

READING MASCULINITY IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*:

IDEALS, DILEMMAS AND MOTIFS

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Dedication

To
my parents

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List of Abbreviations

Mbh *Mahābhārata*

RV *Ṛg Veda*

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The entire responsibility for the mistakes in this work is mine and I am alone responsible for it.

Sudipta Mandal

Foreword

Where possible, the textual material used for the purposes of the following dissertation has been drawn from the *Mahābhārata* translated from Sanskrit by Kisari Mohan Ganguli first published from 1883 to 1896. The volumes were published in the name of the publisher Babu Pratapa Chandra Roy.¹ I have also looked into the English translation of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* by J.A.B. Van Buitenen published by the University of Chicago Press (1973-78).² The Book 11 and part of Book 12 were translated into English by Buitenen and Fitzgerald and published by University of Chicago Press in 2004. However, in my dissertation I have preferred the translation of Ganguli over that of Buitenen. Ganguli's translation is literal and more word by word.³ For me, with a rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit, Ganguli's translation helped me to match the English translation word by word with the Sanskrit edition. Buitenen's translation, I

¹ The use of two names sometimes confuses new researchers about the authorship. However, the name of the publisher was used only to avoid any confusion. Ganguli writes, "Before, however, the first fasciculus could be issued, the question as to whether the authorship of the translation should be publicly owned, arose. Babu Pratapa Chandra Roy was against anonymity. I was for it. The reasons I adduced were chiefly founded upon the impossibility of one person translating the whole of the gigantic work. Notwithstanding my resolve to discharge to the fullest extent the duty that I took up, I might not live to carry it out. It would take many years before the end could be reached. Other circumstances than death might arise in consequence of which my connection with the work might cease. It could not be desirable to issue successive fasciculus with the names of a succession of translators appearing on the title pages. These and other considerations convinced my friend that, after all, my view was correct. It was, accordingly, resolved to withhold the name of the translator. As a compromise, however, between the two views, it was resolved to issue the first fasciculus with two prefaces, one over the signature of the publisher and the other headed--'Translator's Preface.' This, it was supposed, would effectually guard against misconceptions of every kind. No careful reader would then confound the publisher with the author." (Ganguli, *Adi Parva*, p. xii)

² Unfortunately Buitenen could not complete his translation. The English translations from Book One to Book Five are available. Later Fitzgerald translated the Book Eleven and a part of Book Twelve into English.

³ "But the endeavour of the present translator has been to give in the following pages as literal a rendering as possible of the great work of Vyasa. To the purely English reader there is much in the following pages that will strike as ridiculous." (Ganguli, *Adi Parva*, p. xi)

felt, was more on the sense of the verses and did not correlate sequentially with each word of the Sanskrit edition. However, Buitenen's translation has the advantage of being the direct translation of Sukthankar's critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* and follows the numbering of the verses according to the Sanskrit edition. But Ganguli's translation is derived from the Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* by the commentator Nilakantha. Brodbeck and Black had provided a whole table of correlating the Sections of Ganguli's translation with the Chapters of Sukthankar's Critical Edition (Brodbeck and Black 2007: 279). Another inconvenience with Ganguli's translation is that the sections are arranged numerically without any description of its contents. For the list of the contents Duncan Watson's "A Chapter by Chapter Summary of the Great Indian Epic, as an Aid to Finding Passages within the Original 18 Volumes" is helpful (available online at www.mahabharata-resources.org). Ganguli's translation also have some more passages which are not included in the translation of Buitenen as he translated only the main passages of the Critical Edition. In conducting this study on masculinity in the *Mahābhārata* I have consistently adopted the position of those authorities who believe in the existence of an underlying unity of aim and plan in the epic as a whole.⁴ In my dissertation I have used some translations of Ganguli which are not available in the main text of Sukthankar, as I do not fully agree with the idea of an original *Mahābhārata* and non-original interpolations.

In addition to the English text I have also used the Sanskrit Critical Edition for the purposes of verification of terminology. I have also tried to keep to tradition by italicizing all Sanskrit terms, except the name of persons and those already in common English usage such as brahmin. In quoting from Roy, I have kept with the somewhat archaic method of transliteration of these terms, which ignores diacritical marks. The longer quotations from both primary and secondary sources are indented and interpolations into a quotation are placed between square brackets.

⁴ Hildebeitel argues that, "After over forty years of increasingly productive exploration of the symbolism of the *Mahābhārata*, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Great Epic possesses a remarkable coherence" (Hildebeitel 1980: 147)

Chapter one

Introduction

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man [...] In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both a positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity [...] He is the subject, he is the absolute – she is the other. (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949)

In the initial years of the feminist movement, Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* helped to delineate the structure of patriarchy. In the contemporary discourse of early twentieth century woman was not considered in equal footing with man. The man was the universal, woman the particular; man was the subject and woman the 'other'. Early feminists successfully highlighted the institution of patriarchy and its discrimination towards woman. However, in an effort to demarcate the other – patriarchy in the context of feminist movement, feminist scholarship often homogenized it. The diversity of patriarchy in time and space was overlooked. Further masculinity and patriarchy remained undistinguished. However from the eighties of the twentieth century serious scholarship on masculinity began to get published. Man no longer remained a universal unchanging category, but masculinity was found to be a cultural domain of action and expectation asserted through repetitive performance. Further there were several strands of masculinity in the same culture that were contesting each other. This shift in scholarly attention towards masculinity is described by Miller,

Men were once the implicit centre of most political discourse, social organisation and intellectual inquiry – universal subjects of truth whose achievements, failures,

milestones, foibles and bodies were historical and biological markers of human endeavour and nature. Now they are subject to specific attention and problematization by researchers, governments, and corporations. Feminist political, personal and scholarly work, in particular, has been crucial in both asserting the centrality of women to social, scientific, and intellectual life, and calling on men to become objects of study as gendered subjects rather than universal models. (Miller 2009: 114)

Following the examples in Anglo-Saxon world, works on masculinity also followed in South Asia. However, the quantum of such works is not much and primarily concentrated on modern and contemporary South Asia. Masculinity is not a direct concern in any works on ancient Indian history. There has been occasional reference to masculinity in several works but the ideologies and contestation within masculinity was not critically looked upon. In this dissertation I have focused upon the ideologies of masculinity, the diversity and contestation within them. The last two chapters deal with the male conception about the female. On one hand ideals of virility and emasculation are related to the prevalent model of masculine code of conduct and on the other hand it is also linked with how the male mind perceives his relation with the female. Thus, I have interpreted the prevalent ideologies in the *Mahābhārata* and also used Jungian psychoanalysis to understand the construction of masculinity.

1.1 Literature Review of Studies in Masculinity

Borrowing heavily from feminist scholarship, studies in masculinity began in the late eighties of the last century. Prior to that, works on masculinity were either regressive, exhorting the old biological model, or an oblique concern for psychoanalysts. For an early beginning of masculinity studies, the works of Connell become important. His thesis on 'hegemonic masculinity' summarised the interaction of the ideals of masculinity with social realities like capitalism, imperialism and subordination (Connell 1987). 'Hegemonic masculinity' was further

theorised in the works of Mosse (Mosse 1996) where he charts the evolution of European masculinity from late medieval to post colonial modernity. The ideologies of renaissance, capitalism, socialism, fascism and post-coloniality were all shown to create different brands of masculinity. Apart from the linear history of masculinity, the nineties saw a spurt of writing about men in multiple themes like education, sports, war, and family along with a spread of masculinity studies in Europe, Latin America, Australia and the Arab world.

In South Asia sociological, anthropological and historical works focussed on masculinity and its relation with modernity, colonialism and post-coloniality. Mrinalini Sinha (Sinha 1995) identified the complex relationship between the ideals of masculinity and colonial subordination which she elaborates through the controversies like the Ilbert Bill (1883-84) and Age of Consent Bill (1892) when both the colonial and colonised masculinity were at loggerheads. Writings on post-colonial masculinity deny any uniformity of South Asian men but show their contingencies to different levels of economic affluence and a varied reception of modernity. Srivastava (Srivastava 2006) has shown the different constructs of masculinity throughout the urban landscape varying from the footpath to the middle classes. The compiled work of Chopra and Osella (Chopra, Osella, Osella ed. 2004) had identified the workings of masculinity in social life and its performance in films over different regions of South Asia. A significant aspect of all these studies is their location within the discourse of modernity and post- coloniality. This had facilitated the recourse to a wide array of meta-narratives, be it imperialism, capitalism, nationalism or post-colonial. These provide a colossal repertoire of discourses which could be conveniently brought in to understand the complexities of masculinity. However, in this dissertation I am more interested in discerning the ideas of masculinity in the ancient Indian context with a primary focus on the *Mahābhārata*. Here we are far removed from the contemporary world of capitalism and nationalism, and face an acute absence of meta-narratives on which we can peg our theories of gender. However it will be an exaggeration to say acute absence, since every age has some kind of ideologies which are glorified and hallowed and believed to be central to its constitution. The difficulty arises in discerning what that ideology was and how far was it acculturated? An additional dilemma in understanding masculinity through texts like the *Mahābhārata* is the uncertainty about both time and space. The Sanskrit

Mahābhārata, which is my prime focus, is a literature produced throughout a millennium in different regions spreading all over South Asia. The precise time and location of the epic is almost impossible to define. This places us in the difficulty of recognising the dominant ideology underneath the narrative which might not be the same for such a long period and broad geography. At best there could be overlap of multiple ideologies with elements of continuity. Unlike the contemporary period one cannot say with a high degree of conviction, about the dominant, hegemonic ideologies of the ancient period, but efforts were made to grasp such a structure though they were often tainted with ‘Orientalism’.

1.2 The Search for Meta-narratives

The implicit meta-narrative of ancient India has attracted the attention of modern Indologists of all hues, but stood as a complex web ever elusive to cognisance. It has engendered virulent criticism from the nineteenth century Utilitarians – the analogy of the jungle with all its mystery, danger and wonder became the dominant cliché for the Indian mind. The German Indologists though highly sympathetic towards the Indian civilization, were not far from the Utilitarians in their a priori conviction of an ontologically separate entity called the ‘Orient’.

The publication of Said’s *Orientalism* and the dissemination of Foucauldian discourses exposed the nexus between knowledge and power and the positivist fiasco of capturing reality. The edifice of ‘Orientalism’ so painstakingly constructed by the Utilitarians and Romantists came under challenge. A lot has been written by now on the imperialist construction of the ‘Orient’. My dissertation, being specifically concerned with masculinity will not venture further into the intricacies of such constructions. But it is imperative to note that the search for an Indian essence still continues unabated. Even recent writings have shown a preoccupation with capturing an essence that is fundamentally ‘Indian’. Ramanujan in his famous essay ‘Is There an Indian Way of Thinking’ succinctly summed up the meaning of ‘Indianness’ (Ramanujan 1989¹). Though initially he plays with the title of his essay, highlighting the different hues of the question, and

¹ Ramanujan presented the Draft of ‘Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?’ as a paper for a ‘Workshop on the Hindu Person’ at University of Chicago in 1980 (Ramanujan 1999: 310). This paper was later published in Contributions to Indian Sociology in January 1989; vol. 23, 1: pp. 41-58.

even alluding to the possible heterogeneity of ‘Indianness’, he finally catapults in discovering the Indian essence. This essence is the Indian fancy for context sensitivity that rarely moves towards universalism. Thus ‘Indianness’, as Ramanujan exhorts, is a unique pattern of thinking that plunges into tedious details and make provisions for innumerable contexts. Somehow Ramanujan succeeds in delineating an essence which is markedly different from the western mind and all the contrary evidences to context-sensitivity are relegated to the class of counter-movements² placed safely away from the mainstream.

As if the cascading condemnation of the Utilitarians or the sympathy of the romanticists were not enough, the ‘irrational’ Indian mind needed a diagnosis. So it came under the perceptive lenses of the psychoanalysts. They claimed to demystify the Indian mind by plunging into the inner depths of the ‘Indian’ unconscious. The unconscious, as the psychoanalysts argue, often overwhelms the conscious mind and surfaces in myths and rituals. The ‘Indian’ unconscious can also be traced for the aggravation of gender and caste discrimination, communal tension or corruption that is currently raging in the nation state (Kakar 2007).³ Though a significant effort in understanding the unconscious, psychoanalytic studies take for granted a definitive mysticism or irrationality of the Indian mind that is in need for explication.

Other efforts of grasping ancient Indian society followed the structural model of creating a discrete structure and deriving meanings that are integral to it. This was a welcome departure from the evolutionary theories, which sought to explain all contradictions by the cognate models

² Ramanujan argues, “All societies have context-sensitive behaviour and rules – but the dominant ideal may not be the ‘context-sensitive’ but ‘context-free’... Yet societies have underbellies. In a predominantly ‘context –free’ societies, the counter-movements tend to be towards the ‘context-sensitive: situational ethics ... in ‘traditional’ cultures like India where the dream is to be context-free. So *rasa* in aesthetics, *mokṣa* in ‘aims of life’, *sannyāsa* in the life-stages, *sphoṭa* in semantics, and *bhakti* in religion define themselves against a background of inexorable contextuality (Ramanujan 1989: 54).” However the basis of judging which trend is dominant and which are subordinate counter movements is indeed subjective.

³ Kakar discusses a range of issues involving sexuality, gender discrimination, familyism, corruption and communal violence, from a psychoanalytic perspective. Indian reverence for hierarchy, attachment to family and childhood memories is thought to be responsible for the uniqueness of Indian behaviour.

of Aryan/non-Aryan, rational/irrational or Vedic/non-Vedic. Doniger explained the Indianness as a capability to gracefully swim through contradictions. An illustration is Śiva the ‘Hindu’ God who is both a celibate ascetic and an erotic lover (Doniger 1973). Such contradictions are not explained away by Doniger merely as the rumblings of the imaginative Indian mind; she sought to create a coherent structure where each of the seeming contradictions have its own meaning. Emphasis was put on myths and symbols which were meaningful in their own milieu.

Though vehemently against succumbing to any particular methodology (Doniger 1980: 3-4), Doniger herself implicitly believes in the existence of a structure of Indian myths and the possibility of capturing that structure. Her work traverses a vast chronological frame – from the *R̥g Veda* to the Purāṇas, and borrows symbols and meanings from a wide variety of sources. Though illuminating the pattern of Indian myths, her work is conspicuous by the absence of history (or time); that is it remains unclear whether the structure of Indian myths changed with time or it remained changeless⁴.

However, to analyse masculinity it becomes imperative to place it in a relevant context. Here the context is the Brahmanical world view which is not a singular, but multiple and fluid structure. So masculinity, hegemonic or subordinate, placed in such a context will have multiple resonances, that may often seem contradictory and ambivalent.

⁴Inden critiques Biardeau’s work for the lack of history and transforming Hinduism into a unified atom. He also mentions Doniger in passing (Inden 1990: 226).

1.3 Man and Masculinity in the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata* - with its colossal volume, multiple versions, myriad diversities and blatant contradictions – has been a precipitating ground for diverse hermeneutical tools, employing various perspectives. In pre-modern times, it engaged the minds of theologians to justify the apparently obvious violations of *dharma*, carried on so frequently by the prime heroes. The modern era ushered the new venture to know India (‘other’ of the west) and the *Mahābhārata* became the suitable analogy for the mystery of Indian nature.⁵ It commanded the awe of the Orientalist scholars, aptly brought out in the following words

Like an Indian jungle it [*Mahābhārata*] spreads out before us in an endless wilderness of trees entwined and tangled with rank creepers.... and home of every kind of living creature. Bewitching bird-song, the terrifying cries of wild beasts fall on our ears [...] the robbers dwells therein, free, indeed, from the law, but often the slave of superstitions beyond belief. (Meyer 1930: 1).

Through the exotic meandering into the Indian Jungle, Meyer discovers the essence of the *Mahābhārata* and everything that can be termed ‘Indian’. Transition from analysis of a text to the interpretation of the unique Indian consciousness and the delight of unravelling that mysterious thing called ‘Indianness’, was an ubiquitous feature of Orientalist scholarship.

Under this scheme of scholarship, gender and masculinity were only oblique concerns. The prime focus was to know and capture ‘India’ which had consistently confused the western mind. Works on masculinity were rare and remarks on gender were only incidental. Nevertheless, texts like *Sexual Life in Ancient India* authored by Meyer, did focus on concepts of masculinity and femininity and their interrelationship in ancient India. His work catalogues the different roles of male and females and carries an encyclopaedic account of their roles as enunciated in ancient

⁵ Nature is used here in the sense of a comprehensive whole, which includes both the physiography comprising of the landscape, climate etc, and the psychological nature of the Indians. In fact, these two natures were supposed to impact, determine and reinforce each other.

Indian texts. References to masculinity and manliness are quite vague and simplistic. The entire epic of the *Mahābhārata* was considered to be masculine, for its excess of violence, brute force and passion, in contrast to the Quietist view of the *Rāmāyana*. “The poetry of the Mahābhārata”, Meyer remarked “is often quickened in its older parts by a mighty flame of fire, a *manly* (emphasis added), undaunted, passionate soul: it was a warrior that sung this heroic song” (ibid: 2). The consideration of the *Mahābhārata* as manly, was taken for granted and no further theoretical convolutions were thought to be necessary. It fitted into the contemporary androcentric understanding of gender divisions which divided the world around an unquestioned gender axis.

Occasionally, Meyer glances into the construction of the feminine and makes insightful references to the worldview of ancient Indian men. “In the soul of the Indian there dwells that twin pair, burning sensuality and stark renunciation of the world and the flesh. What a delight and torment then must woman be to him!” (ibid: 4). But the focus of his study mostly dissipated into demarcating a space for Indian sexual life unique from the west.

Another way of deriving meaning from the epics was running parallel to Meyer’s views. It was the nationalist discourse that found the ancient texts as auspicious sites for challenging the colonialist tirade against ‘Indian civilization’. “Degenerate and barbaric” practices against women, the colonialist argued, was the most ominous feature of the Indian tradition. An early nineteenth century British traveler chastises the Indian tradition and sympathizes with Indian women thus:

At no period of life, in no condition of society, should a woman do anything at her mere pleasure. Their fathers, their husbands, their sons, are verily called her protectors; but it is such protection! Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence [...] it is ruled that a female has no business with the texts of the Veda – that having no knowledge of expiatory texts, and no evidence of law, sinful women must be foul as falsehood itself, and incompetent to bear witness [...] and left as she is, will it be a matter of wonder that, in the moment of despair, she will embrace the burning pile and its scorching flames,

instead of lengthening solitude and degradation, of dark and humiliating suffering and sorrow? (Chatterjee 1999: 153-54)

The most brutal and hideous act was the immolation of the sati mandated by the Śāstras. While the subordination and misery of women was evident, it served as a tool for legitimising colonial rule and their apparent mission to ‘civilize’ the natives.

The reaction from the western educated Indian middle class was expected to discover counter evidence of women freedom from the same ancient texts. While the contemporary conditions of women was invariably agreed to be deplorable, it was argued that only from the late ancient period did women’s status deteriorate (Altekar 1938). The nationalist discourse created its own ideal women of the past by focusing on independent figures like Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata*. Plenty of literature flourished extolling the independence and excellence of such women figures like Gārgī, Maitreyī, Sītā, Draupadī, Ambā, Sāvitrī, Kuntī, Anasūyā and others. They stood out as icons of women’s independence in the face of the colonialist tirade against Indian tradition.

Unlike the works on women, studies on masculinity are far less directly evident. The critique of Indian tradition accompanied the critique of Indian masculinity too. The Britons constructed the Bengalis as effeminate and therefore destined to be ruled. Mrinalini Sinha brings out the familiar stereotyping contrast between the Britons and Bengalis in the following words

In that period the British and Bengali were delineated by sharp stereotypical distinctions – on the one hand a supposed masculine ideal identified by love of sports, particularly hunting, a disdain for the ‘bookworm’, a celebration of general competence... a vigorous pursuit of play and ‘japes’ as well as work at proper place, a chivalric (and therefore distancing) approach towards women all contributing to the ‘manly character’ which was seen as a well nigh unique mark of the Briton. The Bengali *babu* was viewed as a complete foil to this: effeminate, bookish, over-serious, languorous, lustful and lacking in self discipline. (Sinha 1995: vii).

