

Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Characteristics of Duryodhana and Karna in
The Mahabharata



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Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Characteristics of Duryodhana and Karna in *The Mahabharata*

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgment of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nafiur Rahman', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to the future scholars whose enthusiasm, passion and curiosity regarding South Asian literature will continue to illuminate the rich and complex narratives of this region. May this research act as a milestone for extensive research of the vibrant history, culture and tradition and inspire scholars in studying the timeless texts of the subcontinent. I offer this research as a humble contribution to those who are keen to know about the human psychological conditions and emotions that can be found in the ancient texts and foster a greater appreciation for the timeless wisdom embedded in South Asian epics.

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Abstract

In the cultural and historical studies of ancient India, the concept of *Karma* and *Dharma* has played an essential role. Using this key concept, this study investigates the psychology of the characters, Duryodhana and Karna from *The Mahabharata* and how it influenced their decisions. Despite the numerous studies on the epic, little was found on the implicit factors that could have played an essential role in the development of their personalities and the events that lead to the war of *Kurukshetra*. The characters Duryodhana and Karna have been analyzed using the Psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Unlike past studies which have consulted to the broader themes like domestic violence, revenge and political powerplay, this study delves into intangible factors such as trauma, hatred, malice and other emotional extremes deriving from a troubled psychological condition to investigate these characters. Furthermore, this study addresses how the class system and entitlement impacted the psychology and relationship of Duryodhana and Karna in *The Mahabharata*.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, ethical and moral values, identity crisis, trauma, ordeal.

Psychoanalytic Investigation of the Characteristics of Duryodhana and Karna in *The Mahabharata*

Chapter 1

Introduction

“A classic does not simply belong to its own time. The very definition of a classic implies the recognition that it speaks to all age, despite the complex ways in which it relates to and reflects the specific circumstances of the world in which it originated. A classic work must carry within itself the potentialities for relevance to the future generations of researchers in different cultural contexts.”

(Rajan 27)

1.1 Backstory:

The Mahabharata is one of the most ancient epics of the Indian Subcontinent which was written by Vyasa. Vyasa's *Mahabharata* which was originally written in Sanskrit language and later translated into various languages which has been a key interest for researchers involved in the study of historical, cultural, social and political structures of ancient India. The epic of *The Mahabharata* has proven to be a crucial reference to the Indian subcontinent as it has the essence of ethical, moral and political practices that are still followed in the 21st century. With the help of

psychoanalytic studies and observations, this study has addressed Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of The Mahabharata* and specifically the deeply conflicted characters Duryodhana and Karna.

“No society can exist without myth as it creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad,
heaven and hell, rights and duties”

Devdutt Pattanaik

Among other publications of Devdutt Pattanaik, a writer based in Mumbai India, his approach towards *The Mahabharata* is considered as unique because of his unconventional view that is evident through his narrative style. His works delve into the relevance of mythology in the modern times in areas of governance, leadership, ethics and strategy. Pattanaik delves into the events and brings out the minute details in focus and explains how they have crucially engineered the major events such as the pivotal conflict in *The Mahabharata*. Thus, the researcher explores the implicit factors that are crucial to understand the psychology of certain characters.

In ancient India, the class system has been an intriguing factor that influenced a large proportion of the population and the situation persists today. The society was divided into a four-part *varna* (caste) system which was defined through occupation and lineage: *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmins*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. This partition of the society set the tasks and assigned them to the people in which they had to spend their everyday discourses. For example, the *Kashatriyas* were usually the people from the warrior caste who performed the administrative and war tactics.

Brahmins being the priestly class performed the religious rituals such as conducting *yagnas* and reciting *vedas*. *Vaishyas* were the ones engaged in farming, trading and artistic activities and the *Shudras* being the lowest were considered as the ‘untouchables’, carrying out activities of minimal reputation. The belief in this ancient caste system of India ensured that no one was allowed to perform activities of the different castes and considered it as a punishable act. As a result, people from the lowest level, the *Shudras* were the ones who faced most oppression and marginalization. Eventually, this tradition slowly introduced the *Shudras* as the ‘outcastes’ to the society making them a burden for the people from the superior castes. The belief that the lower class or the laboring class such as the *Shudras* not eligible to perform noble tasks led to a widespread marginalization and discrimination within the society which was justified by the *pandits/Brahmins* (religious scholars) of the contemporary religious structure of *Sanatan*. This paper focuses on the implications of entitlement and the class system that affected the psychology revolving around the characters of Duryodhana and Karna.

