; Collins 2000; Parrot 1998; Bartley 2007: 141-7.

124 For the tātrata in classical sāṁkhya, see Parrot 1986: 56-9. The non-renouncing Vedic hedenist of Bhagavad-gītā 2.42-4 is also ahaṁkāra-ascendant.

125 Janaka expounds the karmāyoga to Śukāḥ, but says he learned it from Prācātkaśaḥ.

126 Analogical re-application may introduce polarization within either or both poles (e.g. Bhagavad-gītā 7.4-5). Ātman being inactive, the choice between ahaṁkāra and buddhi may fall to a masculinized aspect of prakṛti. At Mahābhārata

14.20-50 manas is buddhi's husband, but kṣetrajita (i.e. ātman) is manas's teacher. Such finesse allows the male to retain a soteriological role.

127 Male friends (e.g. Yuddhiṣṭhira's brothers) also share this role elsewhere. At 1.57.1-31 Indra persuades Vāsū, who has renounced kingship, to take it up again. Indra's gender is not unambiguous in the Mahābhārata (see 12.329.14; 13.34.25-6; 13.41.21); at Kauśitkī Upaniṣad 3.1 he plays Krṣṇa's Bhagavad-gītā role as supreme object of knowledge and paradigmatic kārmāṇyojan.

128 Arjuna must seek refuge in buddhi (Bhagavad-gītā 2.49c) and in Krṣṇa (18.66). See Hiltebeitel 1984: 12-15; 2001a: 273 n. 90; Grassard 1999; Sutton 2000: 344-7; Dasti 2003. For buddhi as chariotee, see Mahābhārata 5.127.25-6. The chariotee is ātman at 14.50.1-6 (with buddhi as ātman); sattra at 11.7.13-15; phāna at 12.228.8-12; vīra at Plato's Phaedrus 247. Elsewhere ātman (variously construed) or kṣetrajita plays the charioteer (3.2.62; 3.202.1-35; 5.3.57-8; 12.238.2; 12.280.1; Goudriaan 1990). The discrepancy may track the difference between a charioteer of war or state (featuring a dedicated driver) and a single-occupant chariot (cart). Nala's charioteer is initially Vārgṣya; later, in hunchback form, Nala himself is the driver (3.57, 69). The charioteer analogy is applied also to the cosmos; see 8.24, where Siva and Brahmā are warrior and charioteer. Ānandagāna says his charioteer is Earth, his horses the Vedas, his charioteer the wind (ahāntavīva, from mīrī, mother), his armour the Vedas' mothers (5.180.3-4). At 5.183.15-27 Gāṅga drives Bhīma's chariot. At 12.246.9-15 the body is a city, with Buddha its queen (nāmaśreṇa).

See also 1.16.39-40 for Viṣṇu's female form. On Viṣṇu's three steps as covering one pole, the other, and the totality, see Kurper 1962; 1975: 20, 41-55.

130 At māksa the ātman joins its analogical counterpart, Krṣṇa-parvatottama, the pre-communicant Lord (Bhagavad-gītā 7.5; 8.20-2; 15.7).

131 According to an androcentric syllogism. Despite the textual support for this syllogism, there always were female renouncers: see e.g. Khandelwal 2004: 36-9 for Hinda Desai, Hornor 1999 for Buddhism; Dunias 1992: 48-52 for Jainism.

132 There are many important women in the generations the Mahābhārata spotlights, but in some ways we are led to suppose that this should be anomalous, a symptom of dharmic crisis. In the frame story of Earth's oppression (1.58-61), for example, Earth features as a character only because the kings are bad.

133 On the contrast between Draupādī and Śītā in terms of the pātīvat model, see Sutherland 1889.

134 ["Sūtra this formless Brahman is also understood to be the ultimate identity of an essentially male god . . . how androgynous can Brahman really be?" (Pintchman 1998: 275).

135 On the gendered dynamics here, see also Dennis Hudson 1996: 72-8.

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GLOSSARY

upajīti a type of Sanskrit metre
upākhyāna sub tale
uttarārāyaṇa the first half of the year
vāsya the third social class, comprising artisans and agriculturists
vāṇśa genealogy
varga any one of four social classes, namely brahmin, kṣatriya, vāśya, śūdra
vārṇadharmā specific duties in accord with social class
vārṇāśrama-dharmā specific duties in accord with social class and stage of life
vidūṣaka a stock character in classical Sanskrit drama; a comical, gluttonous, degraded brahmin, he is a good friend of the hero
vidyā knowledge; spell
vīrūpavatva ugliness
vīra a stock character in classical Sanskrit drama; a hero
vṛata vow; regimen
vṛātya itinerant and degraded persons known for adventuring together in quasi-military groups
vyāha any one of four stages in the cosmogony, and the particular deities (or names of deity) associated with them; battle-array
yājaka sacrificial priest
yajamāna 'sacrifice'; the sponsor of a Vedic sacrifice and the recipient of its benefits
yājana Vedic sacrifice
yakṣa a type of semi-divine chthonic being, often associated with a particular locality
yakṣī a female yakṣa
yati an ascetic who has renounced the world
yoga spiritual exercise; stratum; any disciplined personal effort ('yoking') directed towards a specific goal
yogin one who performs yoga
yoni womb; female organs; origin

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