While the stereotype was contested on several occasions during the course of the national movement, it required some ideological base to re-invigorate the fallen masculinity. The virile spirit of the *Mahābhārata* and the clarion call of Kṛṣṇa to fight against the enemies, inspired to rejuvenate native masculinity. The Gītā was retold and reinterpreted several times – by Aurobindo Ghosh, Tilak, and Gandhi – with a call to Indians and Indian masculinity to rise against colonial exploitation. However, Gandhi’s call was for a non-violent soul force.

The *Mahābhārata* resonated in the nationalist imagination as a symbol of virile masculinity. However, this character of the entire epic as masculine was ascribed on the basis of prevalent ideas about masculinity. Deeper investigation into the constructions, contradictions and diversity of the *Mahābhārata* masculinity were not undertaken. It was with psychoanalysis that new endeavours were made to understand the male psyche in the epic. Myths were taken to be pre-modern instruments for expressing the hidden anxieties and fantasies of the authors (mostly men) and their wide distribution among the community testified the communal nature of those anxieties. Psycho-analytic theories derived from assumption and case studies, found a suitable field of experimentation in the analysis of myths. It charted out several phases of evolution of the human psyche, and found their appropriate manifestation in the mysterious yet popular stories of the myths. An attempt was made in the late seventies of the twentieth century to trace out reminiscences of one such evolutionary stage in the stories of the *Mahābhārata*. In an epic overflowing with patricidal and fratricidal wars it is difficult not to be stricken by the oedipal⁶ angle to such conflicts. But it was only with Goldman’s article titled “Fathers, Sons and Gurus; Oedipal Conflict in Sanskrit Epics” (Goldman 1978) that the oedipal drama in the *Mahābhārata* was elaborated. The conflict between Arjuna and Bhīṣma in the battle field of Kurukṣetra, where Arjuna eventually overcame his grandfather with the help of Śikhaṇḍin(ī)/Ambā, or the battle between Arjuna and Babhruvāhana incited by his mother Ulupī were instances of an oedipal conflict – a struggle between the father and son for the possession of the mother. Although not

⁶ The Oedipal complex in psychoanalytic theory is the unconscious desire to possess the parent of the opposite sex and eliminate the parent of the same sex. This theory was elaborated by Freud and subsequently used in the analysis of different cultural phenomenon including myths. Etymologically the term oedipal derives from the Greek mythical character Oedipus who unknowingly kills his father Laius and marries his mother Jocasta.

categorically brought out, these stories had a modest resemblance with the classic oedipal conflict. It served to break the myth that the Indian oedipal was always negative that is resulted in the defeat of the son. In the accounts of the fight between Bhīṣma and Rāma Jāmadagnī, Arjuna and Bhīṣma, Babhruvāhana and Arjuna were always positive – the son is victorious. Nevertheless, the occasion of the defeat of the son invariably led to symbolic castration. The instances given by Goldman were the lifelong vow of Bhīṣma, and the curse upon Arjuna to live as a eunuch for a year. For Goldman the negative resolution of the oedipal conflict was the core of interpreting transsexualism in India. This typical reversal of masculinity which has been ‘central to the theological, ascetic and social ideologies’ of South Asia was further elaborated in an anthology of religious cults and figures titled “Transsexualism, Gender and Anxiety in Traditional India” (Goldman 1993). With the growth of queer studies, evidence of transsexuality and same-sex love began to gain attention. Vanita and Kidwai edited *Same Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (Vanita and Kidwai 2001) was an effort to bring forth evidence of transsexualism and same-sex relationships from the entire gamut of ancient and medieval and modern texts. However, it was primarily directed to challenge the contention that same sex relations were alien to Indian culture, rather than analyzing the evidence.

Whereas Goldman discovered oedipal conflict in the epics, the other evolutionary stages of the Indian psyche was looked upon by Kakar (Kakar 1978). In the fascinatingly composed book *The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Kakar focussed on the childhood psychology of the Indian, mostly male, and how the unconscious acts in the narration of popular myths. In the story of the child Kṛṣṇa and Putanā or the cursing of Arjuna by Urvaśī, Kakar absorbingly captures the anxiety of the child with his mother’s love. The mother’s love for the child is both essential for his upbringing and again a surplus of it can be a hindrance for his independence. The complex mental dilemma generated in the anxiety of not fulfilling the mother’s demand or the wish to punish the ‘bad mother’ is reflected in the above accounts. For instance in the encounter between Arjuna and Urvaśī, when the former could not fulfill his mother’s sexual demands, the plot was resolved by the castration of the son. Thus castration was the resolution of the son’s inability to fulfill his mother’s demands. In psycho-analytical studies,

the individual or communal unconscious was the primary focus. Myths were used to analyse the hidden unconscious.

1.4 Chapters

The first chapter of the dissertation focuses on the ideals of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. The ideal of a heroic, powerful and virile man is very evident in the *Mahābhārata*. However, in closer scrutiny this ideal gets complicated and elusive. The epic presents various hegemonic figures, all proclaiming different ideals of masculinity. Throughout the epic there is a contestation among different ideals and the result is insoluble dilemmas. The contestation of ideals has been explained in different ways – as the difference between a core *Mahābhārata* in contrast to later interpolations, or as the contestation between Kṣatriya and Śramaṇic ideals. Here, I have used the concept of *Puruṣārtha* to understand the ideals of masculinity in *Mahābhārata*. The *Puruṣārtha* (goals of man) consists of four aims *dharma* (virtue), *artha* (profit), *kāma* (desire) and *mokṣa* (emancipation), out of which the first three form the *trivarga* and some claim that the fourth aim *mokṣa* is a later addition. The *Mahābhārata* deals broadly on the first three ideals and *mokṣa* is discussed extensively in the Śānti Parva. But *mokṣa* is only an incidental concern for the central characters of the *Mahābhārata*. The masculine ideals of the first three Pāṇḍavas are discussed in this chapter through the goals of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* only. The *Mahābhārata* describes Yudhiṣṭhira as the son of Dharma, he emphasizes the ideal of *dharma* and he has to face several *dharmaic* quagmires too. In fact his ideals are rather tilted too much towards *dharma* at the cost of the other two *Puruṣārthas* viz. profit and desire. Yudhiṣṭhira criticizes the Kṣatriya ideals and talks of renunciation. In contrast to him Arjuna represents the ideal of *artha* and Bhīma that of *kāma*. Both Arjuna and Bhīma judge Yudhiṣṭhira’s masculinity through their own ideals and consider him unmanly. This chapter shows how masculinity is contested through the ideals of *Puruṣārtha*. Overemphasis on one goal at the cost of the others is also assumed to be unmanly.

The second chapter discusses the masculine body. It had been emphasized by generations of Indologists that unlike the Cartesian ideal of body the 'Hindu' body assumes continuity between consciousness, mind and body. The body is not different from the mind but a grosser manifestation of the consciousness. However, the body in Brahmanical thoughts has many variations and one aspect that separates it from the modern western notion of body is the belief in its fluidity. The body was considered to be both male and female at the same time. The bones, sinews and marrow were considered to be derived from the male whereas the skin flesh and blood were thought to be derived from the female. In the Yogic conception of the body, it was so fluid that one could interchange it and enter into another's body. The views on the body are contradictory - it is on the one hand considered as a significant indicator of virility and on the other hand it is seen as so insignificant as to be changed like clothes. Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavat Gītā proclaimed to Arjuna, "As a man, casting off robes that are worn out, putteth on others that are new, so the embodied (soul), casting off bodies that are worn out, entereth other bodies that are new." (Ganguli, Bhisma Parva, Sec. XXVI). In this chapter I discuss two instances of the body of the virile man. The first section deals with the body of Arjuna, where the body is the signifier of both his heroic and divine nature. His great marksmanship, his successes in the battles and also finally his failures in the Aswamedha Parva all bear a connection with his body. The next section deals with the universal form of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is considered to be the best of the male beings (*puruṣottama*), and his body is equated with the universe. Here, we find all the dichotomies collapse in a description *mokṣa* where one goes beyond the sets of opposite. The universal form (*Viśvarūpa*) is an endeavour to depict the formless and here the depiction of Kṛṣṇa is somewhat similar to the unmanifest form (*arūpa*) of Śiva. The body is the repository of masculine attributes as in the instance of Arjuna and in the *Viśvarūpadarśana* it represents the transcendence of all qualities.

The third chapter deals with sexual motifs and the construction of masculinity. Masculinity is integrally related to the feminine or feminine principles. The female in the Brahmanical world view is split into the fertile and the erotic. When man comes in contact with fertile women he

attains virility and immortality. But when he comes under the influence of erotic women he is either emasculated or meets with death. The split between the fertile and erotic women is also transposed to fluids that are taken to be feminine. Thus the *amṛta* and the poison represent respectively the character of the fertile and erotic female. Here I have discussed three accounts that illustrate the link between masculine and feminine principle. The story of *samudramanthana* shows this linkage in a rudimentary way. The *samudra* is conceptualized as a female womb that produces both the elixir (*amṛta*) and poison. The gods after consuming the elixir become immortal and invincible, while the poison is drunk by Śiva to save the creation. In Bhīma's story the same motif is elaborated, where Bhīma gets unconscious after consuming the terrible poison *Kālakūṣa* and Duryodhana drowns him in the Ganga. Bhīma is saved by the snakes who live under the water, and comes up even more reinvigorated after consuming the *rasakuṇḍa* that gives him the strength of a thousand elephants.

The fourth chapter deals with androgyny and the loss of masculinity. Androgyny is a recurring figure in Vedic, epic and Purāṇic literature. There is always an ambiguity over the status of the androgyne – it is either condemned as lacking masculinity or revered as having attained the equilibrium of male and female principles. In the Purāṇic mythologies the androgyne has much theological import (as the *Ardhanārīśvara* or the primavel *Puruṣa*). However, in the *Mahābhārata* though the androgyne is many and varied, it does not have much theological ramification. In most cases the androgyne was initially male and became an androgyne under the influence of the female or feminine principle. The androgyne in this chapter is basically divided into two categories – the fertile and the erotic/fatal. The fertile androgyne moves towards immortality and the fatal androgyne moves towards emasculation or death. Immortality is represented in several ways; it can be either the gaining of *Saṅjīvanī* – the formulae to revive the dead (in the Kaca story) or the attainment of the knowledge of emancipation (in the Janaka Sulabhā story). Similarly the fatal nature of the androgyne is represented in numerous ways, the emasculation of Arjuna in case of Bṛhannalā, the death of Bhīṣma in the case of Śikhaṇḍinī, and the death of Kīcaka where Bhīma dresses up as a transvestite.

Chapter Two

Masculinity and *Puruṣārtha*

Initial works on masculinity were primarily concerned with the hegemonic or the dominant notion of man. Works by Connell and Brittan focused on the cherished ideals of masculinity and their relationship with power (Connell 1995, Brittan 1989). The social milieu defined the constructions of ‘hegemonic masculinity’¹, however the hegemony did not remain unchallenged and got modified with new power relations. The notion of the ‘hegemonic male’ is also culture specific. This chapter focuses on the construction of masculine ideals in the *Mahābhārata* and specifically the hegemonic one. But the ideals of hegemony are not uniform and are continuously contested throughout the epic. Masculinity was not a simple biological derivative, but had to be performed and repeatedly asserted. Duryodhana’s final taunt to Yudhiṣṭhira just before the Great War is illustrative of the performativity of masculinity. Duryodhana mocked at Yudhiṣṭhira and provoked him to be a man and remember the defeat in the dice, the molestation of Draupadī and their banishment into the forest:

¹ “The concept of ‘hegemony’, deriving from Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of class relations, refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” (Connell 1995: 77). Connell further argues that the ‘hegemonic masculinity’ does not remain uncontested. “I stress that hegemonic masculinity embodies a ‘currently accepted’ strategy. When conditions for the defense of patriarchy change, the bases for the dominance of a particular masculinity are eroded. New groups may challenge old solutions and construct new hegemony.” (ibid. 77)

O Yudhishtira! Thou wert defeated at dice, and Krishna (Draupadī) was brought into the assembly! At this, a person who regardeth himself a man would be justified in giving way to wrath! For twelve years wert thou banished from home into the woods! For one whole year didst thou live in Virata's service. Remembering the reason there is for wrath, thy exile, and the persecution of Krishna, *be a man* (emphasis added), O son of Pandu! (Ganguli, Sec. CLXII, p. 313)

This was an incitement for Yudhiṣṭhira to live up to the expectations of masculinity that Duryodhana believed in. However, the *Mahābhārata* does not present only one kind of 'hegemonic man'. There is a constant dialogue between different characters on what is ideal manliness. These ideals had been seen earlier, through a dichotomy – the dichotomy between Kṣatriya ideals and Śramaṇic influences (Brodbeck and Black 2007: 151), or the contradiction between a heroic core and later interpolations (Meyer 1930: 2). In those analyses the Kṣatriya ideals are taken to be the core of *Mahābhārata* masculinity, that is occasionally interrupted by the musings of Yudhiṣṭhira.² However in this chapter I have discussed the ideals of masculinity not simply from this simplistic dichotomy, but through the ideals of *Puruṣārtha*. The *Mahābhārata* is a carefully structured literary piece, though subjected to successive phases of interpolations. The above statement may seem contradictory, but stating only one part will be saying half the truth. The different characters, Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Bhīma follow the structure of *Puruṣārtha*, each emphasizing one ideal of the *Puruṣārtha*. The characters of Duryodhana and Karṇa are the alter egos of Bhīma and Arjuna and we can understand them similarly through the ideals of *Puruṣārtha*.

² In this connection van Buitenen's remark is illustrative. In the introduction to his translation of the fifth book of the *Mahābhārata*, van Buitenen writes: "Epic myth [as opposed to Puranic myth] has a different character: it is frankly more manly . . . Duryodhana's final taunt to Yudhiṣṭhira, "Show you are a man!" is the essence of the *Mahābhārata* as epic" (Buitenen 1978: 168 cited in Brodbeck and Black 2007: 208).

2.1. *Puruṣārtha*: The Goals of Men.

Puruṣārtha when literally translated means the aims or the goals of man. The *Puruṣārtha* includes four goals viz. *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. Among these four the first three are grouped together, whereas *mokṣa* emerges as a separate goal. “There are some controversy whether there were originally three (*trivarga*) or four (*caturvarga*) *Puruṣārthas*, the *trivarga* consisting of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, the fourth *mokṣa* being a latter addition.” (Krishnan in Matilal ed. 1989: 53). The first three *Puruṣārthas* had been a source of continuous deliberation among the first three Pāṇḍavas, Yudhiṣṭhira argues in favor of *dharma*, Arjuna for *artha* and Bhīma for *kāma*. The debates are repeated a number of times in the *Mahābhārata* and seemed almost insoluble.³ In fact, this has been a persistent dilemma in the Brahmanical thought, and considerable effort was made to resolve it. The *Manusmṛti* also endeavors to resolve this dilemma.

Some say *dharma* and *artha* are the best, others *kāma* and *artha* and others *dharma* only; yet others *artha* only. But the real truth is that *sreya*, i.e. prosperity or welfare consists in and is achievable by all three together.⁴ (2.224 cited in *ibid.* 53).

One solution to the dilemma of *Puruṣārtha* is by balancing all three of them, the other way is to make the three subservient to *mokṣa*. The *Mahābhārata* gives both these resolutions.

³ In this context *Mahābhārata*'s own proclamation about the *Puruṣārtha* is interesting. Rukmani states that, “The *Mahābhārata* describes itself as a *dharmasāstra*, an *arthasāstra*, a *kāmasāstra* and a *mokṣasāstra* and then goes on to proclaim that whatever is here in this book may be found elsewhere, but what is not found here cannot be found anywhere else” (Rukmani in Matilal ed. 1989: 20).

⁴ Quoting the *Manusmṛti* is a colonial legacy, the search for a legal document to understand ancient Indian society. However, we can find significant linkages and overlaps between several Brahmanical texts spreading over a diverse time period.

2.2. Pāṇḍu's Desire for Three Sons

When Gāndhārī's conception was full one year old, Pāṇḍu desired to have sons. Kuntī summoned the eternal god of justice (Dharma) to obtain a offspring for him. Kuntī was united with the god of justice in his spiritual form and obtained from him a son who was devoted to the good of all creatures. As soon as the child was born an incorporeal voice thundered from the skies:

This child shall be the best of men, the foremost of those that are virtuous. Endued with great prowess and truthful in speech, he shall certainly be the ruler of the earth. And this first child of Pandu shall be known by the name of Yudhishtira. Possessed of prowess and honesty of disposition, he shall be a famous king, known throughout the three worlds. (Adi Parva, Sec. CXXIII, p. 256).

But Pāṇḍu pondered again, only having a virtuous son was not enough to rule the kingdom. One requires a son full of vigour, who could uphold the Kṣatriya values. He thought that a Kṣatriya must be endued with physical strength otherwise he is no Kṣatriya. So, Kuntī prayed to Vāyu, "Give me, O best of celestials, a child endued with great strength and largeness of limbs and capable of humbling the pride of everybody." (ibid. p. 256). The Mahābhārata demonstrates the strength of Bhīma just after he was born. Kuntī was frightened by the roar of a tiger, and Bhīma fell from her lap onto a mountain. As a consequence of this fall the mountain broke into a thousand pieces.

Pāṇḍu thought again and desired for a son who would be a great conquer, and would achieve worldwide fame. To accomplish this, the simple physical power of Bhīma was not enough, it needed someone who would unite destiny with exertion. Pāṇḍu argued to himself, "Everything in the world dependeth on destiny and exertion. But destiny can never be successful except by timely exertion" (ibid. p. 257). So he undertook severe ascetic penance, and gratified Indra. Finally Indra gave him a son, who Indra himself described thus:

I shall give thee, O king, a son who will be celebrated all over the three worlds and who will promote the welfare of Brahmanas, kine and all honest men. The son I shall give thee will be the smiter of the wicked and the delight of friends and relatives. Foremost of all men, he will be an irresistible slayer of all foes (ibid. 257).

Pāṇḍu desired for three kinds of sons, who represented three different aspects of the masculine ideal. Yudhiṣṭhira was himself the son of Dharma, and throughout the epic he argued in favor of *dharma*. Bhīma represented crude masculine power; his impulsive nature reflects the aspect of ‘desire’ or *kāma*. Arjuna on the other hand is the world conqueror, deft in the science of archery, who plays a central role in vanquishing the Kauravas. Arjuna represents the aspect of *artha*. Thus the three Pāṇḍavas – Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna represent respectively the three Puruṣārthas *dharma*, *kāma* and *artha*. The relation between Yudhiṣṭhira and *dharma* is clear from his birth story above, but the relation between Bhīma and *kāma* or Arjuna and *artha* is not so apparent from the birth story itself. It will require further elaboration that will be discussed below.

2.3. Yudhiṣṭhira and *Dharma*

After the battle of Kurukṣetra, Yudhiṣṭhira was aggrieved. The slaughter of the kinsmen, and specially his elder brother Karṇa seemed utterly meaningless to him. Conquering the lost kingdom and rectifying the injustice done to them was the sole goal that sustained the Pāṇḍavas through the arduous exile of thirteen years. But as soon as the goal was achieved Yudhiṣṭhira felt disillusioned. His mind no longer urged for the luxuries of the kingdom but flirted away to a forested utopia. He hankered for going into the wilderness, listen to the melodies of birds and enjoy the fragrance of flowers. There his relation with his body would dwindle, he would make himself thin by reduced diet, and matted hair would crown his head. He would move from door to door asking for food, and would satisfy himself by whatever little is given. Thus emaciating

his body he would calmly wait for the dissolution of his body. With this view in mind, Yudhiṣṭhira condemned Kṣatriya ideals of virility and said:

Fie on the usages of Kshatriyas, fie on might and valour, and fie on wrath, since through these such a calamity hath overtaken us. Blessed are forgiveness, and self-restraint, and purity, with renunciation and humility, and abstention from injury, and truthfulness of speech on all occasions, which are all practised by forest-recluses. Full of pride and arrogance, ourselves, however, through covetousness and folly and from desire of enjoying the sweets of sovereignty, have fallen into this plight (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. VII, p. 7).