Karna was born to the *Pandava* matriarch when Kunti was not married but had a child as a result of a *mantra* (spell) provided by *rishi* Durvasa in return for her hospitality. As a result, to survive from the backlash and outrage from the society, Kunti abandoned her son in the river Ganga with the hope that her son will be brought up in a foster family which eventually came true. Karna was picked up from the river by Adhiratha and Radha (foster parents belonging from the *Shudra* community) who later brought him up. As a result, Karna, not knowing about the truth of his birth, grew up in an oppressed society where he had to face tremendous struggles and losses due to the socio-cultural norms of the society until the aid of a prince from the *Kaurava* clan opposed to the *Pandavas* in his adulthood.

On the other hand, Duryodhana was the eldest son of king Dhritarashtra and was the prince of *Hastinapura*. Despite having the opportunity of living in a palace full of luxuries, Duryodhana was not happy but overwhelmed with hatred for his cousins, the *Pandavas* who ruled in *Indraprastha*. "... people who are unable to leave with their daimon or true self will lack wellbeing and they suffer mentally and physically" (Pallavi 24). Even though Duryodhana was the son of the king, he was not independent in expressing his desires or wishes as he was always compelled to consider sharing his rights with the *Pandavas*. His voice remained unheard to the elders in establishing his importance until his meeting with Karna much later. His friendship with Karna turned out to act like a balm over the psychological lesions of Karna and Duryodhana had the opportunity to exhibit his rights with Karna at his side. This research has addressed these two characters as they were both psychologically traumatized even though their contexts were completely different: Duryodhana perceived a marginalization within his extended family and Karna was oppressed by the wider society. With references of previous research on *The Mahabharata*, this paper analyzes various events and investigates the emotional turmoil that they have faced.

1.2 What is Psychoanalysis?



Maslow's hierarchy of needs

American psychologist Abraham Maslow's triangular theory has assisted the researcher in identifying and establishing the importance of healthy human relationship. According to Saul McLeod from the American Psychologist Association, "Deficiency needs arise due to deprivation and are said to motivate people when they are unmet. Also, the motivation to fulfill such needs will become stronger the longer the duration they are denied" (2). The character of Duryodhana has been examined in this context as he faced constant deprivation from his birth rights. Even though his father, Dhritarashtra was the king, Duryodhana could not establish his rights since his birth. According to the ancient Indian customs of India, the son of the king was supposed to be the next king (heir presumptive). Even though Dhritarashtra was older than the king of the *Pandavas*, and Duryodhana, being the eldest son of Dhritarashtra, making him the rightful heir to the throne of *Hastinapura*, he was not declared the heir presumptive and was constantly reminded to share his belongings and the royal property with the *Pandavas*. "... [Dhritarashtra's] legitimate claim to the throne was denied because of his disability, and the title

passed on to his younger brother...” (Dhand 53). Every time Duryodhana asked something for himself and the other Kauravas, he was rejected by reminding him that he does not solely own anything but a part of ownership lies to the *Pandavas*. As a result, Duryodhana grew a sense of contempt towards the *Pandavas* and Shakuni, who soon emerged as a political advisor to the *Kauravas*, took advantage of the situation.

Shakuni who was full of revenge against the *Kuru* clan because of the tragic death of his family by Bhishma for not informing about Gandhari being Manglik (Mars defect: usually considered as a bad sign) before marriage, started to exploit Duryodhana from his childhood. Thus, Shakuni committed to take revenge upon the *Kuru* dynasty and ensure its destruction as the kingdom of *Gandhara* was not self-sufficient in terms of power compared to *Hastinapura*. As a result, he planned strategies to manipulate Duryodhana into loathing towards the *Pandavas* so that a family dispute can arise and their unity is disrupted by the flames of jealousy and hatred. This study investigates the psychological implications of Duryodhana and the underlying reasons behind his actions that eventually led to the war of *Kurukshetra*.

Since verbal communication and the surroundings can essentially impact the development of the thought processing system, the researcher takes into consideration the contexts and the characters who were closely related to the lives of Duryodhana and Karna. Additionally, the concept of *dharma* has also been considered to acknowledge the role and responsibility of the guiding lights of the *Kuru* clan such as Dhritarashtra, Bhishma (grandfather), Dronacharya (royal preceptor) and Vidura (prime minister and paternal uncle) to understand how their choices influenced Duryodhana and Karna. The researcher also explores

their ability to make decisions on their own which resulted in the demise of the two crucial characters of *The Mahabharata*. Unlike other studies on the broader themes, this study aims to provide a different approach for the retelling and interpreting the epic by taking the implicit psychological factors into consideration and contributing to the addition of global knowledge regarding *The Mahabharata*.