The dilemma described here has often been described through the contrast between Kṣatriya and Śramaṇic ideals.⁵ Although Śramaṇic influences are quite visible throughout the Mahābhārata, Yudhiṣṭhira's dilemma can be explained through the ambiguity in the concept of *dharma* itself. *Dharma* in Brahmanical literature has myriad definitions. "Manu explains *dharma* as fivefold: *varṇa-dharma*, caste duties; *āśramadharmā*, duties of persons in the different stages of social life; *varṇāśramadharmā*, *naimittaka dharma*, occasional or periodical rites and ceremonies including *prāyaścitta*; expiatory rites and *guṇa dharma*, specific duties (of an institution or authority such as the duties of a king also called *rājadharmā*). Examples of other *dharmas* are: *kuladharmā*, duties of a family; *strīdharmā*, the duties of woman; *jātidharmā*, caste duties; *śreṇīdharmā*, duties of corporations, etc. the meaning of the word *dharma* depends upon the context in which it is used, that is, the meaning is contextual or situational." (Krishnan in Matilal ed. 1989: 54). The *Mahābhārata* provides a well known but more general and subjective definition of *dharma*. When Yudhiṣṭhira asked Bhīṣma about *dharma*, Bhīṣma finally concluded by saying that the practice of *dharma* is "Whatever wishes one entertains with respect to one's ownself, one should certainly cherish with respect to another" (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CCLIX, p. 227).

⁵ For a broader analysis of this dilemma see Matilal, B. K. ed. (1989), *Moral dilemmas in the Mahābhārata*, Matilala Banarsidass, Delhi.

The notion of *dharma* although varied, two parallel trends are clearly visible in it. One is the contextual definition of *dharma* which takes into account various duties like *Kṣatriya dharma*, performance of sacrifices and obligation towards the *pitṛs* and so on, and the other is the more universal *dharma*, that is not so much concerned about balancing the three *Puruṣārthas* and talks of transcending all binaries – an idea of *dharma* that tends to merge with *mokṣa* (emancipation). Yudhiṣṭhira in fact explains these two types of *dharmas*,

There are two well-known paths (for us), viz., the path of the *Pitris* and the path of the gods. They that perform sacrifices go by the *Pitri*-path, while they that are for salvation, go by the god-path. By penances, by *Brahmacharya*, by study (of the *Vedas*), the great *Rishis*, casting off their bodies, proceeded to regions that are above the power of Death (ibid. Sec. XVII, p. 30).

Yudhiṣṭhira's desire was to choose the second kind of *dharma* that led to emancipation. To support his view Yudhiṣṭhira condemned all the *Kṣatriya* ideals, all the ideals of masculine vigour and manly goals (*Puruṣārtha*). But his ideals of *dharma* was severely criticized by both Arjuna and Bhīma; the dominant rhetoric was that Yudhiṣṭhira's behavior was like a eunuch (*klība*).

2.4. Arjuna and Artha

Yudhiṣṭhira's ideal of renouncing the world and retreating to the forest was not acceptable to Arjuna. He condemned Yudhiṣṭhira's ideals to be unmanly, suited for a person of fickle heart.

Having slain thy foes, and having acquired the sovereignty of the earth which has been won through observance of the duties of thy own order, why shouldst thou abandon everything through fickleness of heart? Where on earth hath a eunuch or a person of procrastination ever acquired sovereignty? Why then didst thou, insensate with rage, slay all the kings of the earth? He that would live by mendicancy, cannot, by any act of his, enjoy the good things of the earth (ibid. Sec. VIII, p. 11).

Arjuna argued that wealth and religion are integrally connected. He claims that all kinds of meritorious acts flows from the possession of great wealth. From wealth springs all religious acts, all pleasures and heaven itself. And on the other hand poverty is sinful. He sees no difference between a fallen man and a poor man. He who has wealth has friends and kinsmen. And he who has wealth is regarded as a true man in the world. Arjuna further clarifies that:

From wealth, one's religious merit increases. He that is without wealth hath neither this world, nor the next, O best of men! The man that hath no wealth succeeds not in performing religious acts, for these latter spring from wealth, like rivers from a mountain (ibid. Sec. VIII, p. 12).

Nakula and Sahadeva, though not so central to the *Mahābhārata*, as the other three Pāṇḍavas , also agreed with the view of Arjuna on the importance of *artha*.⁶ Arjuna emphasizes the *dharma* of the first kind (referred above) which was concerned with the scriptures, appeasing the Brahmanas, carrying on sacrifices and upholding Kṣatriya values. For those purposes the possession of wealth was necessary. So, he considered wealth to be central for the sustaining *dharma* and fulfilling one's desire.

But Yudhiṣṭhira was critical towards Arjuna's views. Yudhiṣṭhira quoted the Vedas and said "in the Vedas there are precepts of both kinds, viz., those that inculcate action and those inculcate renouncement of action" (ibid. Sec. XIX, p. 35). But he at the same time condemned Arjuna's ideas about dharma, "thou are conversant only with the weapons and observant of the practices of the heros. Thou art unable to understand truly the sense of the scriptures. If thou wert really acquainted with duty, then thou couldst have understood that these words such as these ought not to have been addressed to me by even one possessed of clearest insight into the meaning of the scriptures and acquainted with the truths of religion" (ibid. Sec. XIX, p. 35). So, Yudhiṣṭhira

⁶ Nakula and Sahadeva elaborated the importance of *Artha* in the scheme of *Puruṣārtha*. They said, "That Wealth which is connected with Virtue, as also that Virtue which is connected with Wealth, is certainly like nectar. For this reason, our opinions are as follows. A person without wealth cannot gratify any desire; similarly, there can be no Wealth in one that is destitute of Virtue" (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CLXVII, p. 367).

argued that though Arjuna was expert in the science of warfare, he did not have good understanding of *dharma*.

2.5. Bhīma and *Kāma*

Like Arjuna, Bhīma too questioned Yudhiṣṭhira's masculinity. He compares Yudhiṣṭhira's craving for *dharma* as a sign of loss of masculinity. He said:

Afflicted with the vows, thy cry is *Religion! Religion!* Hast thou from despair been deprived of thy manliness? Cowards alone, unable to win back their prosperity, cherish despair, which is fruitless and destructive of one's purposes. Thou hast ability and eyes. Thou seest that manliness dwelleth in us. It is because thou hast adopted a life of peace that thou feelest not this distress" (ibid. Vana Parva, Sec. XXXIII, p. 71).

Bhīma argued that virtue is sometimes also the weakness of men. If such a man is engaged in the practice of virtue, then both profit and virtue leave him, as pleasure and pain leave the person who is dead. Pleasure has virtue as its root and virtue also is united with pleasure. Finally Bhīma suggested a balance between all the three *Puruṣārthas* as a solution to Yudhiṣṭhira's dilemma. Bhīma also defines pleasure or *Kāma* in the following way,

The joy that one feeleth in consequence of contact with objects of touch or of possession of wealth, is what is called pleasure. It existeth in the mind, having no corporeal existence that one can see (ibid. Vana Parva, Sec. XXXIII, p. 72).

It means "*Kāma* is that pleasure which in our mind derives from contact of the senses and the object presented. The mental state is experiential. It has no embodied existence. *Kāma* is that pleasure which is experienced by our mind and our heart when our sense organs are in contact with their respective objects." (Matilal 2002: 146). Bhīma further says that everything is pervaded by desire and in fact desire is the essence of virtue and profit. Bhīma says:

As butter represents the essence of curds, even so is Desire the essence of Profit and Virtue. Oil is better than oil-seeds. *Ghee* is better than sour milk. Flowers and

fruits are better than wood. Similarly, Desire is better than Virtue and Profit. As honeyed juice is extracted from flowers, so is Desire said to be extracted from these two. Desire is the parent of Virtue and Profit. Desire is the soul of these two (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CLXVII, p. 367).

Here, we find that Bhīma is clearly arguing in favor of desire of *kāma*. His idea of *kāma* is often linked with food and sex. Food plays a significant role in the character of Bhīma. In the Mahaprasthanika Parva Bhīma saw all the Pāṇḍava brothers (except Yudhiṣṭhira) and Draupadī fall down and Bhīma was the last to fall. Out of great astonishment and pain Bhīma cried “O King, behold, I who am thy darling have fallen down. For what reason have I dropped down? Tell me if thou knowest” (ibid. Mahaprasthanika Parva, Sec. II, p. 4). Yudhiṣṭhira answered, “Thou wert a greater eater, and thou didst use to boast of thy strength. Thou never didst attend, O Bhīma, to the wants of others while eating. It is for that, O Bhīma, that thou hast fallen” (ibid. p. 4). Being a glutton was not just a humorous and innocuous aspect of Bhīma’s character. It had greater significance throughout the text. When Bhīma talks of desire, he compares the whole world as his food. While advising Yudhiṣṭhira not to renounce his kingdom Bhīma said:

The learned have said this all that we see is food for the strong. Indeed, this mobile and immobile world is our object of enjoyment for the person that is strong. Wise men acquainted with Kshatriya duties have declared that they who stand in the way of the person taking the sovereignty of the earth, should be slain (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. X, p. 16).

And Yudhiṣṭhira sharply condemns Bhīma’s ideals about food and desire. He said unto Bhīma, “Fire, when fed with fuel, blazeth forth; when not so fed, it is extinguished. Do thou, therefore, extinguish with little food the fire in thy stomach when it appears. He that is bereft of wisdom seeks much food for his stomach. Conquer thy stomach first. (thou shalt then be able to conquer the earth).” (ibid. Sec. XVII, p. 30). Yudhiṣṭhira’s ideals about food were opposite to Bhīma’s views about food. Yudhiṣṭhira linked the control over food habits as a way for emancipation. He argued that “they who subsist on leaves of trees, or use two stones only or their teeth alone for

husking their grain, or live upon water only or air alone, succeed in conquering hell.” (ibid. Sec. XVII, p. 31). In Brahmanical texts food has a relation with sex and *kāma*. “The Sanskrit root *bhuj* means both ‘to eat’ and ‘to enjoy sex’.” (Ramanujan 1999: 89).⁷ In the case of Bhīma there is a regular connection between food and sex. In the Adi Parva, while the five Pāṇḍavas and Kuntī were resting in a forest the ferocious Rakṣasha Hiḍimba sent his sister Hiḍimbā to bring the humans to him for consumption. Hiḍimbā went to kill the Pāṇḍavas but was attracted towards Bhīma. Seeing him, Hiḍimbā said to herself “If I slay him, my brother’s gratification as well as mine will only be momentary. But if I slay him not, I can enjoy with him for ever and ever” (Ganguli, Adi Parva, Sec. CLIV, p. 318). Thus Bhīma who was initially food for Hiḍimbā, became her sexual partner. Bhīma while discoursing on *kāma* brought forth analogies which were related to food and sex. He describes the world as ‘food for the strong’ (discussed above) and criticizes Yudhiṣṭhira’s state of mind through sexual metaphors:

This our act (in refusing the kingdom) is like a person afflicted with hunger, who having obtained food, refuses to take it, or of a person under the influence of desire, who having obtained a woman reciprocating to his passion, refuses to meet her (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. X, p. 16).

Thus Bhīma clearly argued for the *kāma Puruṣārtha*. He considered *kāma* as fundamental among the three *Puruṣārthas*, and elaborated it with metaphors of kingdom, food and sex. Throughout the discussion between Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Bhīma the three ideals of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* jostled with each other. Each of them represented three different strands of masculinity and considered the other as unmanly or eunuch. However, the *Mahābhārata* made considerable effort to reach a consensus and to resolve this dilemma.

2.6. The Dilemma and Its Resolution

⁷ For more elaboration on the relation between food and sex see Ramanujan, “Food for Thought: Towards an Anthology of Hindu Food-images” in Dharwadker, V. (ed.), (1999), *Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, New Delhi, Oxford university Press.

For the resolution of this dilemma an understanding of the two meanings of *dharma* is important. All the Pāṇḍavas were debating on the true meaning of the *dharma* – Yudhiṣṭhira acknowledged that there are two types of *dharma* or two kinds of injunctions in the Vedas (discussed above), whereas Arjuna and Bhīma stuck to the scriptural understanding of *dharma*. Bhīma claimed that Yudhiṣṭhira had not understood the essence of Vedas. Bhīma alleged that Yudhiṣṭhira “has become blind to the truth, like that of a foolish and unintelligent reciter of Veda in consequence of his repeated recitation of those scriptures” (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. X, 16). Similarly Yudhiṣṭhira argued that Arjuna and Bhīma are not knowledgeable in matters of *dharma*. The resolution to this dilemma is also twofold; one solves it through a reassertion of the scriptural *dharmaic* practices. This solution is mostly given by someone other than the Pāṇḍavas. In the Vana Parva the debate on the *Puruṣārtha* is interrupted by the appearance of Vyāsa who assured that the Pāṇḍavas will be eventually victorious (ibid. Vana Parva, Sec. XXXVI, p. 80). In the Shanti Parva, Devasthāna appeared and suggested sacrifice as a means of solving this dilemma (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. XX, p. 38).

However, towards the end of the Shanti Parva, another solution to this dilemma is provided by Yudhiṣṭhira himself. Yudhiṣṭhira proclaims that:

He who is not employed in merit or in sin, he who does not attend to profit, or virtue, or desire, who is above all faults, who regards gold and a brick-bat with equal eyes, becomes liberated from pleasure and pain and the necessity of accomplishing his purposes. All creatures are subject to birth and death. All are liable to waste and change. Awakened repeatedly by the diverse benefits and evils of life all of them applaud emancipation (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. CLXVII, p. 368).

Here Yudhiṣṭhira traverses the triad of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* and talks of *mokṣa*. All the Pāṇḍava brothers finally accept Yudhiṣṭhira’s conclusion. *Mokṣa* or emancipation is taken to be the final goal and in comparison to it the other three *Puruṣārthas* are hardly of any significance. The *Mahābhārata* has lengthy discussions about *mokṣa* throughout the Mokṣadharmā Parva. But in the discussion on *mokṣa* the central characters of the epic had only

an incidental presence. Broadly *mokṣa* has been described as the end of all dichotomies, liberation from notion of pain and pleasure. It has been also argued to be the essence of the Vedas, in contrast to them who simple recitation of the Vedas.⁸

The Brahmanical ideals of *Puruṣārtha* provide a tool for analyzing the male heroes of the *Mahābhārata*. The three Pāṇḍava brothers represent each aspect of the *Puruṣārtha*. Draupadī is also involved in this debate on *Puruṣārtha* and she talks of forgiveness and the duties of the king. The same ideals of *Puruṣārtha* can be seen to reflect other characters in the epic also. For instance Duryodhana can be seen as representing the opposite of Bhīma. They are often compared together. Both of them were born on the same day (ibid. Adi Parva, Sec. CXXIII, p. 257). Both of them were club fighters and arch rivals right from the childhood. Whereas Bhīma represents the ideal of *kāma* but also talks of balancing it with virtue and profit, Duryodhana can be seen as a distorted representation of the same ideal of *kāma* or desire. On the other hand Karṇa is the arch rival of Arjuna. Both of them were proficient in the science of warfare and had been contesting each other from their childhood. Yudhiṣṭhira represents the ideal of *dharma* and there is no counterpart to him among Duryodhana's brothers. The *Puruṣārtha* of *mokṣa* can be said to be best represented by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is a complex character and is full of contradictions. He represents transcendence beyond all the dichotomies. One aspect of such transcendence is his eternal form (discussed in Chapter 2). The four *Puruṣārthas* form a hegemonic ideal in the Brahmanical conception of masculinity. The contestations of this hegemony are represented by the relative importance of the four *Puruṣārthas*.

⁸ The concept of *mokṣa* is scattered in many parts of the *Mahābhārata*. Some of the important discussions on this subject are in the Vyāsa-Śuka dialogue (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CCXXXIX), Tulādhara tale (ibid. CCLXII), and Janaka-Sulabhā tale (ibid. CCCXXI).

Chapter Three

The Body and Masculinity

The body is a site where gendered ideals are inscribed. So for an understanding of masculinity an analysis of the body is necessary. However, the body in the Brahmanical world view is a complex notion. Works on the 'Hindu' body have often pointed out its difference from the western concept of the body. Van der Veer argued that "the Hindu conception of the self does not posit a quasi Cartesian division of the body and the soul, as is found in contemporary western thought" (Van der Veer 1989: 458). Alter similarly stated, "in Hindu philosophy the mind and the body are intrinsically linked to one another . . . there is no sense of simple duality" (Alter 1992: 55). In contrast to the 'Hindu' view, the Cartesian dualism believes in a split between the soul and the body. By this division Descartes was able to preserve the soul as a domain of theology, and legitimated the body as a domain for science. In the contemporary west, it is believed that, the Cartesian split between mind and body still reigns supreme: science is not much interested in the mental or psychological dimension of human beings, and the secular culture prioritizes materiality over the spirit. Conversely, in the east, many theorists write, that the doctors, psychics, performers and religious practitioners regularly connect mind or spirit with the body. However, this division between the oriental and occidental in the lines of Cartesian split is to a certain extent overemphasized. This has been a part of the Orientalist project of viewing the orient as distinct from the occident. Quoting Ronald Inden (1990), Parry suggests that the emphasis on coherence of fusion as a way Indian religious systems see the body may be rooted in an Orientalist tendency to view "the essence of Indian civilization [as] just the opposite of the West's". (Inden 1990 Cf. Hausner 2007: 56).

However, the major distinction between the western and ‘Hindu’ body is the emphasis on the fluidity of the body. The body is seen as continuous with the supreme consciousness and only as a grosser form of the latter. Again the body can be interchanged, one could enter into another’s body, and similar such instances emphasize the fluidity of the body. The body on the one hand is considered to be a significant marker of masculinity, while on the other hand the body is hardly of any significance and can be worn and thrown away like clothes. Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavat Gītā* proclaimed to Arjuna, “As a man, casting off robes that are worn out, putteth on others that are new, so the embodied (soul), casting off bodies that are worn out, entereth other bodies that are new” (Ganguli, Bhīṣma Parva, Sec. XXVI). In this chapter I discuss two instances of the body of the virile man. The first section deals with the body of Arjuna, where the body is the signifier of both his heroic and divine nature. His great marksmanship, his successes in the battles and also finally his failures in the Aswamedha Parva all bear a connection with his body. The next section deals with the universal form of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is considered to be the best of the male beings (*puruṣottama*), and his body is equated with the universe.

3.1 Fluid Bodies

Concepts of body in south Asia are varied such as “subtle and gross bodies, social bodies, the transformation and transgression of the body, sacrifice of the body and body as sacrifice. Further differentiation includes, for example, the tantric, medical, yogic or devotional body (Michaels and Wulf 2009: 11). In Sāṃkhya the body is viewed as an evolution/devolution of the consciousness, the difference is only in the degree of subtlety. In a way the difference between the consciousness, mind, body and sense organs and sense objects is only in the quality of grossness and all are the manifestation of the unmanifest. The *Mahābhārata* claims the body to be both male and female at the same time. It is the bone sinews and marrow that come from the male and the skin, flesh and blood that is derived from the female. In the dialogue between Janaka and Vasiṣṭha, Janaka said:

Hear what the attributes are, that belong to the sire and what those are that belong to the mother. Bones, sinews and marrow, O regenerate one, we know, are derived from the sire. Skin, flesh, and blood, we hear are derived from the mother. Even this, O foremost of regenerate persons, is what may be read of in the Vedas and other scriptures (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CCCVI, p. 18).

The fluid nature of the body is brought out very clearly in the passages related to Yogic practices. The term Yoga means to yoke – that is to yoke the *Jiva* (personal soul) with the Supreme Brahma. However Yoga has several meanings and the *Mahābhārata* too reflects the diverse meanings. Although Yoga is today understood as a practice that leads to the liberation of the soul, yet the overwhelming focus of many ancient Indian texts including *Mahābhārata* was on attainment of magical powers and *siddhis*.¹ In the *Mahābhārata* we find several instances of one entering into others' body and the entry can be either predatory or beneficial to the host. The story of Kubera and Uśāna (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CCXC), or Vidura's entry into the body of Yudhiṣṭhira (ibid. Asramavasika Parva, Sec. XXXVI) or Sulabhā's entry into Janaka's body (ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. CCCXXI) are some of the examples.

However, in this chapter only two aspects of the body are discussed, - one where the body bears the signature of heroism and indicates the success and failure of the hero, and the other aspect is concerned with the body of the best of male beings (*puruṣottama*). In the second aspect the body is universal and unites all contradictions.

¹ White notes that "Patañjali's 'classical' definition of 'yoga' notwithstanding many, if not most pre-twelfth century accounts of the practice of 'yoga' going back to the *Mahābhārata*, describe it not as a form of meditative or physical practice, but rather as a battery of techniques for the attainment of *siddhis*, including out of body experience entering the bodies of others as a means to escaping death or simply to feed on them, invisibility, the power to fight transmutation and so on" (White 2001: 221).

3.2 Arjuna's body

The body in the *Mahābhārata* bears the signature of the attributes - valour, royalty and godliness all seem to leave their mark on the body. Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* is described as endowed with every virtue and having the mark made by Śrīvatsa [*sarvaguṇasampannam śrīvatsakṛtalakṣaṇam*]. Similarly Karṇa is “the tiger of the splendour of the sun, marked by every divine mark [*divyalakṣaṇalakṣita*] with earrings and armour. In Buddhism, the Buddha was also recognized to possess thirty two major and eight subsidiary *lakṣaṇa*, which indicated his godly virtues” (Hiltebeitel 1990: 198).

The body is seen to be the repository of all those marks that point towards the virtues of a figure. Arjuna, in the *Mahābhārata*, is also privileged with body marks that prove his valour, manliness, virtues and also limitations. The body as a cultural motif can possess features that are contrary at the physical level. Arjuna, for instance, is both white and dark. The origin and usage of the term Arjuna goes back to the Vedic times where it means white or shining (Katz 1989: 282). The colour white has positive connotation in the *Mahābhārata*.² During the war Karṇa had a dream where he saw Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, all wearing white turbans and white robes ascended to a thousand pillared palace. In Dhārtaraṣṭra's armies too he saw three white turbaned men – Aśvatthāman, Kṛpa, and Kṛtavarma Sātava. All other kings wore red turbans (Mbh 5.141.27-28 Cf. Katz 38-39). Here the white turbaned warriors are those who will survive the war, the red turbaned ones, those who will be killed. White is also associated with purity and entities that are considered to be highest and purest. “It is said, for example, to be the colour of the Brāhmaṇa class (Mbh 12.181.5 Cf. Katz 1989: 282) and of Viṣṇu in the Kṛtayuga (Mbh 3.148.16, 3.487.31 Cf. Katz 1989: 282) and is aligned with *sattva guṇa* (the quality of goodness in nature)” (Mbh 12. 291.42 Cf. Katz 1989: 282).

When asked by Uttarā, to explain his ten names, Arjuna also explained one of his names as Kṛṣṇa. Being both black and white, though a physical impossibility was culturally plausible if

² White also had equivocal connotation, for instance in the case of Pāṇḍu, Where he was born pale because his mother turned pale in fear of Vyāsa before copulation. The other princess closed her eyes on seeing Vyāsa, so her son was born blind. Being white in instance of Pāṇḍu did not have a positive connotation.

black signified Arjuna's closeness to Kṛṣṇa, who was black because of his closeness to Kaliyuga. Black, though not considered an auspicious colour, is also the complexion of important Brahmanical divinities. Whereas white highlighted the purity and virtues of Arjuna, black might suggest his integral relation with Kṛṣṇa.

The *Mahābhārata* gives explicit evidence about the imagery of a heroic body. Arjuna is described as:

Dark in complexion, youthful in years, of curly locks, exceedingly handsome mighty car-warrior, of broad chest and long arms, possessed of the tread of an infuriated elephant, of eyes of the colour of burnished copper and like those a chakra, that brother of thine enhances the fears of foes" (Ganguli, Drona Parva, Sec. CXXV, p. 268).

Such a description prior to the encounter between Jayadratha and Arjuna is purposefully used to exaggerate the vigour of Arjuna which is reflected in his body. Thus broad chested and great armed, prominent as lions are the symbols of masculinity possessed by the body of the warrior.

The Kṣatriya body is again marked by permanent marks that are impossible to hide. The marks of bowstrings on Arjuna's hands were the veritable signs of his marksmanship. And it could not be hidden when he took the garb of a Brāhmaṇa. When Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna, dressing as Brāhmaṇas went to the court of Magadha, the intuitive Jarāsandha, hardly had any difficulty in identifying the Kṣatriya marks on Arjuna's arms. "who are ye", an apprehensive Jarasandha asked, "thus decked with flowers, and with hands bearing the marks of the bow string? Attired in the coloured robes and decked unreasonably with flowers and paste, ye give me to understand that ye are Brahmanas, although ye bear Kshatriya energy" (Ganguli, Sabha Parva, Sec. 48).

Further in the Virāṭa Parva, though cursed to be a eunuch, Arjuna does not lose his masculine Kṣatriya aura. King Virāṭa finds it incredible that Arjuna is of neuter sex.

Possessed of great strength, thou art unto like a celestial, and young and of darkish hue, thou resembles the leader of a herd of elephants. Wearing conch-bracelets overlaid with gold, a braid, and earrings, thou shinest yet like one amongst those that riding on chariot wander about equipped with mail and bow and arrows and decked with garlands and fine hair [...] It seemth to me that such a person as thou can never be of neuter sex (Ganguli, Virata Parva, Sec. p. 18-19).

Apart from the conventional Kṣatriya marks, Arjuna is privileged with special signs which none of his brothers possessed. When Samjaya entered the chamber where Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Satyabhāmā were residing, he found Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna resting their feet on each other's lap. Samjaya saw on the soles of Pārtha, straight lines that ran upward. Samjaya with great trepidation could foresee the destruction of Duryodhana's army as those marks on their feet confirmed that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna was none other than Viṣṇu and Indra. Marks on the body testified the inevitable victory of Arjuna, an indication of his power, vigour and divine nature.

Throughout this chapter, I referred to all the positive aspects that enhance the masculinity of Arjuna. The marks of valour, power and divinity all got inscribed in the body of Arjuna. However from the Aśvamedha Parva, this veritable hero began faltering in one battle after another. In the encounters that ensued the Gāṇḍīva fell from his hand and Arjuna had to be resuscitated by the prayers of celestial beings. When the sacrificial horse eventually reached Hastināpura this great hero was a fatigued and worn out figure. The *Mahābhārata* sadly compares him with “a ship wrecked man tossed on the waves resting on reaching the shore” (Ganguli, Aśvamedha Parva, Sec. p. 150). Such a desolate state of the Pāṇḍava hero endowed with all the auspicious marks, compelled Yudhiṣṭhira to ask Kṛṣṇa that, “His [Arjuna's] body has every auspicious mark. What, however, O Kṛṣṇa, is that sign in his excellent body in consequence of which he always has to endure misery and discomfort? (Ganguli, Aśvamedha Parva, p. 150). Kṛṣṇa replied that Arjuna's single fault was *piṇḍike atikāyatah*, which means “two disproportionate large swellings” (Mbh 14.89.7 Cf. Katz 1989: 199). Ganguli translates that as high cheek bones. These swellings could also mean testicles, as is suggested by Daniel H. H.

Ingalls (Katz 1989: 199). In support of this view one may cite Draupadī’s reaction at 14.89.10 to Kṛṣṇa’s words: “Kṛṣṇā Draupadī looked askance with annoyance” (Katz 1989: 200).

Thus the body is the repository of all his heroic success and also his defeats. Here, the body is a significant indicator of Arjuna’s heroism. But this is not the only way the body is seen. In case of Kṛṣṇa he possesses both his human and infinite body. The human body bears the marks of his divinity, while in the infinite body all the dichotomies collapse. The body becomes the signifier of the totality.

3.3 The Cosmic Body

Gratified with the discourse on *Adhyātma*, Arjuna now desired to see the universal form of Kṛṣṇa. He pleaded before the lotus eyed (*kamalapatrākṣa*) lord:

O best of male beings (*puruṣottama*) I desire to behold your sovereign form (*rūpam aiśvaram*). If, O Lord, you think that I am competent to behold that (form), then, O Lord of mystic power, show me your eternal self (Ganguli, Bhīma Parva, Sec. XXXV, p. 79)³.

Srībhagavān replied, “behold, O son of Pritha, my forms by hundreds and thousands (*rūpāṇi śataśo 'tha sahasraśaḥ*) various, divine in hue and shape. Behold, the Adityas, the Vasus, the Rudras, the Aświn, and the Maruts... Behold, O thou of curly hairs (*guḍākeśa*), the entire universe of mobiles and immobile (*sacarācaram*) collected together in the body of mine.” (ibid. p. 79)

However, it was not possible for Arjuna to behold this universal form with his own (human) eyes. He was granted divine vision (*divyaṃ cakṣuḥ*) for beholding Kṛṣṇa’s sovereign mystic nature (*yogam aiśvaram*).

³ The Section XXXV of the Bhīma Parva in Ganguli’s translation corresponds with *Bhagavat Gītā* Chapter XI

Then the lord in his supreme sovereign form burst forth in the sky, as if with the splendor of thousands sun. With many mouths and eyes (*anekavaktranayanam*), many wondrous aspects (*anekādbhutadarśanam*), many celestial ornaments (*anekadivyaḅharaṇam*), many celestial weapons uplifted, wearing celestial garlands and robes and with unguents of celestial fragrance, full of every wonder, resplendent, infinite he covered the universe with faces on all side. The body of the God of the gods was sub divided into many parts and again all collected together (*tatraikastham jagat kṛtsnam pravibhaktam anekadhā*). Arjuna cried in amazement and with joined hands:

I behold thee with innumerable arms, stomachs, mouths, and eyes, (*anekabāhūdaravaktranetram*) on every side, O thou of infinite forms (*sarvato 'nantarūpam*). Neither end nor middle, nor also beginning (*nāntam na madhyam na punas tavādim*) of thine do I behold, O Lord of the universe, O thou of universal form. Bearing diadem, mace, and discus (*kirīṭinam gadinam cakriṇam ca*), a mass of energy glowing on all sides, do I behold thee that art hard to look at, endued on all sides with the effulgence of the blazing fire or the sun (and) immeasurable. Thou art indestructible, (and) the supreme object of this universe (*akṣaram paramam veditavyam*). Thou art without decay, the guardian of eternal virtue (*śāśvatadharmagoptā*). I regard thee to be the eternal (male) being (*sanātan puruṣa*).” Arjuna continued, “I behold thee to be without beginning, mean, end (*anādimadhyāntam*), to be the infinite prowess (*anantavīryam*), of innumerable arms, having the Sun and the Moon for thy eyes, the blazing fire for thy mouth, and heating this universe with energy of thy own. For the space between heaven and earth is pervaded by Thee alone, as also all the points of the horizon. At sight of this marvelous and fierce form of thine, O Supreme soul, the triple world trembleth [...] beholding thy mighty form with many mouths and eyes, O mighty-armed one, with innumerable arms, thighs and feet, many stomachs, (and) terrible in consequence of many tusks, all creatures are frightened and I also. Indeed, touching the very skies, of blazing radiance, many hued, mouth wide-open, with eyes that are blazing and large, beholding thee, O Viṣṇu, with (my) inner soul

trembling (in fright), I can no longer command courage and peace of mind (ibid. p. 80).

Kṛṣṇa (*avatāra* of Viṣṇu) showed Arjuna his universal form. The *Mahābhārata* has given an unparalleled role to Viṣṇu. The other two gods of the Brahmanical trinity Śiva and Brahmā are rather peripheral figures. The role of the trinity is often granted to Viṣṇu who is depicted as the one supreme God of the universe. In the *Viśvarūpadarsana Parva* Arjuna extols him as the best of male beings (*puruṣottama*) and the eternal male being (*sanātana puruṣa*). According to Samkhya Darśana, Puruṣa is the eternal being who remains immutable and through his union with Prakṛti creates the entire cosmos. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* Puruṣa is equated with Prajāpati who creates this universe through sexual union. Viṣṇu is also referred to as the beautiful male figure who sleeps peacefully on the giant serpent dreaming the universe into being. However the enviable position of Viṣṇu emerged quite late. In the four Vedas we do find the mention of Viṣṇu but nowhere does he appear as a supreme deity. He is there identified with the sun and is claimed to have stridden over the seven regions. One account to his credit goes to conquering the entire universe by only three steps. From the *Śatapatha-Bṛāhmaṇa* we get the hint of contestation; when Viṣṇu attained the position of preeminence among the gods, the other gods became envious of him, and through machinations managed to have his head cut off. Soon, however, they became alarmed at the loss of Viṣṇu and desired to have him restored to them (Gopinatha Rao 1914: 75-77). But from the epics and Purāṇaic accounts of Viṣṇu appears as one of the three great gods. And in the epics he is given a hegemonic status.

In the depiction of Viśvarūpa an effort is made to imagine the infinite, to visualize the formless. So it was considered improper that Arjuna could behold the infinite through his ordinary human eyes. Kṛṣṇa granted him the divine vision. The Viśvarūpa visualizes the collapse of all dichotomies – the dichotomies that are inherent in the world of forms. Thus anything endowed with a form will have a beginning or end. But Arjuna sees Kṛṣṇa as one who has neither end nor middle and no beginning (*nāntaṃ na madhyaṃ na punas tavādim*). His universal body is divided into many parts and again all collected together. Thus in his formless being, He transcends the limits of both diversity and unity. His faces are spread in all directions with many mouths and

eyes, He has innumerable arms and stomachs and His forms are in hundred and thousands. The very multitude of the bodies negates the notion of possessing any particular form. In the image of Viśvarūpa Kṛṣṇa traverses the limits imposed by qualities (*guṇa*), time (*kāla*) and space (*ākāśa*). The division between the object and subject is also transcended. *Arjuna* claims that He is both the object of knowledge and the knower himself. The distinction between the knowledge and knower collapses and He represents the unity of both. Kṛṣṇa is also visualized as time which is often equated with death. All creatures living in time is constantly rushing towards death, to take the *Mahābhārata* simile, like insects rushing towards the burning lamp. All beings are inevitably rushing towards Kṛṣṇa and He is crushing them by his fierce teeth and they are grotesquely hanging from the interstices of his teeth. Kṛṣṇa is the immutable being of the universe and he is the eternal male being (*sanātana puruṣa*).

By collapsing the dichotomies evident within time and space, the image of the universal form is seen as one who transcends the limits of form; or in other words the image of the formless is depicted. In this context a look into the iconography of Śiva can be helpful. The iconography of Śiva is far more elaborate than that of Viṣṇu. So an analysis of Śaiva iconography will be helpful in understanding the general axioms of Indian iconography. God is both with form and formless, but the form is rather a superimposition and not a reality. The *Viṣṇu Samhita* says “without a form, how can god be meditated upon? If (He is) without any form, where will the mind fix itself? When there is nothing for the mind to attach itself to, it will slip away from meditation or will slide into a state of slumber. Therefore the wise will meditate on some form, remembering, however, that the form is a superimposition and not a reality” (Goldberg 2002: 43). In Śaivism the relation between the formless and the form/image (or transcendence and materiality) unfolds through a tripartite structure, that is in theological terms the process of formless (*niṣkala*, *arūpa*, *aliṅga*) deity manifesting itself through a progressive three stage process into material form (*sakala*, *rūpa*, *liṅga*) or *mūrti*. There is an intermediate stage known as Liṅga or Sadāsiva, that lies between the *arūpa* and *rūpa* stages.

The highest manifestation of Śiva is the unmanifest (*arūpa*) whose ultimate and singular essence is considered beyond attributes (*guṇa*), such as time (*kāla*), space (*ākāśa*), action (*karma*), and

the name and form (*nama-rūpa*). Parabrahma or paraśiva are the names given to the formless or unmanifest aspect (*Brahman, niṣkala, arūpa, aliṅga*). Maheśara is the fully manifest form (*sakala, rūpa, mūrti*) of Śiva. The Sadaśiva lies in the intermediary space between the *arūpa* and *rūpa* and is represented by the *liṅga*. (Goldberg 2002: 08)

Unmanifest Form	Paraśiva	Known by the terms <i>Brahman, niṣkala, arūpa, aliṅga</i>
Intermediary Form	Sadaśiva	Represented by the <i>liṅgam</i>
Fully manifest Form	Maheśvara	Known by the terms <i>sakala, rūpa, mūrti</i>

Theoretically the Brahmanical texts believe that the image (mūrti) of god is a superimposition on the reality, and in reality god is formless. Thus, god is imagined as both having form and also formless, though the form is considered as a grosser representation. If we think of Viṣṇu’s iconography parallel to the iconography of Śiva, then a certain trend is visible. In the Viśvarūpa Viṣṇu is seen as almost formless where His body contests the limits of form. Unable to bear the ferocity of the Viśvarūpa, Arjuna pleads with Kṛṣṇa to appear in his saumyarūpa. This saumyarūpa can be seen as corresponding to the Maheśvara form of Śiva. In the Bhagavad Gitā Kṛṣṇa hints towards his two forms – a higher and lower. In the section of the Gitā preceding the Viśvarūpa form alludes to his lower nature and higher nature. “My material nature (*Prakṛti*) is eightfold, comprising the order of earth, water, fire, wind, ether, mind (*masas*), spirit (*buddhi*) and the ego (*ahamkara*). This is my lower nature (*aparā*), but know that I have another, higher nature (*prakṛti parā*), which comprises the order of souls (*jivabhūta*); it is by the latter that this world is sustained ...” (*Bhagavat Gītā* 6.7.4-5). The *Mahābhārata* is not very abundant in the iconographic details of Viṣṇu. By the time of the later Purāṇas the exact iconography of Viṣṇu was well established. Typically he is described or represented as beautiful to behold of dark

complexion with four arms that carry his four - symbols the conch, lotus, disc and mace. His consort is Śrīlakṣmi the god of prosperity and his carrier is the mighty bird Garuda and his bed is the celestial serpent known as Ananta of Śesa. His eyes are long like lotus petals he is dressed in yellow garments and wears a helmet of crown on his head. His chest bears the gem known as the Kaustubha and has a white mark called Śrīvatsa representing his connection with goddess. A review of relevant passages reveals that in the *Mahābhārata* this iconography is present but in a less developed and notably more restrained form than is found in the Purāṇas. (Sutton 2000: 155). Here, I am considering the Viśvarūpa of Kṛṣṇa and the iconography of Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa is considered as the incarnation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu. It is believed that among all the incarnation of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa is his highest representation (*pūrṇa avatāra*). Though the figures of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are not completely interchangeable, one is the representation of the other. So the Viśvarūpa of Kṛṣṇa can be seen as the universal form of Viṣṇu also. Similarly the representation of the human form of Kṛṣṇa often alludes to the anthropomorphic form (*rūpa*) of Viṣṇu.

The body has multiple symbolisms in the Brahmanical world view. It has its significance in the construction of masculinity too. In the instance of Arjuna it bears the signature of his heroism. The marks of valour, power and divinity all got inscribed in the body of Arjuna. Similarly, according to Kṛṣṇa the reason for Arjuna's failures in the Asvamedha Parva was also inscribed in his body. But, the body is not just the signifier of qualities; it also represents the universal man as in the Viśvarūpa Darśana Parva. The body here becomes the representative of the infinite where all dichotomies collapse. The effort in the *Mahābhārata* was to represent the supreme Brahma or the primeval Puruṣa who encompasses the universe within him. The representation of Kṛṣṇa in the Viśvarūpa has similarity with the unmanifest form of Śiva.

Chapter Four

Sexual Motifs and the Construction of Manhood

This chapter deals with the attainment of virility by the male. For an understanding of virility I have dealt with several sexual motifs and looked into masculinity in relation to assumptions about femininity and about the male's notions of the female. The splitting of women into the erotic and the fertile, plays a significant role in the construction of virility. When the man comes in contact with the erotic, sexually seductive woman his masculinity is lost or significantly reduced, whereas when he comes under the shelter of the fertile motherly woman his virility gets enhanced and he moves towards immortality. The feminine here is not limited to the female individual but also gets transmitted to motifs that are thought to possess feminine qualities. Thus the *amṛta* and the poison represent the fertile and erotic woman respectively. When the male consumes the *amṛta* or something similar to it he either attains immortality or invincibility. But, when he is in contact with poison the result is either death or emasculation.