However, due to the limitations of the time frame, not all events can be thoroughly examined but will help to boost the existing level of knowledge in the context of literature. The methodology for this study is qualitative and is realized through archival research. This research is conducted by using the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud in reference to Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* to explore the cognitive abilities (attention, memory, logic and processing) of Duryodhana and Karna.

The researcher has used Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory as it effectively addresses the different stages of the mind: conscious and the subconscious. Furthermore, Freud's theory also explains how these levels of the minds can affect each other depending on the existing context. Freud's pioneered theory will also assist the researcher to connect how the extreme human emotions such as hatred, anguish, exasperation and rage influences both the conscious and the subconscious state of mind.

By applying this theory we can examine the thought processing system, desire and internal conflicts of Duryodhana and Karna. For instance, the aggressive behavior of Duryodhana to assert dominance and superiority can be explained as the manifestation of his

subconscious defense mechanism. Due to his insecurity with the Pandavas and desires for validation. Similarly, Karna's inner desire for identity and belonging can be investigated as he struggled for recognition due to his abandonment and ideological conflicts with the society which eventually influenced his interactions with the others.

“When we look at the world through a psychoanalytic lens, we see that it is comprised of individual human beings, each with a psychological history that begins in childhood experiences in the family and each with patterns of adolescent and adult behavior that are the direct result of that early experience” (Tyson 12). The study further explains the reasons and complexities that occurred in the early lives can lead to chaos or conflicts and further contribute to the increasing volume of study regarding *The Mahabharata* and provide a gateway of retelling the epic.

1.3 Research objective:

The purpose of this research is to examine the complex chain of events in reference to the implicit factors to understand how the psychological factors had essentially engineered the connection between the subconscious and the conscious states of mind. Through the portrayal of the connection between the subconscious and the conscious, this research seeks to shed light on the importance of the setting that can play an essential role in intellectual development.

1.4 Research Question:

How did entitlement and the class system impact the psychology and relationship of Duryodhana and Karna in *The Mahabharata*?

1.5 Methodology:

Through archival research this study has been qualitatively conducted with the aid of scholarly materials. This study has implicitly explored *The Mahabharata* through the psychoanalytic lens pioneered by the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud and investigated the lives of Karna and Duryodhana. His theories have been used to explore the psychological condition of Karna and Duryodhana in *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik.

Chapter 2

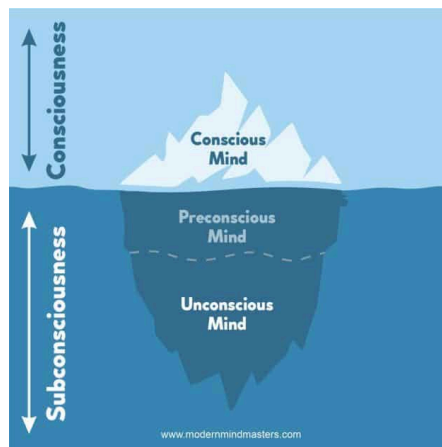
Literature Review

The Mahabharata is one of the most widely studied mythological epics that reflects tradition, moral and ethical beliefs of Ancient India. While the previous research has prioritized domestic violence (*Draupadi Vastraharan*), oath of revenge by the *Pandavas* and the geopolitical complexities (conflicting alliances of the *Kurus* and the *Pandavas*) that contributed to the war of *Kurukshetra*, this paper addresses the psychology of Duryodhana and Karna to understand the development of personality and decipher the reasons behind their choices. Moreover, this paper also considers the concept of *dharma* to unravel their approaches towards life. Unlike previous studies which have mostly focused on the major events, this study highlights the implicit factors that have altered both their conscious and the subconscious. The documents used for this study to validate have been organized thematically.

Regarding the importance of traumatic experiences and their aftermath, Renuka Panchal from the University of Mumbai explored Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to understand the emotional state of Karna in her research "Karnabharam By Bhasa And Psychoanalytic Theory Of Sigmund Freud". According to Panchal, the unconscious mind impacts external desires, suppressed emotions and unfulfilled dreams. Thus, she explored the sad emotional psychic condition of Karna due to his lies for learning from Parasurama, Karna's anguish due to Indra's deceit, his promise to keep Kunti's four sons alive and other events which have been explored in detail in the later chapters. Panchal's scientific approach to understand Karna has been used to

explore how certain events contributed to his journey towards being a great warrior from a traumatized past.