	Motifs	Effect on Male
Fertile	Fertile woman, mother, water, milk, <i>amṛta</i> , <i>rasakuṇḍa</i> , snakes in fertile aspect and deer	Virility, invincibility, immortality, knowledge
Erotic	Erotic woman, poison, mare, and snakes in erotic aspect	Death, emasculation, beheading, becoming of neuter gender (<i>klība</i>)

Here, I have dealt with three accounts – *samudramanthana*, Bhīma’s fall into the kingdom of the snakes and the tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. The gods were in search of immortality and they got it by consuming the *amṛta* (the liquid of immortality). The *samudra* is visualized as the womb full of milk which produces both the elixir and the poison. The elixir went to the gods and the poison was drunk by Śiva. It was through the consumption of this liquid that the gods attained immortality and became invincible. In the story of Bhīma, first Kālakūṭa the deadly poison (incidentally the name used for the poison emerging from churning the ocean is the same Kālakūṭa) was mixed with his food. It had a fatal effect on Bhīma; he was almost dead and drowned in the Ganga. However, the fertile aspect of the snakes did wonders by reviving him again, and finally it was the consumption of *rasakuṇḍa*, that transformed him from a powerful child to an invincible man. In the tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga the reason for gaining virility is different. Since, the milieu of this narrative is the ascetic world, (the opposite of domesticity) the motifs used are somewhat different. It is not the contact with the fertile woman that is the reason for virility, but the total oblivion about the presence of woman, that leads to the accumulation of virility in Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. But it was the contact with the erotic woman in the form of the courtesan that leads to the reduction of his virility acquired through penance, which got converted into rain. However when he finally entered the world of domesticity, then the similar motifs restored his virility again. It was through his marriage with Śāntā, who represented the fertile power of women that the evil effect of the erotic courtesan was neutralized. And Śāntā waited upon Ṛṣyaśṛṅga like any other hallowed female figure in the Brahmanical Pantheon.

4.1 Tormenting the Ocean

The gods went to Brahmā and Viṣṇu and asked for a plausible way of churning the ocean. Viṣṇu having compassion on the plight of the gods, sent for Ananta, for uprooting the great mountain Mandāra. The magnificent Ananta tore off the mountain, along with its dense collection of flora

and fauna and brought it to the shore of ocean for the purpose of extracting the nectar. Then, an elaborate arrangement followed. The mountain Mandāra was put on the back of the tortoise king. The snake Vāsuki, was used as a tugging rope and gods and demons on either side started churning the ocean. Out of the great tension, the plants and animals got crushed, the milky exudation of the trees and herbs got mixed with the ocean water and the water itself turned milky. The milky water further turned into butter, but the nectar did not arise. The gods became exhausted and again prayed to Viṣṇu.

After regaining their strength from Viṣṇu the gods and demons began to churn the ocean with renewed force. Now, the treasures from the ocean began to emerge:

After a while, the mild moon of a thousand rays emerged from the ocean. Thereafter sprung forth Lakshmi dressed in white, then Soma, then the White Steed, and then the celestial gem Kaustubha which graces the breast of Narayana. Then Lakshmi, Soma and the Steed, fleet as the mind, all came forth before the gods on high. Then arose the divine Dhanwantari himself with the white vessel of nectar in his hand (Ganguli, *Adi Parva*, Sec. XVIII, p. 59).

But as the churning still continued the poison Kālakūṭa appeared at last. It engulfed the three worlds with its deadly fumes. And then Śiva being solicited by Brahmā swallowed that poison for the safety of the creation. The divine Maheśvara held it in his throat and from that time on he came to be known as Nīlakaṇṭha.

The legend of the churning of ocean appears to be another story of creation, that abounds in the Brahmanical myths. However, unlike in the story of Brahmā where he is alone and lonely and creates the universe through self division and sexual union,¹ apparently the churning of the ocean does not seem to directly have notions of sexuality. But the story is in fact impregnated with ideas of sexuality which consistently reverberate in many Brahmanical mythologies.

¹ *Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4 cited in Handelman and Shulman ed. *God Inside Out: Śiva's Game of Dice*. P. 50.

The ocean in this myth is referred to by several terms, *samudra*, *kalaśodadhi*, *udadhi*. The word in ‘*duh*’ in Sanskrit means ‘to milk’ and more over the past participle, ‘*dugdha*’, is a noun meaning ‘milk’. By a rough word count, ‘*duh*’ is applied to *ūdhar* (udder), *dhenum* (cow) or other unequivocally female words more than thirty times in the Ṛg Veda. (Doniger 1980: 23). Similarly the word ‘*dadhi*’ (common meaning curd) is derived from ‘*dugdha*’, and is a byproduct of milk.

The ocean is visualized as a *kalaśa* (jar/container) brimming with the feminine fluid *dadhi* – a derivative of milk. The consideration of the female womb as the *kalaśa* has itself a long history in Brahmanical world view. The woman, as the *Manusmṛti* claims is the field, the passive recipient of the male seed. The passivity of female womb, justifies the unilateral creation of offspring from the male semen itself in many post Vedic mythologies. However a parallel concept of woman possessing seed and participating equally in creation is prevalent in the Tantra (Doniger 1980: 97). But it is rather the passivity of the womb which is more recurrent in the Brahmanical thought and literature.

In the *samudramanthana* myth, the term *kalaśodadhi* signifies the visualization of a feminine womb containing the creative fluid milk (which is to be churned by the gods and demons, to facilitate the process of creation).

The gods were facilitated by the great serpent Ananta (or Śeṣanaga) to bring the mountain Mandāra on the shore of the sea. The Mahābhārata provides an ornamented description of the mountain, tangled with dense vegetation and its golden peaks almost touching the heaven. The mountain inaccessible to the ordinary mortal beings was uprooted and brought in for the churning. From the force of the churning, the mountain started exuding fluids. The terrible force, that dragged (swirled the mountain) caused a veritable act of destruction. Large trees crushed with each other, and tumbled down the mountain peaks, smashing down the elephants lion, birds and every living beings. The whole mountain was aflame and dense black clouds entangled the whole sky.

"After the churning, O Brahmana, had gone on for some time, gummy exudations of various trees and herbs vested with the properties of amrita mingled with the waters of the Ocean. And the celestials attained to immortality by drinking of the water mixed with those gums and with the liquid extract of gold. By degrees, the milky water of the agitated deep turned into clarified butter by virtue of those gums and juices." (Ganguli, *Adi Parva*, Sec. XVIII, p. 59)

The process of churning is of significance here. Through churning one is believed to get the more filtered and subtler form or any entity. Thus progressive churning leads to the essence of anything. A more prevalent instance is milk where it is churned to get the butter, a more subtle essence of the milk. Similarly, semen is believed to be the essence of man. It is produced through a meticulous process of progressive distillation. "According to clearly defined and predictable ratio, food is transformed into blood, blood into flesh, flesh into fat, fat into bone, bone into marrow, and marrow into semen" (Alter 2011: 31). Thus the value of semen is enormous as the input given for a single drop of semen is mindboggling.

This filtration process is achieved through churning. The *Mahābhārata* provides an analogy for us.

As the butter that lies within milk is churned up by churning rods, even so the desires that are generated in the mind (by the sight or thought of women) draw together the vital seed that lies within the body (Ganguli, *Shanti Parva*, Sec. CCXIV, p. 100).

Thus, churning is a process of much import and the churning of the mountains leads to the flow of more essential fluids like plant exudes, and milk, which drop into the ocean. These juices like semen, had the power of elixir and immortality. The yogi is again considered as a man who has stockpile of semen energy, and his conservative approach towards his semen gives him a transcendental power. The juices and the plant exudes form the mountain floods into the ocean (*samudra*), which is again visualized as a jar (*Kalaśa*) or womb.

The more common translation of ocean is *samudra*. *Samudra* is also the name of the vessel that is used for pressing the soma in sacrifices. Thus *samudra* can be considered as soma vats. In the *R̥g Veda* soma is said to rush to this *samudra* with a roaring sound (RV. 9.107.21 Cf. Doniger 1980: 24). Soma has an androgynous character. The soma juice is likened to a bull full of seed who mingles with cows to ensure fertility. (RV.9.70.7; 9.79.9 Cf. Doniger 1980: 24). Soma is also likened to an udder milked of juices which are like cows. (RV 3.48.3 Cf. Doniger 1980: 24). Whereas it is difficult to identify the precise sexual nature of soma, its relation with fertility is certain. The *Mahābhārata* narrates an entangled story where soma and milk regenerate one another. The gods churn the ocean and produce first milk, then butter, then wine, then poison and finally soma. In addition the magic wishing cow is produced when the ocean is milked, and the ocean milk flows from her udder. Thus the cow and the ocean are each other's mother. This logical circle is stated explicitly. The magic cow was born of soma that Brahmā spat from his mouth, from the cow's milk the ocean of milk arose on earth, and four cows were born from her, when the gods and demons churned the ocean that was mixed with the milk of these cows, they obtained soma (Doniger 1980: 43).

From the circular and tangled account above, it's impossible to conceive who generated whom, but the interrelationship between soma and milk and their relation with fertility is evident. The gods and demons struggled with their churning even after the ocean had turned milky and buttery. Finally, with the blessings from Viṣṇu their efforts bore results. The ocean began to gift treasures. There are varying accounts about the precise inventory of the treasure, however, the *Mahābhārata* gives a list of eight treasures. – the moon, Lakṣmī, surā (wine), the white steed Uccaiḥśravas, Kaustabha, Dhanvantari with the pitcher of Amṛta, Airāvata and Kālakūṭa the poison. The emergence of the treasures gives a semblance of altogether new creation, nevertheless the prime concern of the gods and demons were the elixir (*amṛta*) the liquid of immortality. The *Mahābhārata* goes to more detail regarding the elixir and the poison (Kālakūṭa). With the emergence of Kālakūṭa the three worlds were stupefied. It was only the grace of Śiva that he drank the poison for the safety of the creation. The divine Maheśvara held it in his throat, and from that time came to be known as Nīlakaṇṭha (blue throated). The emergence of the elixir caused a bitter struggle between the gods and the demons. Eventually Viṣṇu could manage to

deceive the demons, by taking the form of a beautiful damsel and the gods received the entire *amṛta*.

The *amṛta* was produced by the churning of the ocean (*samudra*), which is also a soma vat, and the *samudra* itself is turned into milk, *ghṛta* and butter. *Ghee* is an important constituent to be poured into the sacrificial fire. *Ghee* and butter replace the soma in the Later Vedic period. The *ghee*, a more distilled form of milk, is also considered to provide more vitality to the male. In the churning of the ocean myth, the milky ocean is churned out, and the *amṛta* is produced. By consuming it the gods become immortal. The *amṛta*, for the gods, could be equivalent of *ghee* or butter, which provides vitality to humans. The visualization of the ocean as a jar full of milk and its churning bears similarity with the production of ghee and butter from milk.

Further the emergence of the poison Kālakūṭa points to the long existent ambivalence towards female sexuality. Women on the one hand are revered as the nurturing mother and on the other hand as the one who drains away the vitality of man. The *Ṛg Veda* remarks on the sexually aggressive wife as “the foolish woman sucks dry the panting wise man” (RV 1.179.4 Cf. Doniger 1980: 79). The *Manusmṛti* also contains misogynist vitriol against woman. However, it surprises one to see the same Manu arguing for virtuous treatment of the female members of the family. “where women are honoured, there gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards [...] where the female relations live in grief, the family soon wholly perishes; but that family where they are not unhappy prospers [...] the houses on which female relations, not being duly honoured, pronounce curse, perish completely, as if destroyed by magic” (Bühler 1886: 85)

The ambivalence is intensified in the image of the Goddess. “Indian goddess can be divided into two distinct categories. The first group is goddesses of the tooth (or the genitals the two concepts being linked in the motif of the *vagina dentata*); they are worshipped in times of crisis, such as epidemics and are ambivalent, dangerous and erotic figures. The second group is the goddess of the breast endemic and auspicious, bountiful and fertile, linked to the life-cycle. The Goddess of the breast provides role models for the wife; they are subservient to the husband. Goddess of the

tooth do not provide such models; though they have consorts they dominate them and play non-feminine, and martial roles as well “ (Doniger 1980: 90).

The ocean after churning produces both the elixir and poison along with several other gems and treasures. We have discussed above how the ocean is conceived to be feminine and creation occurs through the process of churning. This myth gives a similar instance of ambivalence towards female sexuality. On the one hand the elixir emerges from the ocean which gives immortality to the gods and is evidently a nurturing force; however the ocean also produces the poison that has the potential of devastating the three worlds. In order to mitigate the dangerous potential of the poison, Śiva had to save the world by consuming it. The role of Śiva in pacifying dangerous goddess is rather recurrent. In the myth of churning of the ocean this ambivalence towards female sexuality is also found, it can be called in an embryonic form. The division is not brought out sharply as in the Purāṇic myths. The relation between the ocean and female sexuality can only be inferred.

Though the myth does not directly deal with masculinity as such, it gives a picture of the male’s visualization of the female creative power. The story presents us with an inventory of motifs that is recurrently used in Brahmanical mythology. The motifs illustrated here will be further elaborated in later myths to understand the subtle notions of masculinity in the myths of the *Mahābhārata*.

4.2 Renewal of virility: Poisoned Bhīma Sinks into the Kingdom of Snakes

The second Pāṇḍava Bhīmasena, the son of Vāyu, personified immense physical prowess that is revealed in his frequent exhibition of brute force. He is credited with the ruthless slaughter of terrible rākṣasas, but his most decisive and contentious triumph was the defeat of Duryodhana. Bhīmasena represents a genus of virile masculinity that possessed enormous muscular power but was frequently excitable. Bhīma's impulsive nature though evident, was most illustratively depicted when Draupadī was dragged into the Kuru court. Bhīma vociferously chastised the instigators of the act, yelling vows after vows, while all the eminent figures were engaged with the nitty-gritty of *Dharma*. It does not need to stretch our imagination to recognise the hyper-masculine attributes of Bhīma, but to understand the symbolic encodings that crafted the figure of Bhīma we need a further look. Here I am citing a tale of Bhīma that is narrated in the *Ādiparva* of the *Mahābhārata*.

The sons of Pandu were always superior to the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Bhīma was always amused to bully the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra together were no match for Bhīma alone. Bhīma took delight in thrashing them from trees, pulling them into water and very unceremoniously dragging them on the ground. The growing strength of Bhīma alarmed the eldest of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons, who hit upon a plan to wipe off the incredibly powerful second Pāṇḍava. Duryodhana lured the Pāṇḍava brothers to a beautiful place called Pramāṇakoti on the banks of Ganga. There, in the course of having water sport, Duryodhana presented Bhīma with some food mixed in a dreadful poison. After enjoying the water sport Bhīma felt excessively fatigued as the poison was making its effect. When he slept on the ground, Duryodhana, who was waiting for this moment, bound him with chords and shrubs, and threw him into the Ganga. Bhīma sank deep into the waters of the Ganga without being conscious of what was happening to him. In the deep recesses of the water, the unconscious body of Bhīma reached the kingdom of snakes. He was attacked by the ferocious snakes who were guarding their kingdom. But as if a miracle, due to the vigorous bitings of the snakes, Bhīma regained his consciousness. The *Mahābhārata* describes this event in its own medico-chemical terms, as the neutralisation of vegetable poison by animal poison (*sthāvaram jaṅgama*) (Vogel 1926: 73). As soon as he

regained his senses, Bhīma tore away the chords that bound him, and violently smashed the army of snakes. The snakes ran in fear to their king Vāsuki and narrated this incredible event. The snake king personally went to enquire into this unprecedented incident. Now among the snakes there was one named Aryaka who happened to be a distant relative of Bhīma. On recognising Bhīma, Aryaka embraced him and introduced him to the snake king. Thereupon Bhīma was offered a grand welcome, and the distinguished among the snakes became busy, musing on how to please Bhīma. Finally it was agreed that Bhīma will be presented with vessels full of *rasakuṇḍa* (nectar or elixir) and he will drink as much as he pleased. Bhīma quaffed off eight vessels of *rasakuṇḍa* at a go as each of those vessels was flooding with the energy of a thousand elephants. Then he slept for eight long days, and when on the eighth day he awoke from that slumber the delighted Nāgas said, “O thou of mighty arms, the strength-giving liquor thou hast drunk will give thee the might of ten thousand elephants! No one now will be able to vanquish thee in fight. O bull of Kuru’s race, do thou bath in this holy and auspicious water and return home”(Ganguli, *Adi Parva*, Sec CXXIX p.270). Thereupon Bhīma “purified himself with bath in those waters, and decked with robes and flowery garlands of the same hue, ate of the *paramanna* (rice and sugar pudding) offered to him by the Nagas” (ibid p.270). Bhīma being empowered with the strength of thousands of elephants, returned to his anxious mother and brothers. Undaunted by the recurrent failures, Duryodhana once again tried to kill Bhīma by the same deadly poison. Bhīma smartly consumed the poison which failed to have any effect on him.

It seems evident from the above story that Bhīma undergoes some kind of initiation through which he emerges to be more powerful and almost invincible. The drinking of the *rasakuṇḍa* and the ceremonies that followed endowed him with newly gained strength and immunity. But the symbolic coding of the story in terms of sexuality and masculinity is not quite apparent from a reading at the narrative level. For further analysing the sexual symbolism of this tale, we need to interpret several motifs and their relevance in the Brahmanical cosmology. Here I have chosen four sexual motifs of the story which will help to grasp the ideals of masculinity in the *Mahābhārata*; those are snakes, poison, water and elixir.

Snakes in Brahmanical mythology have quite obvious connections with sexuality. While the gender of the snake motif can be ambiguous that is both male and female, they are often associated with dangerous female sexuality. The story of the jealous nāga (Vogel 1926: 177) demonstrates the danger of women's insatiable passion. In this tale the snake enticed human lovers, all of whom were finally burnt to death by the jealous snake husband. Another popular theme in Hindu folktale is that the vagina of an erotic woman contains poisonous snake. (Doniger 1980: 292) Further the story of Kāliya nāga in the *Harivamsa* has undertones of sexuality. Kāliya who poisoned the water of river Yamuna was tamed by *Kṛṣṇa* and exiled to the oceans. The ocean had a cooling effect over the poisonous instinct of Kāliya nāga. Here it is significant that the dreadful nāga is not killed but tamed. The dominant motif behind this story is the control over sexuality, not altogether destroying it. On the other side sexuality also has a fertility aspect to it, but uncontrolled passions can lead to destruction. Snakes are also seen as fertility motifs: "In Hindu mythology and folklore snakes represent rain (Maity 1963: 124-125; *Ṛg Veda*: 1.22.2: Vogel 1926: 34). In a more general sense they are often regarded as the deities of ponds and rivers (Crooke 1926: 390; *Harivamsa* chap. 68; Maity 1963: 154 Cf. Alter.). H. Zimmer writes "like a river winding its way, the serpent creeps along the ground: it dwells in the earth and starts forth like a fountain from its hole. It is embodiment of the water of life issuing from the deep body of mother earth" (Zimmer 1946: 74-75). Here their role is more related to fertility and it would become more apparent during the discussion of elixir and water.

Apart from the fertility motifs in the story, there is the presence of destructive motifs like poison. Bhīma almost succumbed to death after consuming the deadly poison Kālakūṣa. The story precisely mentions it to be vegetable poison which is neutralized by the animal poison of the snakes. Here we can notice the inversion of popular medical practice of curing snake bites with plant exudes. The cure most commonly in vogue was to use banyan or pupil exudes for snake bites, the medico-philosophical logic being the neutralization of deadly poison with the nurturing quality of milk (banyan and pupil plants exudes a kind of juice which looks like milk, and is widely considered to be sacred among the Hindus). On the other hand Nim leaves are also considered to neutralize snake venom, by virtue of their bitterness which contends with the intensity of the poison. "Its (Nim) bitterness is regarded as symbolically parallel to poison. If a

person can eat bitter Nim leaves he is said to be cured” (Alter 1992: 162). In the above story we find a deliberate inversion of the popular practice, where the vegetable poison is neutralized by animal poison and not the other way round. One reason for this inversion can be the intention to highlight the nurturing aspect of the snakes in contrast to the sexually dangerous one. And this purpose becomes clearer as the story proceeds further.

Another motif that appears in the story is water or the river water. The Kauravas arrive at the bank of the Ganga at a place called Pramāṇakoṭi. It appears from the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī that the place derived its name from a huge banyan tree *Pramana* (Ganguli, Vana Parva, Sec XII). Here the presence of the banyan is sexually potent. Banyan on the one hand represents the nurturing aspect of the mother because of it exudes milk, on the other hand it symbolizes the male virility on account of its aerial roots which hangs from its branches and resembles the matted hair of an ascetic. It is believed in Hindu mythology that the semen resides in the head and it becomes more potent in the head of a matted yogi (Doniger 1980). Thus the symbolism of the banyan tree in the site where Bhīma is revitalised, is the androgynous representing both the nurturing care of the mother and virile potency of the male. The motif of water appears, once as the water of Ganga which is held to be highly sacred even today, and the water by which Bhīma purifies himself after arising from his eight day long sleep. Water in Hindu mythology is mostly taken to be feminine, as the nurturing and sustaining force of the creation. It can be juxtaposed with rain in a male/female dichotomy, where the water is female and rain is the male. Doniger points out “*Vṛṣṭi* (rain) and *vṛṣan* (a powerful, virile, lustful man or a bull) are both derived from *vṛṣ* (to rain or pour forth) (Doniger 1980: 20). The connection between rain and semen is made clearer in the Purāṇic story, where Brahmā’s seed forms the cloud of the doomsday flood. Rain becomes feminine when it turns into water. Thus semen converts itself into a nurturing force in the form of water.