Furthermore, Nitesh Sharma from the Konsole Group studied the extent to which verbal communication can impact psychology in “A Qualitative Analysis of Communication Technique of Sri Krishna and Shakuni with Special Reference to Mahabharata”. Using Sigmund Freud’s model of the mind, Sharma explored the arbitrariness of communication where a word can independently burst into numerous meanings to represent reality. Thus, Sharma implemented the brain model to explore how communication can occur at both conscious and unconscious level that has the ability to influence the transmission of meanings. This model of the brain helps to understand how Shakuni’s words of manipulation influenced not only Duryodhana’s consciousness, but also his unconscious mind.



“The Impact of Childhood Abuse and Neglect on Adult Mental Health: A Prospective Study” is a study done by Horwitz V, et al., on childhood neglect. Their study explains how childhood abuse or neglect can have a long-term effect on the psychology of children, resulting

in permanent depression and anti-social qualities within the personalities of the victimized. Their approach has been modified to understand how childhood neglect resulted in misguided decisions by Duryodhana and Karna that eventually influenced the political instability of ancient India as both Duryodhana and Karna held powerful positions that influenced the wider community.

Furthermore, Cathy Caruth, from Cornell University has explored the traumatic experiences by those who have gone through or witnessed sufferings or pain in the second chapter of her book “Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History”. She has explained how survivors from wars are often subjected to nightmares and used Freud’s trauma theory to analyze how painful events repeat themselves for those who already had similar experiences and how these events are initiated by fate and outside of anyone’s control or wish. Caruth’s view has been used to explain the life of Karna who had to face situations that imprisoned him within his ethical and social dilemma.

On the other hand, Helen Cederman from the University of Canterbury focused on the role and importance of women/motherhood in ancient India in his research “Women in the Mahabharata”. According to her, women are the center of the religious existence where mothers stand for birth, life and liberation. However, Cederman’s paper has been used to explain how Kunti’s abandonment led Karna to fight against his own blood brothers and how Gandhari’s failure to bring her son to the path of peace led Duryodhana to his defeat. Furthermore, Cederman’s paper has also been used to explain the psychological implications of Duryodhana and Karna and their relationship with their mother.

Additionally, Praggnaparamita Biswas from the Asiatic Society, in his paper “Interconnectivity of Marriage, Sexuality and Streedharma: Reflections through the Minor Female Characters of the Mahabharata” also discussed the societal norms and the position of women in ancient India. In reference to *The Mahabharata* Biswas also explained how women were considered low by the society. He explored how certain female characters such as Gandhari and Kunti despite belonging from a royal family were constrained by the social system. Nevertheless, Biswas’s paper has been used to explain the complexities of the situation where Kunti revealed her identity of being the mother to Karna and explore the extent of psychological shock and pain where he refused to fight along with the *Pandavas* against the *Kauravas*. Karna’s shock in knowing his identity of being Kunti’s son has been discussed in the later chapters.

Moreover, in the paper “The Subversive Nature of Virtue in the Mahābhārata: A Tale about Women, Smelly Ascetics, and God”, importance of the father figure has been investigated by Arti Dhand from the University of Toronto. She explained the ancient custom of India known as *niyoga* or levirate. She explored how these processes lead to the birth of Duryodhana’s ancestors and made his father Dhritarashtra blind. Moreover, her paper has been utilized to focus on how Dhritarashtra’s blindness resulted in Duryodhana getting deprived of his rights because of not being the rightful king of *Hastinapura* that resulted in the hatred of the *Kauravas* towards the *Pandavas*. Thus, Dhand’s paper has been used to explain the childhood events that psychologically affected the *Kauravas* since their childhood.

On the other hand, Panguluri Pallavi from GITAM (Deemed to be University), India studied the quality of consciousness that is required to maintain the wellbeing of an individual

mentally and physically in her article, “Psychological Wellbeing Concepts And Hindu Epics-Ramayana And Mahabharata”. According to her, the two broad categories of wellbeing are hedonic (happiness) and eudaimonic (human potential). Pallavi believed that a person who lives according to their true self is the one who is able to maintain their wellbeing. Her paper has been studied to understand the hedonic happiness of Duryodhana who despite having wealth, powerful kings as friends was not satisfied because of the continuous manipulation of Shakuni in plotting against the *Pandavas*.