In popular myths and rituals snakes are often offered milk to drink. The symbolism of this myth is the neutralization of the venomous snake or dangerous sexuality with the nurturing qualities of milk or mother. But there is some ambiguity in this motif, “on one level the snake sucks out the mother’s nurturing milk, but at a parallel symbolic plane it sucks out vital male energy... As the

snake drinks milk it is associated with both the good mother's flowing milk and the bad mother's passion. On one plane the suckling snake raises the symbol of erotic fantasy, but it is also, on another plane, emblematic of the non-erotic relationship between mother and child. The motif of suckling snake raises the issue of sexuality in the same that it resolves it" (Alter 1992: 147). However suckling the milk is not just a one way process, folklores also narrate that snakes keep guard of treasures which they give up in exchange of milk. Provided the apparent connection between snakes and sexuality, the treasure that they are guarding is the semen. "the snakes keep watch over the "life-energy that is stored in the earthly waters of the springs, wells and ponds (Zimmer 1946: 63)". Another popular physiological motif of the snake guarding the treasure is *Kuṇḍalini Śakti* coiled at the end a person's spine. Through the arousal of the snake the energy locked up in the *Kuṇḍalini* is released, which is a kind of internal ejaculation where the semen reaches the person's head.

In the above story the snakes offering elixir to Bhīma is quite telling. They were in possession of a treasure, in accordance with other folklores, and that treasure gave enormous strength to Bhīma almost equal to the power of several thousand elephants. It made him so strong that no poison was ever able to do any harm. This narrative is integrally linked with the construction of masculinity in Bhīma. Bhīma though a powerful child from his birth, had not yet faced any major encounter. The consumption of the elixir prepared him for the lifelong battles that he fought with numerous *rākṣasas* and humans. The elixir had the concentrated power of semen, which transformed Bhīma from a powerful child to a hyper-masculine male. Elixir or the *rasakuṇḍa* as referred to in the *Mahābhārata* can be symbolically similar to *ghi* or butter which is produced through the churning of milk. The elixir in the *Mahābhārata* or in the *Purāṇas* is procured by the churning of the ocean. Here again the eternal snake Ananta plays the role of a rope which is pulled by both the gods and demons. Whereas *ghi* is recommended for humans, the elixir is the favourite of the gods. *Ghi* is supposed to produce semen which is considered stable and resilient. Thus while describing the wrestler's regimen Alter quotes Atreya who makes the following point: "there are many things which are as rich and oily as *ghi* but they do not have resilience. The semen and strength which is produced from these things are not stable. *Ghi* is the only thing

which can keep your strength up and produce *oj* [the aura of virility]” (Alter 1992: 153). If we take the *rasakuṇḍa* as the counterpart of *ghi* it would have the desired effect on Bhīma.

The story of Bhīma’s encounter with the snakes symbolizes an initiation process through which Bhīma passes over from childhood to manhood. The story is coded with multiple layers of sexual symbolism, the snakes who combined the twin motifs of dangerous sexuality and motherly nurturer were the custodian of a life giving force, an allegory of the concentrated power of semen, and Bhīma who drank eight vessels of that fluid transformed into a virile man immune from any kind of poison. The symbolism of this poison is ambiguous; whether it refers only to venomous fluid or to dangerous sexuality is not very clear. These multiple levels of symbolism can be understood in the context of other mythological tales. By expanding the meanings of the motifs by comparing them with relevant tales we can derive the sexual meaning of the myths and look into the construction of masculinity.

4.3 Tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga

While journeying through the forest Yudhiṣṭhira and Lomaśa came across the hermitage of Viśvāmitra. From there Lomaśa pointed to the hermitage of Kāśyapa, whose son Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was renowned for his ascetic power that caused Indra to produce rain. And that powerful son of Kāśyapa was born of a hind. Yudhiṣṭhira was curious to know how the son of Kāśyapa was born from a hind (*mṛga*). And how did Kāśyapa, endowed with holiness, participate in such a forbidden miscegenation (*viruddhe yonisamsarge*)? In reply Lomaśa narrated the birth of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Kāśyapa (who is henceforth referred to as Vibhāṇḍaka²) had perfected his soul through austerities, and through this process his seed had become so powerful that it never failed in creating generation (*amoghavīrya*), and his luster was like Prajāpati. One day Vibhāṇḍaka proceeded to a big lake and devoted himself to the practice of penances. And once he was washing his mouth, in the waters he saw the reflection of the celestial nymph Urvaśī – where upon came out his seminal fluid (*retah pracaskanda*). And a hind at that time happened to lap it

² Vibhāṇḍaka was the son of Kāśyapa.

up along with the water that she was drinking, and from this she became pregnant. That hind gave birth to Vibhāṇḍaka's son, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. The saint was born with a horn on the head and for that reason he came to be known as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga.

Vibhāṇḍaka's ascetic penances resulted in vigorous semen energy, so powerful that it never failed to create generations. Here he is also compared with Prajāpati, the primal being who created the universe. Prajāpati is also considered as the pregnant male who created the universe through sexual union with his daughter. He is the pregnant male because he out of himself created his daughter, and then through repeated sexual union with her created all the beings of the universe. Vibhāṇḍaka through his ascetic penances acquired a sexual power that could be compared with the ultimate fertile being Prajāpati. While seeing the reflection of the divine nymph Urvaśī, his seminal fluid came out and got mixed up in the water of the lake. Urvaśī in Brahmanical mythologies is quite a regular figure who often appears to disrupt the penances of the ascetic. She is seen as a sexually aggressive seductress who destroys the virility of male (ascetic penances and virility have very strong connection). In the *Ṛg Veda* Urvaśī herself admits that “Women have the heart of hyenas” (RV 10.95.15) “and Urvaśī admits that immortal women, when they respond to mortal caresses (in relation to Purūravas), are like water birds or like horses who bite in their love play (RV 10.95.9)” an allusion to erotic and aggressive sexuality (Doniger 1980: 180). In the *Mahābhārata* Arjuna loses his masculinity due to his failure to satisfy Urvaśī. In the story of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, the ascetic Vibhāṇḍaka similarly loses his seed on simply seeing the reflection of Urvaśī in the water of the lake. The fatal nature of the sexually aggressive woman is often counterpoised with a deer. The deer represents a more delicate and ‘feminine’ female that neutralizes the evil effects of erotic women. So, here Vibhāṇḍaka's seed is lapped up by a deer, who has really been a daughter of the gods but cursed by Brahmā to be a deer. The deer finally gives birth to the saintly child Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who is born with a horn in his head. The phallic symbolism of this horn is quite evident.

Now the king of Aṅga, Lomapāda was in great trouble. Out of love of pleasure he was guilty of falsehood towards a Brahmins (*kāmaḥ kṛto mithyā brāhmaṇebhya*). And as a result the ruler was shunned by all the Brahmins and he was without any ministering priests. The god of the

thousand eyes (*sahasrākṣa*), Indra, suddenly abstained from giving rain in his territory and people began to suffer. Lomapāda then enquired before the Brahmins on how to please the heavens so that his kingdom is granted rain. And one of the best Brahmins spoke to the king:

O Lord of the Kings! The Brahmanas are angry with thee. Do some act (therefore) for appeasing them. O ruler of the earth! Send Rishyasringa, the son of a saint, resident of the forest knowing nothing of the female sex, and always taking delight in simplicity. O King! If he, great in the practice of penances, should show himself in thy territory, forthwith rain would be granted by the heavens, herein I have no doubt at all (Ganguli, Vana Parva, Sec CX, P.238).

The Brahmin suggested that Lomapāda bring Ṛṣyaśṛṅga into his kingdom and the heavens would instantly issue rain. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga represents virile asceticism, and his loss of virility would result into rain. Semen and rain in Hindu mythology has an integral connection. The terms *vṛṣṭi* (rain) and *vṛṣan* (a powerful, virile or lustful man, of a bull) are both derived from the *vṛṣ* (to rain or pour forth) (discussed above). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says that “The rain is the urine of the sacrificial horse” (BAU 1.1.1 Cf. Doniger 1980: 20). The horse is often a metaphor for the virile male and the rain is seen as the urine of the horse. The rain (*varṣan*) is seen as male fluid equivalent to semen. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga’s ascetic penances led him to possess immense semen energy, a result of never seeing any women, which finally got converted into rains. Thus the mere entry of a virile male like Ṛṣyaśṛṅga could result in the coming of rain into the kingdom of Aṅga. In the earlier two sections we have seen that by drinking the feminine nurturing fluid one attains immortality or virility. However the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga story provides another alternative for attaining virility, that is by hardly being in contact with women. And the contact with women leads to the destruction of his semen, which gets converted into rain and brings forth life in the kingdom of Lomapāda.

King Lomapāda introspected on how to bring Ṛṣyaśṛṅga into his kingdom, and finally he sent for a number of beautiful courtesans. He wanted them to somehow allure Ṛṣyaśṛṅga into his territory. But the courtesans were on the one hand afraid of the king’s anger and on the other dreaded the curse from the saint. They became sad and confounded and declared the business to

be beyond their power. However among them was a hoary woman (*ekā jarad yoṣā*) who spoke to the king:

O great king! Him whose wealth consists solely in penances (*tapodhanam*), I shall try to bring over here. Thou wilt, however, have to procure for me certain things, in connection with the plan. In that case, I may be able to bring over the son of the saint – Rishyasringa (ibid p. 239).

According to her plan a floating hermitage was created, adorned with artificial trees, various flowers, fruits and diverse shrubs and creeping plant, in the vicinity of the hermitage of Kāśyapa. The elderly courtesan then sent her beautiful daughter, who was pleasing and of smart sense to search for Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Meeting the courtesan Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was awestruck and said, “thou art shining with luster, as if thou wert a (mass) of light (*ṛddho bhavāñ jyotir iva prakāśate*). And I deem thee worthy of obeisance... O Brahmana! Thou resembles a god in thy mien. What is the name of this particular religious vow, that thou seemest to be observing now?” (ibid p.240). The courtesan replied:

I am not worthy of obeisance from persons like thee; but I must make obeisance to thee. O Brahmana! This is the religious observance to be practiced by me, namely, that thou must be clasped in my arms (ibid p.240).

Then she gave him unsuitable things for food, and garlands of exceedingly fragrant scent and beautiful and shining garments to wear and first rate drinks.

And she touched his body with her own and repeatedly clasped Rishyasringa in her arms. Then she bent and broke the flowery twigs from the trees, such as the Sala, the Asoka and the Tilaka. And overpowered with intoxication, assuming a bashful look, she went on tempting the great saint’s son. And when she saw that the heart of Rishyasringa had been touched, she repeatedly pressed his body with her own and casting glances, slowly went away under the pretext that she was going to make offerings to the fire (ibid. Sec CXI p. 240).

Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was intoxicated by his meeting with the courtesan. The courtesan here represents the other side of the erotic woman, who through her seductive power destroys the wealth acquired by the male ascetic through his penances (*tapodhana*). The split between erotic and fertile women is recurrent in the Brahmanical mythologies and helps to explain male notions about masculinity. The contact with the erotic woman, destroys man's virility, he loses his ascetic power, becomes clueless and moves towards death rather than immortality. After the courtesan left, similar was the state of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, he was overpowered with love and lost his senses. He began to sigh and was in great distress. Vibhāṇḍaka compares the erotic women as *rākṣasa* who takes beautiful forms, lures ascetics and destroys their penances. On her departure, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga became overpowered with love and lost his sense. His mind turned constantly to her and felt itself vacant. He began to sigh and seemed in great distress. At that moment Vibhāṇḍaka appeared, and saw that his son was sitting alone, pensive and sad, his mind upset and sighing again and again with upturned eyes. Being worried Vibhāṇḍaka enquired about what had happened. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga narrated his meeting with the courtesan, but he was hardly conscious that she was female. So he narrated about her, in the masculine pronoun thinking that she was also male and a religious student. Vibhāṇḍaka's instant reply was that those were *Rākṣasas*. He said,

Those are, O son! *Rakshasas*. They walk about in that wonderfully beautiful form. Their strength is unrivalled and their beauty great. And they always meditate obstruction to the practice of penances. And, O my boy, they assume lovely forms and try to allure by diverse means. And those fierce beings hurled the saints, the dwellers of the woods from blessed regions (won by their pious deeds). And the saint who hath control over his soul, and who is desirous of obtaining regions where go the righteous, ought to have nothing to do with them (ibid. Sec CXIII, p. 242).

Thus the sexually aggressive woman is compared with a *rākṣasa* with all the intent to destroy the penances of the ascetic. Vibhāṇḍaka not only compares, but makes the courtesan identical with the *rākṣasa* in order to scare Ṛṣyaśṛṅga about her evil nature. The tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is also an example of unconscious androgyny where the beholder out of ignorance assumes one to be of a

different sex. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who had never seen any woman, considers the courtesan as male; he describes her in the male pronoun. However, in spite of Vibhāṇḍaka's warning he could not forget about the courtesan and the next time he found the courtesan again, he fled with her into the kingdom of Aṅga, keeping his father uninformed.

One day while Ṛṣyaśṛṅga went for gathering fruits, the courtesan came again to tempt him. He was glad and hurriedly ran towards him. Then the courtesan by contrivances made the son of Kāśyapa to enter their bark, and unmoored the vessel and came to the kingdom of Aṅga. The king kept that son of Vibhāṇḍaka within that part of the palace destined for the females. All of a sudden he saw the rain poured by the heavens and that the world was flooded with water. And Lomapāda, whose desire was fulfilled bestowed his daughter Śāntā to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in marriage.

The mere entry of an ascetic like Ṛṣyaśṛṅga ushered rain in the kingdom of Lomapāda. As described above semen is often thought to be converted into rain. Here the loss of his asceticism, through his contact with the courtesan converted itself into a torrent that flooded the kingdom. Similarly in the Purāṇas we find the loss of Brahmā's semen caused due to his lust towards Pārvatī, got converted into the doomsday cloud that flooded the entire creation. Semen is always seen to be fertile, if it is retained then it leads to great ascetic merit, verging towards immortality, and if it is released it can create new generations or rain (which is also a metaphor for new creation). Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is viewed as a virile ascetic who is brought into the kingdom for the purpose of fertility. In the realm of Lomapāda his entry causes rain after a long period of drought. And the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrates that Daśaratha³ who was childless went to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga who gave him *pāyasa* to be given to his wives, who eventually gave birth to four sons.

After the rain, that was the result of loss of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's penances, king Lomāpada made every effort to placate the anger of Vibhāṇḍaka. He immediately offered her daughter Śāntā in marriage to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. All efforts were made to please the saint Vibhāṇḍaka on his way to Aṅga. Finally when he found Ṛṣyaśṛṅga glowing like the Indra of heaven and his daughter-in-law looking like lightening issuing from the cloud, he became very pleased. He told his son that as soon as a son is born to him, he should return to the forest without any failing. And Ṛṣyaśṛṅga

³ The *Mahābhārata* mentions that Lomapāda of Aṅga was a friend of Daśaratha.

acted accordingly and went back to his father. Here Śāntā represents the fertile women, the other side of the split, who neutralizes the evil effect of the erotic woman. She is a nurturer or the mother who gives birth to a son. The *Mahābhārata* took pains to describe the fertile nature of Śāntā.

Santa obediently waited upon him as in the firmament the star Rohini waits upon the moon, or as the fortunate Arundhati waits upon Vasishtha, or as Lopamudra waits upon Agastya. And as Damayanti was an obedient wife to Nala, or as Sachi is to a god who holdeth the thunderbolt in his hind or as Indrasena, Narayana's daughter, was always obedient to Mudgala, so did Santa wait affectionately upon Rishyasringa, when he lived in the wood (ibid. Sec CXIII, p. 244).

Thus Śāntā represents all the quintessentially fertile women of the Hindu pantheon. The Ṛṣyaśṛṅga tale has a recurring structure. The ascetic penance of Vibhāṇḍaka, stored up in his semen was released by beholding the reflection of Urvaśī in the waters of the lake. Urvaśī is the erotic woman, and her presence led to the loss of virility in case of Vibhāṇḍaka. But her effect was immediately neutralized by the deer, a more docile and 'feminine' female, who laps up his seed along with water and gives birth to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. Similarly the contact with the courtesan led to the loss of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's ascetic wealth that got converted into rain. But the effect of the courtesan was neutralized by the fertile woman Śāntā who gives birth to a son and waits upon Ṛṣyaśṛṅga like any other motherly woman in the Brahmanical mythology.

This chapter has examined the notion of masculinity in the *Mahābhārata* and its connection with femininity. The female principle plays a significant role in either the development of virility or its destruction. The *samudramanthana* story narrates the whole endeavor to attain immortality. This is attained through the drinking of *amṛta* which is a fertile feminine principle. The poison, the fatal fluid that emerges, is consumed by Śiva to protect the entire creation. Similar motifs are repeated while the division of the *amṛta* between the gods and Dānavas is about to begin. Viṣṇu takes the form of Mohinī, and offers to divide the *amṛta* equally between the gods and the

Dānavas. Enchanted by her beauty the Dānavas agree instantly. But Mohinī deceived the Dānavas and offers the entire share to the gods. Thus the seductive woman in the form of Mohinī (the name itself suggests seduction) proves fatal for the Dānavas. The Dānavas were separated from the *amṛta* that led them to remain mortal and finally to be defeated at the hands of the gods. The *amṛta* provides the gain of immortality and therefore invincibility to the gods, whereas Mohinī, the seductive or erotic woman proved to be fatal for the Dānavas. The story of Bhīmasena shows similar motifs. The Kālakūṭa, a form of vegetative poison, proves deadly for Bhīma and he is drowned in the Ganga and ultimately reaches the kingdom of the snakes. The fertile aspect of the snakes is represented in the story that saves Bhīma through their poison. Finally Bhīma is offered the *rasakuṇḍa* which has the condensed energy of thousands of elephants and becomes invincible. The Kālakūṭa poison could no longer have any effect on him. Thus the *rasakuṇḍa* could be a representative of *amṛta* that granted virility and invincibility to Bhīma. The tale of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is narrated in the ascetic environment. There virility is accumulated through the total absence of women. Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was virile and full of ascetic wealth (*tapadhana*) because he had never seen women. However his contact with the courtesan led to the destruction of his ascetic penances and his virility got converted into torrential rain. However by his marriage with Śāntā this loss was neutralized and after giving birth to a son he again went back to asceticism. Though there are an abundance of sexual motifs, they can be reduced into two the fertile and the erotic. This division helps as an interpretative tool for understanding masculinity and the male view about the female. The female in the male view is always split – the mother and the erotic woman. But the man is normally integrated; it is only his contact with the kind of woman or feminine principle that is determines the extent of his virility.

Chapter Five

Androgyny and Emasculation

The androgyne is a very recurrent figure in Vedic and Brahmanical literature. Reference to androgyny is found in Vedic literature where Indra is cursed to be covered by a thousand *yonī*. In the Brāhmaṇas and Purāṇas the androgyne becomes a potent figure, surrounded by a maze of mythologies. Prajāpati in one of the creation myths is endowed with a maternal physiognomy which includes a womb chamber filled with forms. The creator god in the guise of the pregnant male presages belief in “the womb of creation” which occurs in several Upanisadic figurative allusions (Srinivasan 1997 p.130). Śiva in union with Pārvatī forms the Ardhanārīśvara – the lord who is half woman. In the *Mahābhārata* we find several androgynies but unlike the androgyne imagery of Śiva and Prajāpati they have not been of great theological concern. But before discussing them we need to look at the meaning of the androgyne in the Hindu texts.

The commonly used word for androgyne in Sanskrit is *Klība*. Doniger argues:

A *klība* is not merely an androgyne; where androgyne implies a male-female equality and a creature of mythological status, with some power and dignity, a *Klība* is a defective male, a male suffering from failure, distortion, and lack [...] We learn from the *Laws of Manu*, *Klība* includes a wide range of meanings under the general homophobic rubric of “a man who does not act the way a man should act”, a man who fails to be a man. It is a catchall term coined by a homophobic Hindu culture to indicate a man who is in their terms sexually dysfunctional, including someone who was sterile, impotent, castrated, a transvestite, a man who committed fellatio with other men or who had anal sex, a man with mutilated or defective sexual organs, a man who produces only female children, or finally, a

hermaphrodite. When a culture does not want to confront an issue, it provides a haze of obfuscating terms that can be used for a wide range of pejorative purposes; *klība* is such a term (Doniger in Shulman ed. 2002: 65).

5.1 Androgyny in the *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata* narrates numerous instances of androgyny. Those instances are varied and incorporate the loss of masculinity, male pregnancy and union of male and female. But in most cases the androgyne is primarily one who due to certain intervention loses his masculinity or is bestowed with feminine features. The transformation is caused either by boon or curse, mostly curse, or the male is a masquerade. Instances where the female is transformed into male are rare, as in the case of Śikhaṇḍin(ī). Many of the androgynies of the *Mahābhārata* are also found in the Brāhmaṇas and Purāṇas. The example of Ila, changing his sex every month, is an interesting example of alternating androgyny. The accounts of Yuvanāśva, Śukra and Kaca are instances of male pregnancy. The more central figures of the *Mahābhārata* also underwent either loss of masculinity or cross-dressing. Arjuna in the Virāṭa Parva acts as a eunuch, who teaches dance and music to the daughter of king Virāṭa. Bhīma before killing Kīcaka dresses up as Draupadī. Moreover, Śikhaṇḍin(ī) who is born as female, transforms herself to male, through the grace of a Yakṣa, and becomes the cause of the defeat of Bhīṣma. The androgyne formed by the union of male and female as in the case of Ardhanārīśvara is not found in the *Mahābhārata*. However, the account of Janaka and Sulabhā can be said to approximate such a union. Sulabhā through her Yogic powers enters the body of Janaka and discusses about the knowledge of emancipation. Androgyny in the *Mahābhārata* though diverse, can be seen as divided into two distinct patterns – one representing eroticism and death and the other fertility and immortality.

5.2 Bṛhannalā

During his stay in heaven, Arjuna was cursed that he would lose his masculinity forever. The reason behind such a curse was his refusal to unite with Urvaśī, who was overpowered by the

god of love and desired Arjuna. However, by the efforts of Indra, his father, the curse of Arjuna was diluted to a period of a year only. During the year of disguise when the Pāṇḍava took shelter at the court of Virāṭa, Arjuna dressed himself as a eunuch. He was appointed as a dance teacher of the princess Uttarā. The description of Arjuna/Bṛhannalā that the Mahābhārata provides is more of a cross dresser. Even after dressing as a eunuch, it becomes difficult for the onlooker to consider him so. Bṛhannalā is described thus:

Next appeared at the gate of the ramparts another person of enormous size and exquisite beauty decked in the ornaments of women, and wearing large ear-rings and beautiful conch-bracelets overlaid with gold. And that mighty-armed individual with long and abundant hair floating about his neck, resembled an elephant in gait. And shaking the very earth with his tread, he approached Virāṭa and stood at his court (Ganguli, Virat Parva, Sec. XI p.18).

Here Bṛhannalā seems more as a cross-dresser, rather than one who is sexually transformed. In spite of wearing the ornaments of women, the large ear-rings and conch bracelets, his masculinity could not be hidden. And his gait was not feminine, it resembled the gait of an elephant. However, the epithet gait of an elephant can be ambiguous too. In the Brahmanical literature the woman is often compared with Gajagāminī that is one whose gait is comparable with that of the elephant. However king Virāṭa hardly had any doubt that Bṛhannalā was a cross dresser. He said:

Possessed of great strength, thou art like unto a celestial, and young and of darkish hue, thou resembles the leader of a herd of elephants. Wearing conch-bracelets overlaid with gold, a braid, and ear-rings, thou shinest yet like one amongst those that riding on chariots wander about equipped with mail and bow and arrows and decked with garlands and fine hair (ibid p.18).

He was so certain that Arjuna was male that he wished to adopt him as his son and make him the king of the Matsya Kingdom. But Arjuna claimed that he is either a son or daughter without a father or mother (*sutaṃ sutāṃ vā pitṛmātrvarjitām*). The Mahābhārata indicated the bodily

transformation of Arjuna in only one instance and that too vaguely. The king and his ministers were still doubtful about Arjuna's gender and thought of examining him by women. The women confirmed that Arjuna's impotency was of permanent nature (*apumstvam sthiram*). Apart from this vague reference, the *Mahābhārata* consistently depicts the masculine features of Bṛhannalā in contrast to his feminine dress and ornaments. Doniger considers Bṛhannalā as a

Paper-thin masquerade, meant to be funny, because we all *know* how virile he is; Arjuna is, in effect, mimicking a drag queen. His assumed name is a phallic joke ("Big-reed," Bṛhannalā), and there are lots of jokes about his big hairy arms; in fact, Arjuna argues that women's clothing is the only thing that will disguise the bowstring scars on both of his arms, which would otherwise reveal his identity as the world's greatest ambidextrous archer (Doniger 1999: 281).

Hiltebeitel had compared Arjuna with the Śiva. Among the ten names that Arjuna explained to a bewildered Uttarā 'savyasācin' was one of them. This epithet signified his efficiency in using both the left and right hands for archery, considered to be a remarkable achievement in the *Mahābhārata*. Hiltebeitel has analysed the use of this epithet 'savyasācin' as another marker of Arjuna's identification with Śiva (Hiltebeitel 1984: 25) as it means a equilibrium between both the right (i.e. male) and left (i.e. female) part of the body. This highlights the androgynous character of Arjuna. However, the androgynes in the *Mahābhārata* do not have as much theological import as Śiva.

Unlike in the instance of Bhīma, Śikhaṇḍin(ī) or Sambhā, Arjuna as a eunuch is a rather harmless figure, engaged as a dance-master of the princess. However, the reason for Arjuna becoming a eunuch is erotic. The celestial courtesan Urvaśī fell in love with Arjuna and propositioned him, but he said she was like a mother to him and clapped his hands and ears. Furious, the spurned nymph gave him a curse to be a dancer among women, devoid of honor, regarded as an impotent man (*Klība*). Urvaśī was not literally his mother, but one of his ancestors. Kakar describes this episode as the child's fantasy about the 'bad mother'.

As described in the Mahābhārata, the episode has a dreamlike quality. It begins with the child's pleasurable feeling of wonderment at his mother's beauty and his desire for her presence, a tender expectancy which changes into its opposite – anxiety about his inadequacy of fulfilling her sexual needs. The conflict is resolved through a self-castration which appeases the mother (Kakar 1978: 96).

The erotic aspect of this account is evident, and Arjuna's refusal to Urvaśī's desires, is fatal for him, he ends up losing his masculinity permanently. But only by the intervention of Indra, a father figure, he is relieved from the curse, partially, and he turned the curse into a benefit, that would help Arjuna during his year of disguise.

5.3 Kīcaka Vadha

The Pāṇḍavas were living in disguise in the Palace of Matsya. It was their thirteenth year and the period of exile was about to end. But their ails were not yet over. Kīcaka's¹ lustful eyes fell on Draupadī. He was afflicted with the shafts of kāma, and desired to possess her. And burning with desire's flame (*kāmāgnisamtaptah*) he talked about her:

This damsel maddens me with her beauty, even as wine maddens one with its fragrance [...] Tell me, who this graceful and captivating lady possessed of the beauty of a goddess (*devarūpā*), and whose she is, and whence she hath come. Surely, grinding my heart she hath reduced me to subjection (*cittam hi nirmathya karoti mām vaśe*). It seems to me that (save her) there is no other medicine for my illness (*na cānyad atrauṣadham adya me matam*). Let her rule over me and whatever is mine (*praśāstu mām yac ca mamāsti kim cana*) (Ganguli, Virāṭa Parva, Sec. XIV, p. 23)

Kīcaka's lustful praises, although put forward in poetic terms, has an inherent masochistic desire. He compared Draupadī with a goddess (though it could be a mere poetic gloss) and already

¹ Kīcaka, the commander general of Virāṭa's forces, was the brother of Sudeṣṇā and thus the brother-in-law of the Matsya king. The term Kīcaka also means hollow bamboo and has phallic connotations.

considered himself to be reduced to her subjection (*Karoti mām vaśe*). Further he desired her to rule over him. Draupadī's repeated reminders that such a union will be fatal probably fuelled Kīcaka's longing for death. Draupadī warned Kīcaka by saying:

Do not, O son of a Suta, act so foolishly and do not throw away thy life. Know that I am protected by my five husbands. Even if thou enterest into the interior of the earth, or soarest into the sky, or rushest to the other shore of the ocean, still thou wilt have no escape from the hands of those sky-ranging offspring of gods, capable of grinding all foes. Why dost thou today, O Kichaka, solicit me so persistently even as a sick person wisheth for the night that will put a stop to his existence? (*tvam kālarātrīm iva kaś cid ātura*) O Kichaka, hast thou no sense which leads thee to seek thy good and by which thy life may be saved (ibid p.25).

Kīcaka's desire for Draupadī was a form of Liebestod, where the goddess beheads (symbolically castrates) her consort. Liebestod is a recurring motif in the Purāṇas (Doniger 1980), however in the *Mahābhārata* it is not so evident. Kīcaka's story can be considered as a proto-liebestod motif, where the seeker is annihilated by the instrumentality of the goddess, but not directly. Kīcaka was killed by Bhīma who dresses up as a woman. The background to this cross-dressing is wholly erotic and the results in the death of the lover. Bhīma's cross dressing results in a double shock for Kīcaka: first he was spurned by Draupadī and then the encounter with death. The concept of androgyny in Hindu mythologies is broad and ambiguous. Cross-dressing also forms a part of such androgyny, where the appearance of the body is changed but the memory of the gender remains intact. In fact many of the androgynies in the *Mahābhārata* are mere cross-dressers. Arjuna dresses up as the eunuch Bṛhannalā, teaching song and dance to the daughter of king Virāṭa. Whether he possessed a feminine body is not very clear from the text. Again Sambhā dresses up as a pregnant woman and asks the saint whether she is going to have a son or daughter. The androgyne undergoing bodily change is somewhat rare in the text as in the case of Śikhaṇḍin(ī) and Ilā.

The emasculated nature of her husbands is often indicated by Draupadī, mostly as a means of igniting their masculinity. In the night before the killing of Kīcaka, Draupadī accused Bhīma about their loss of masculinity:

Oh, why do those heroes today, endued as they are with strength and possessed of immeasurable energy, quietly suffer, like eunuchs (*klība*), their dear and chaste wife to be thus insulted by a Suta son? Oh, where is that wrath of theirs, that prowess, and that energy, when they quietly bear their wife to be thus insulted by a wicked wretch? (ibid Sec. XVI p.28)

To avenge the molestation of Draupadī and to prove that he is not a eunuch (*Klība*), Bhīma took the guise of woman, and waited for Kīcaka in the deserted dancing hall. The *Mahābhārata* further depicts Draupadī as the death of Kīcaka, “Death that had assumed the form of Sairandhri” (*sairandhrī rūpiṇaṃ mūḍho mṛtyuṃ taṃ nāvabuddhavān*) “and the beauty of Kīcaka, who was about to forsake his beauty forever, seemed to highten, like the wick of a burning lamp about to expire.” (*ca asya śrīḥ śriyaṃ pramumuḥṣataḥ nirvāṇakāle dīpasya varīm iva didhakṣataḥ*). (ibid Sec. XXII p.40) Finally Kīcaka’s desire for Liebestod was fulfilled by a gory and sadistic death at the hands of Bhīma.

5.4 Śikhaṇḍin(ī)

King Drupada prayed before Lord Śiva for a virile son and not daughter, who could take revenge on Bhīṣma. But Śiva said, that it is ordained by fate that Drupada will have a child who will be both female and male (*strīpumāṃs te bhaviṣyati*). Then Śiva further clarified that his child will first be a woman and then a man (*kanyā bhūtvā pumān bhāvī*). Believing the prophecy of Śiva, Drupada brought up his daughter Śikhaṇḍin(ī), like a son. He performed all the rites ordained for a male child and no one except the king and the queen got to know the secret. Śikhaṇḍin(ī), like a son, was married to the daughter of Hiraṇyavarman, the king of Dāsārṇaka. And some time after the marriage, the wife of Śikhaṇḍin(ī) soon found out that the former was a woman like herself. She bashfully represented this to her nurses and companions and sent emissaries to the king of

Dāśārṇakas. Thereupon Hiraṇyavarman was filled with wrath and threatened war upon the kingdom of Pāncāla (Drupada's kingdom) and drag Drupada and his son out of their palace. Drupada under great trepidation consulted with his wife and ministers. Meanwhile Śikhaṇḍin(ī) came to know that she was the cause of the great anxiety. Out of shame, and great grief she left home and went into a dense forest that was haunted by Yakṣas. And within the forest stood a mansion with high walls and gateway. Entering that mansion, Śikhaṇḍin(ī) began to reduce herself by foregoing food for many days. Thereupon a Yakṣa named Sthūṇākaraṇa, out of compassion, showed himself before her, and enquired about her. After listening to her the Yakṣa offered to exchange his manhood with her womanhood. The Yakṣa said "O blessed lady, for a certain period I will give thee my manhood. Thou must come back to me in due time. I will bear thy womanhood, O princess! Pledge thy truth to me, I will do what is agreeable to thee (Ganguli, Udyoga Parva, Sec CXCIV, P. 368). Having said this they imparted to each other's body their sexes and the Yakṣa became a female and Śikhaṇḍin(ī) obtained the blazing (sic) from the Yakṣa.

Then returning to the palace, Śikhaṇḍin(ī) disclosed everything to Drupada. Drupada sent emissaries to King Hiraṇyavarman that his child was really a male and he could make it clear through witnesses. King Hiraṇyavarman sent a number of young ladies of great beauty for ascertaining the truth and they told the king that Śikhaṇḍin(ī) was a powerful person of the masculine sex. Meanwhile Kubera cursed Sthūṇākaraṇa for the crime of exchanging his sex. He was cursed that until the death of Śikhaṇḍin(ī), he would never regain his masculinity.

In the account of Śikhaṇḍin(ī) the change of sex is complete, with the conversion of both the body and gender. Women were sent to ascertain the sex of Śikhaṇḍin(ī), and they confirmed that he was a male. After this sex change he no longer had to continue as a masquerade dressing up as a man, but became a proper man physically and behaviorally. He was sent to Droṇa to learn the art of the warrior. Similarly Sthūṇākaraṇa was transformed into a female permanently, at least till the death of Śikhaṇḍin(ī). However, both of them were conscious of this sex change.

We can consider this androgyny as erotic and fatal. The purpose of this androgyny was the death of Bhīṣma. The king of Kāsī had three beautiful daughters, Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā. The

king proclaimed a *Svayamvara* to give his daughters in marriage. But the *Svayamvara* was disrupted by Bhīṣma who by sheer force abducted the three princesses for his younger brother Vicitravīrya. However, on his way he was challenged by Śalya, who claimed that Ambā was betrothed to him. In the ensuing battle Bhīṣma defeated Śalya and took the three princesses to Hastināpura. Ambikā and Ambālikā were married to Vicitravīrya, but Ambā steadfastly refused because she loved Śalya. Bhīṣma attempted to undo the wrong by sending her back to king Śalya. But seeing Ambā, Śalya was reminded of his defeat and he refused to accept a maiden won by another prince and turned her away. Ambā returned to Bhīṣma, who took her to Vichitravīrya. But the latter declined to marry her. Then Ambā had to beg Bhīṣma to take her as his bride. But Bhīṣma was already bound by the oath of celibacy and could not marry her. Betrayed and humiliated by everybody, Ambā came to hate Bhīṣma, whom she considered as the sole cause of her misery. She appealed to sage Paraśurāma for help, but after a deadly battle with Bhīṣma the war was eventually stopped by the ancestors of Paraśurāma. Ambā then took to fierce asceticism seeking the destruction of Bhīṣma. Finally Śiva appeared before her and promised her that one day she would bring about the death of Bhīṣma – but not in her present life. She would be reborn as the daughter of the king Drupada of Pāñcāla and obtain manhood to fulfill her mission. She was assured that her desire of revenge on Bhīṣma would be passed on to her new body and that she would remember everything. So, she was born as Śikhaṇḍin(ī) who was a woman but later became a man. But the *Mahābhārata* did not mention whether Śikhaṇḍin(ī) had the remembrance of her previous life as Ambā.

The story of Ambā/Śikhaṇḍin(ī) has some similarity with the story of Bṛhannalā. Arjuna was approached by Urvaśī, whom he considered as his mother (though she was not literally so), and refused to unite with her. The result was the curse and loss of his masculinity and his becoming a eunuch. Here, Ambā approached Bhīṣma for marriage, but Bhīṣma refused as it would amount to the violation of his oath of celibacy. The result was the creation of an androgyne Śikhaṇḍin(ī), who would be the cause of the death of Bhīṣma. Thus both these androgynies are fatal and have an erotic undertone.

5.5 The Story of Kaca

The gods and the dānavas were fighting for the sovereignty over the three worlds. The gods, from the desire of victory, installed Bṛhaspati as their priest while the dānavas installed Śukra for the same purpose. Śukra possessed a special knowledge, the formula of reviving the dead. Whenever, the dānavas were slain in battle, Śukra used to revive them through his knowledge. Now, the gods were in great trouble, because Bṛhaspati could not revive the celestials who were slain by the asuras as he did not have the knowledge of *Sañjīvanī*. Probably this was the era before the Gods got hold of *amṛta* and became immortal. The threat of death was quite real for the Gods then. The gods approached Kaca, the son of Bṛhaspati, and asked him to become a disciple of Śukra, so that he could gain the knowledge of *Sañjīvanī*. Meanwhile by gratifying Devayānī, the daughter of Śukra, by his conduct of liberality and sweetness, he could obtain that knowledge. Accepting the request of the Gods, Kaca went to the capital of the asuras and met Śukra. Śukra welcomed him and made him his disciple:

Kacha began to conciliate regardfully both his preceptor and (his daughter) Devayānī. Indeed, he began to conciliate both. And as he was young, by singing and dancing and playing on different kinds of instruments, he soon gratified Devayānī who was herself in her youth. And, O Bharata, with his whole heart set upon it, he soon gratified the maiden Devayānī who was then a young lady, by presents of flowers and fruits and services rendered with alacrity. (Ganguli, Adi Parva, Sec. LXXVI p.167).

Five hundred years passed when the dānavas came to know about Kaca's intention. One day the dānavas slew Kaca and hacked his body into pieces and gave them to be devoured by the jackals and wolves. In the evening when Kaca did not return, Devayānī suspected that he must have been killed, and pleaded before her father Śukra to revive him. Hearing this from her daughter Śukra said "let this one come" and Kaca reappeared. Kaca was killed by the dānavas a number of times and each time he was revived by Śukra. Finally the dānavas hit upon a plan. The dānavas slayed Kaca again and burning him into ashes, they gave those ashes to the preceptor himself, mixing them with wine.

Now this was a complex scenario: if Śukra was to revive Kaca, then the former had to die, as he would forcefully come out of his body. But Devayānī pleaded that she would starve herself to death if Śukra did not revive him. But when Śukra summoned him, Kaca replied from inside his stomach and was afraid that if he ripped open his preceptor's stomach then Śukra would certainly die. Śukra then granted him the knowledge of *Sañjīvanī* so that after coming out Kaca could revive him. Accordingly Kaca ripped open his stomach and found his preceptor lying like a heap of penances. Kaca then revived him through the science that he had learnt.

This is an instance of male pregnancy where the male is taking up the female function. By coming out from the stomach of Śukra, Kaca indeed becomes his son and this is acknowledged by both Śukra and Kaca. Before reviving him from his stomach Śukra said

Start thou life as my son. And possessed of the knowledge received from me, and revived by me, take care that, on coming out of my body, thou dost act gracefully
(ibid. Shanti Parva, Sec. LXXVI, p. 169).

Kaca also after coming out of Śukra's body regarded him as both his father and mother. After the expiry of Kaca's period of Brahmacharya, when Devayānī wished to marry him, Kaca replied, "Full of virtuous resolves, O large-eyed one, of face as handsome, as moon, the place where thou hadst resided viz., the body of Kavya (Śukra), hath also been my abode. Thou art truly my sister." (ibid p. 170)

Śukra thus becomes an androgyne who takes over the function of female and becomes both the mother and father of Kaca. We can consider this androgyne as fertile as it leads to immortality for the gods. Kaca remaining inside the stomach of Śukra, got the knowledge of *Sañjīvanī*. Kaca also says that he considers Śukra as his mother and father because he has poured the nectar of knowledge into his ears, who was devoid of knowledge. There are certain interconnections between immortality, knowledge and fertility. A fertile union can lead to immortality and knowledge. In the Janaka Sulabhā story (discussed below) we find a fertile union that leads to the knowledge of immortality. The pregnancy of Śukra can be considered as a fertile androgyny

as it leads to pleasing consequences for the Gods, they gained the Knowledge of Sañjīvanī, a form of immortality, and both Śukra and Kaca were revived after their death.

Male pregnancy is quite recurrent in the life story of Śukra. Śukra got his name for being reborn from the urethra of Śiva. Śiva out of anger consumed Śukra, who remained within his stomach for thousands of years. Then after much prayer and pleading Śiva allowed him to go out from his urethra. Parvati accepted Śukra as her son, and stopped Śiva from killing Śukra. She argued that anyone who comes out through Śiva's body is her son.

5.6 Janaka and Sulabhā

In the Satya Yuga, a woman of the name Sulabhā, was endowed with yogic powers and wandered all over the earth. She came to hear about the king Dharmadhvaja of the Janaka's lineage, who was devoted to the knowledge of emancipation (*mokṣaśāstre*). Janaka was renowned in the three worlds for his attainments in the path of emancipation, in spite of being a king and bearing all the entanglements of worldly life. Hearing about his fame Sulabhā wished to meet him and have a personal interview. She abandoned her body that was emaciated through ascetic penance and assumed an unrivalled beauty of faultless features (*anavadyāṅgī rūpam anyad anuttamam*). In the twinkle of an eye, the lotus eyed lady appeared before the court of Janaka. The king was bewildered by her magnificence and welcomed and gratified her with excellent refreshments. Sulabhā, though gratified by the king's humility, was doubtful about his adherence to the religion of emancipation (*mokṣadharmā*):

Sulabhā, endued with yoga-power, entered the understanding of the king by her own understanding. Restraining, by means of the rays of light that emanated from her own eyes, the rays issuing from the eyes of the king, the lady, desirous of ascertaining truth, bound up king Janaka with yoga bonds. King Janaka and Sulabhā then staying within same form (*ekasminn adhiṣṭhāne samvādah*

Mbh.12.308.19) conversed with each other (Ganguli, Shanti Parva, Sec. CCCXXI, p. 57).

Through her yogic powers Sulabhā entered the body of Janaka (for the process of this entry see chapter 3). Within the same body both Janaka and Sulabhā resided, conversing with each other. This represents another form of androgyne where two persons male and female are residing within the same body. This kind of androgyne is rare in the *Mahābhārata*, where we find the androgyne created mostly by either acquiring some of the feminine features like pregnancy, or through cross-dressing or by the loss of masculinity. However androgyny which is a union of two separate persons – male and female is predominant in the mythologies of Śiva. Śiva unites with Pārvati to form the Ardhanārīśvara, the Lord who is half woman, in order to satiate his desire. The Ardhanārīśvara is the union of the bodies, but both did not forget their individual selves. Similarly in the union of Janaka and Sulabhā, though the body got united, they did not lose their individual identities. Janaka and Sulabhā remained as two distinct personalities engaging in conversation and antagonistic to each other. Sulabhā's entry into the body of Janaka was a form of sexual union where the two became bodily indistinguishable but in terms of gendered selves they remained separate and antagonistic.

Janaka was very uneasy about this conversation especially her abrupt entry into his body without any regard for his consent. He started recounting the faults that Sulabhā caused by entering into his body. Janaka argued, that without providing her identity it is not proper for her to question him about his knowledge of scriptures:

What course of conduct art thou devoted? Whose art thou? Whence hast thou come? After finishing thy business here, whither wilt thou go? No one can without question, ascertain another's acquaintance with the scriptures, or age, or order of birth (ibid p.58).

Janaka considered her act of entering into his body to be highly improper and he pointed out the following grave transgressions. First was the transgression of caste. Janaka considered her to be belonging to the brahmana caste and he was a kṣatriya. There should not be any union between

Brāhmaṇa and Kṣatriya, Janaka argued, as such a union leads to intermixture of castes (*varṇasaṃkaram*). Janaka considered her entry into his body as a form of union. Again she belonged to the ascetic mode of life and he belonged to the domestic mode of life. She had therefore committed an evil by producing an unnatural union of two modes of life. Further, he did not know her gotra nor did she knew his. If both belonged to the same gotra then by entering into his body she had committed the evil of unnatural union (*gotra saṃkaraḥ*). If her husband was alive then by uniting with him she has caused an immoral and unlawful act.

Janaka sees her entry into his body as a sexual act or more solemnly a sexual transgression. She has supposedly broken several injunctions. The gravest among them was the transgression of caste boundaries. She being a brāhmaṇa united with a Kṣatriya king, which results into *varnasamkara*. Further, they did not know each other's gotra and if they were of the same gotra then their union was incestuous. The division of asceticism and domesticity, which is one of the fulcrums of the Brahmanical worldview, collapsed as a result of this union. She who belonged to the ascetic mode of life united with one who is in the domestic mode which had led to an unnatural union. Further, if her husband was alive and living far away then this act of her was immoral and unlawful. The list of the transgressions indicates that this androgyny was an erotic union that gets associated with all the criteria of evil, transgression, fatal etc. These features are brought out more candidly in the next bit of admonitions by Janaka.

By endeavoring to show her own superiority, Janaka argued, she has displayed the traits of a wicked woman (*duṣṭāyā lakṣayate liṅgam*).² She is stupefied by the pride of her yogic powers, and the union that she has caused is a union between nectar and poison (*viṣāṃṛta*). The union where the man and woman covet each other, is as sweet as nectar. But in the union between man and woman where the woman fails to obtain the consent of the man, is as noxious as poison (*viṣopamah*). “Do not continue to touch me” Janaka squirmed, “know that I am righteous (*sādhu*). Do thou act according to thy own scriptures” (ibid. 62).

² Liṅgam means the sign, it can mean the sign of gender also. However here the word *lakṣayate* is already used which means sign. So liṅgam would connote the gender of the person.

Janaka considers this form of androgyny as undoubtedly an erotic one – a fatal union that transgresses all the scriptural norms and is bound to generate poison. Janaka considers himself as a righteous person while in her the signs of a wicked woman are apparent. This union has resulted in the union of nectar and poison. Janaka classifies the union with the predominant classification of woman and androgyne. A woman is either fertile, benevolent and motherly or she can be erotic, malevolent and destructive. Similarly the androgyne can also have these two possibilities – it can be fertile where the desires are satiated or it can be erotic or fatal that is the result of some kind of evil. Janaka compares these two forms with nectar (*amṛta*) that grants immortality and the other with poison (*viṣa*) that is fatal. The union where both man and woman consent is as sweet as nectar (*amṛtopamah*) but where the man does not consent the union is as noxious as poison (*viṣopamah*). The second instance bears the image of the aggressive woman - the *vagina dentata*.

However, Sulabhā listened to all these admonitions patiently. Bhīṣma said that she was not at all abashed. Then she replied with words that were even more beautiful than her. After a long discourse on Samkhya, she comes to the ideas of gender, body, soul and *mokṣa*:

Sulabhā argued “As thou thyself seest thy own body in thy body and as thou thouself seest thy soul in thy own soul, why is it that thou dost not see thy own body thy own soul in the bodies and souls of other? If it is true that thou seest an identity with thyself and others, why then didst thou ask me who I am and whose? If it is true thou hast, O king been freed from the knowledge of duality (*dvandvair muktasya*) that erroneously says – this is mine and this other is not mine, then what use is there with such questions as who art thou, whose art thou and whence dost thou come? What indications of emancipation (*muktalakṣaṇam*) can be said to occur ...?” (ibid p. 67)

Now, she continued her admonition. Janaka was a pretender. He was unworthy of emancipation. With so many faults he does not deserve to be emancipated.

Janaka claimed to have transcended the pair of opposites (*dvandvair muktasya*) – a phrase often used in the *Mahābhārata* meaning the transcendence of all dichotomies and divisions, thereby attaining the knowledge of unity. However his claim is rather bookish (or scriptural) without the realization of it. He continues to distinguish between him and the others, between male and female, between brāhmaṇa and kṣatriya, and between *gotras*. His claims of mokṣa-hood is shaken when Sulabhā enters into his body. An emancipated being does not distinguish, s/he can perceive (which Sulabhā says beholding in one’s own soul) everything with one’s own soul and all distinction between the self and the other collapses. Janaka was more bothered with scriptural prescriptions which we can say *dharma*³. The dharma that tends towards liberation (*mokṣa*) was not part of his realization. The clash between these two “*dharmas*” often forms part of the major dilemmas in the *Mahābhārata*, and the solution to them is often tricky. However in this account Sulabhā demolished his false claims, his pride with the knowledge in *dharma* with that is only scriptural.

This form of union, that Janaka considers as erotic, was indeed fertile in its consequences. It helped Janaka to be conscious of his limitations, and demolished the pride about his knowledge. The *Mahābhārata* says that Janaka could not answer Sulabhā’s arguments. This was a testimony of his defeat, or he was so overawed by her logic that he could not reply back. This could be seen as a move for Janaka from the false notions of *mokṣa*, and his journey in the true path of emancipation (although the *Mahābhārata* does not mention it directly). Such a possibility indeed points to the fertile aspect of this union or androgyny, which though initially seemed erotic. Further, Janaka in his own words considered himself infertile, though by it he claimed to be inert and beyond the influence of desires.

Janaka claimed that in this life itself he had transcended all attachments. Just as the soil that is saturated and softened by water is fit for the germination of the seed, similarly rebirth is the result of a man possessed by desire. But Janaka is like a seed that is fried (*cottāpitam bījam*), which is now unable to sprout forth though the capacity for sprouting was there. His understanding has been freed from the productive principle called desire (*rāgadoṣah*).

³ For more discussion on the two kinds of dharma see Chapter two p. 21.

Janaka considers himself as *abīja*, one who is not fertile to germinate. He considers himself to be so enlightened by the aura of knowledge that he no longer has any desire, the desire that causes one to be reborn. But the account shows that he was devoid of such knowledge and was still entangled in the notion of duality (*dvandva*). Janaka's claim of being *abīja*, is a pun which emphasizes his infertility and lack of knowledge. However the union with Sulabhā made him aware of this pretensions, and thus we can consider it as a fertile form of androgyny.

However there are several ambiguities about the nature of this androgyny. Janaka was initially certain that it was a sexual, erotic and dangerous kind of union. But it turned out to be a fertile one when he realized his own follies. But from Sulabhā's perspective it was a union between two sexes but not a sexual one. She argues:

If it be true that thou met been emancipated from all bonds, what harm have I done thee by entering thy person with only my intellect? ... I have not touched thee, O King, with my hands, of arms, or feet, or thighs, O sinless one, or with any part of the body (ibid p70).

Thus bodily contact was avoided and so she considered it not to be a sexual union. In the same breath Sulabhā continues, it was highly improper for Janaka to consider this union as sexual and publishing it before the entire court:

It was not proper for thee to proclaim before these foremost of men the fact of this congress between two person of opposite sexes (*stripumso samavayo*), if, indeed, thou art really acquainted with the rules of propriety in respect of speech. O king of Mithila, I am staying in thee without touching thee at all even like a drop of water on a lotus leaf that stays on it without drenching it in the least. (ibid p 70)

Though it was a union of two opposite sexes (*stripumso samavayo*), it was asexual as she stayed within his body without touching him just as a drop water stays on the lotus leaf but without drenching it – an analogy used frequently in Brahmanical theological texts. However, this union was not devoid of sexual metaphors. When, Janaka was completely out of words, Sulabhā finally proposed

As a person of mendicant order resides for only one night in an empty house, even after the same manner I shall reside one night in thy person (which, as I have already said, is like an empty chamber, being destitute of knowledge), and having slept this one night in thy person, O ruler of Mithila, which is as it were my own chamber now, tomorrow I shall depart (ibid. p. 72).

Although ripe with the sexual motif of sleeping together in the same person, Sulabhā instantaneously clarifies that his person is after all empty (*śūnya*) and having slept one night she will leave the next day. Thus the androgyne created in this union is quite complicated. Here although the bodies become one containing the understanding of both Janaka and Sulabhā, it is not created by the union of two psychical bodies. Further neither Janaka nor Sulabhā forget their identity as they were engaged in conversation. The categories of fertile and erotic also become ambiguous in this context. Janaka complains of the union being erotic and dangerous. While Sulabhā argues that there was no sexual contact involved and the union was indeed a fertile one as it enlightened Janaka of his fallacies of knowledge.

The accounts of androgyny can be seen as following two particular motifs. Either it emphasizes the fertile aspect of the androgyny which leads to immortality, or it highlights erotic transformation which ultimately leads to death. The division of androgyny is somewhat similar to the division of women in Brahmanical mythology. The woman is either the mother who nurtures the male, or she is the erotic, sexually aggressive woman who drains away the vitality of the male. A similar division found in the androgyny where the transformation of the man happens mostly through the influence of woman. And such a transformation has mostly some erotic cause and results in the fatal end of the male or the loss of his masculinity. Thus the account of Bṛhannalā where Arjuna has to pass a year like a eunuch is an instance of erotic union where the male loses his masculinity. In the Kīcaka Vadha Parva Bhīma dresses up as a woman and kills Kīcaka. Here though Bhīma's cross dressing was not the result of an erotic union, the

story has strong erotic undertones and ends up in the death of Kīcaka. Further, the death of Bhīṣma was caused by Shikhandī, an androgyne created due to Bhīṣma's incapability to marry Ambā. The erotic androgynies are inevitably fatal. The *Mahābhārata* also depicts fertile androgynies but the balance is shifted more towards the erotic. The fertile androgynies are related to giving birth and immortality. The story of Śukra where he unknowingly consumed Kaca and then give him rebirth by ripping open his stomach is an example of the fertile androgyne. Before the rebirth he gives the knowledge of reviving the dead (*Sañjīvanī*) to Kaca which would finally establish the supremacy of the gods. Further, the entry of Sulabhā into the body of Janaka also forms an androgyne which finally turns out to be fertile. Initially there was ambiguity about the nature of this union, as Janaka thought that her entry into his body is reviling the customs. However, from Sulabhā's perspective this was a non-erotic and fertile union. It was only through interacting with her that Janaka realized his lack of knowledge of immortality. This can be considered as the first step towards his knowledge in emancipation, as his pride of knowledge was broken and he came to accept his ignorance. Thus, whether an androgyne is erotic or fertile is determined by the perspective. For instance, the Purāṇas see the Ardhanārīśvara as a union of Śiva and Pārvatī where they are so close that desire is not satisfied. But in Tantra the same figure is seen as an epitome of ultimate satisfaction and a fertile union. Similarly, we can see the perspective differs in the Janaka Sulabhā story. Janaka considers it to be erotic, while Sulabhā proves it to be a fertile union. However, as mentioned earlier, most of the androgynies are of erotic nature and result in the death of a male or loss of his masculinity.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

Studies in masculinity came up in correlation with gender studies and the feminist movement. From the late eighties of the twentieth century, works on masculinity began to get published. For an early beginning of masculinity studies, the works of Connell become important (Connell 1987). Prior to him, works on masculinity were either regressive, exhorting the old biological model or a concern for the psychoanalysts. Connell's thesis of 'hegemonic masculinity' highlighted the interaction between the ideals of masculinity with social realities like capitalism, imperialism and other forms of dominance. 'Hegemonic masculinity' was further empirically analysed in the works of Mosse (Mosse 1996) where he charted the evolution of European masculinity from late medieval to post colonial modernity. The nineties saw the flourish of writings on men in diverse themes like education, sports, war, and family along with a spread of masculinity studies in Europe, Latin America, Australia and the Arab World. In South Asia several works on masculinity were written but those were mostly concerned with modern and contemporary India (Sinha 1995; Chopra, Osella and Osella ed. 2004; Srivastava 2006). Works on Pre-modern masculinity in India had been very rare. Masculinity is not a direct concern in any works on ancient Indian history. There has been occasional reference to masculinity in some works but the ideologies and contestations within masculinity was never the prime concern. In this dissertation I have focused on the ideals, dilemmas and contestations within masculinity and also the motifs that represent it.

However, unlike works on modernity, works on the ancient period faces a unique difficulty. In the modern period the meta-narratives are stable, they can either be imperialism, nationalism or post-coloniality, but among the scholars of ancient India there is no unanimous answer to what is the meta-narrative. Nevertheless, that does not mean the non existence of any meta-narrative in the ancient period, but they were simply fuzzier, less stable and more contested. The clear demarcation of a meta-narrative helps in locating gender theories within it, but the fuzziness of

the meta-narrative makes the understanding of gender relations a bit difficult. In order to locate the meta-narrative I had included a section on the search for the meta-narrative in the Introduction (Chapter one). Several attempts have been made by Scholars to delineate the ‘structure’ of the ancient Indian world view. But there has always been a problem with structuralist assumptions – the structure gets so solidified, that it becomes difficult to explain ‘changes’ with time. Similar difficulty arises when we focus on the structure of the ancient Indian world view. However, another problem of Brahmanical texts is the impossibility of precisely dating them and separating the interpolations of different periods. This makes the Brahmanical texts like the *Mahābhārata* an encyclopedia of myriad ideologies from different periods. As a result, understanding the precise nature of the meta-narrative gets complicated. Nevertheless, I have included certain structures to understand the construction of masculinity.

The first chapter deals with the ideals and dilemmas of man and the structure used is the ideal of the *Puruṣārtha*. The *Puruṣārtha* includes four goals of man – *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. The four ideals often contradict and create dilemmas. The three principal characters of the *Mahābhārata* – Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Bhīma each represent the ideal of *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* respectively. The ideologies and actions of these three Pāṇḍavas reflect these three ideals and the debates among them can be interpreted through the ideals of *Puruṣārtha*. Further, whenever one fails to live up to these ideals one is considered a eunuch (*klība*). The *Mahābhārata* jostles with resolving this dilemma of manly duties and brings forth multiple ways of solving it. The second chapter deals with the body and masculinity. The ideas on ‘body’ in the Brahmanical literature are so diverse that it’s difficult to locate any structure in it. One can only give a general statement that unlike the western ‘body’, bodies in Brahmanical texts were rather fluid. Here, I had dealt with the bodies of two heroic figures – Arjuna’s body and the universal form of Kṛṣṇa. Arjuna’s body bears the signature of his virility, similarly Kṛṣṇa too bears his divinity in his normal form (*saumya rūpa*). However Kṛṣṇa is also considered as the best of men (*puruṣottama*) and the eternal male being (*sanātana puruṣa*). Kṛṣṇa in his universal form traverses all limitations and contradiction. The *Mahābhārata* shows him to encompass the whole universe in his body. The two conceptions of the bodies are very different and here I had included them to show the difference in the imagery of heroic bodies. The construction of

masculinity is also related to the motifs that are used to enhance or subdue it. So the next chapter deals with sexual motifs. The motifs of masculinity are integrally related to the feminine or feminine principles. The female in the Brahmanical world view is split into the fertile and the erotic. When man comes in contact with the fertile woman he attains virility and immortality but he either dies or gets emasculated if he comes under the influence of the erotic woman. The last chapter deals with the idea of androgyny. In Brahmanical literature several categories are clubbed together within the word *klība*. The *Mahābhārata* depicts several kinds of androgyny. The concept of androgyny is closely related to masculinity as in most cases it is the man who becomes the androgyne. The androgyne in this chapter is divided into two categories – the fertile and the erotic/fatal. The fertile androgyne moves towards immortality whereas the fatal androgyne moves towards emasculation or death.

In the analysis of masculinity I have assumed certain structures in Brahmanical thought like the emphasis on *Puruṣārtha* and the splitting of the woman into the fertile and the erotic. However, these are not always very concrete, but can nevertheless help us in understanding the construction of masculinity and decode the dilemmas and anxieties of man within the *Mahābhārata*.

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