In addition to the psychological implications, Dharmapada Jena, from the Govt. Jr. College discussed the social impacts of Mahabharata in “Negotiating The Mahabharata as a Trauma Narrative”. He explored through certain events that contributed to the war of *Kurukshetra*. Jena identified the event of Karna’s abandonment; socio-cultural and religious belief system of ancient India and Duryodhana’s trauma due to the death of his vicious warriors which distracted him from logical approach. However, Jena’s paper also portrays the limitations of his research due to the multiple narrative structures of *The Mahabharata* because of which the psychological implications that exist within the epic have not been largely explored.

However, Torkel Brekke, from the University of Oslo in “The Ethics of War and the Concept of War in India and Europe”, examined the ethical and religious system which failed to justify the wars of ancient India. According to him, the conditions that lead to the war of *Mahabharata* cannot be properly justified by the historians for their inability to separate the public and private realms. His paper has been used to understand how the elders like Bhishma and guru Drona failed to resolve the turmoil between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* because of

which Duryodhana got the scope of following the path set by the psychological manipulations by Shakuni.

Most of the previous studies of *the Mahabharata* have shed light on the thematic factors, such as household politics, honor of women and the events of the *Kurukshetra* war. This research explores how the subconscious have played an essential role in the decisions by the conscious mind of Duryodhana and Karna and provide an aid to a better understanding of the epic that has not been studied extensively.

Chapter 3

Duryodhana: The Dark Sovereign and The Spiral of Destruction

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

(भगवद् गीता ४.७-८)

Transliteration:

Yada yada hi dharmasya glanirbhavati bharata
Abhyathanamadharma-sya tadatmanam srijamyaham

Paritrana-ya sadhunang vinashay cha dushkritam
Dharmasangsthapanarthay sambhabami yuge yuge

(Bhagavad Gita 4.7-8)

English Translation:

O descendant of Bharata, whenever there is a decline in dharma
and a rise of adharma, I personally appear.
To protect the pious living beings and to put an end to malevolence,
I appear at every age to establish dharma.

(Bhagavad Gita 4.7-8)

The lines mentioned above are some of the most famous verses from the *Bhagavad Gita* that explore the key factors of morality or the *dharma*. These verses call attention to the importance of peace and order for establishing a sustainable society. However, it also explains the destructive capacities of *adharma* arousing from greed, chaos, conflicts and other human failings. The verses thus predict the active intervention of divine forces in the human world in order to restore peace, justice and maintain the well-being of the world. The active participation of the divine force thereby exemplifies the dynamics of *dharma* which needs to be maintained regularly in response to shifting circumstances.

German Indologist Paul Hacker stated the concept of *dharma* as “... a right and moral conduct, the exercise of duty toward the human community” (480). According to the beliefs of Hinduism, *dharma* is a philosophical concept that provides a divine guidance for humanity to thrive and set a boundary. This boundary of the *dharma* is to ensure that the orders set by nature or the divine are not violated, so that not only mankind but other forms of life can flourish. Furthermore, Hacker also suggests *dharma* as “...injunctions or prohibitions valid for all mankind such as... the prohibitions of killing or violence, of theft and adultery, or the injunctions of truthfulness, friendliness, or of reverence for gods as well as for persons of respect, parents, and teachers” (482). Thus, the concept of *dharma* cannot be considered as an element of a religion, rather it creates a moral and ethical structure so that threats towards mankind and nature can be thwarted. However, as mentioned earlier of *dharma* having the potential to change itself and vary from person to person, this chapter has explored the underlying psychological factors that had essentially engineered Duryodhana’s actions and decisions.

3.1 Seeds of Ambition:

According to the royal customs of ancient India, the heir presumptive was expected to be the next ruler which was defined by the lineage of the present king: the eldest son was declared as the *Yuvraj* and was crowned to be the next ruler. But instead of declaring Duryodhana as the heir presumptive, he was projected towards competing with his own cousins and prove his superiority in terms of exemplary leadership and bravery. During Duryodhana's childhood, he was sent to the *ashram* (hermitage) of guru Dronacharya along with the other *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* to learn the skills of war, politics, *dharma* and *vedic* (scriptures) knowledge. However, Dronacharya intended for all the young princes to compete with each other rather than encouraging them to learn to the best of their abilities.

According to Devdutt Pattanaik, "Drona...made his way to Hastinapuri, intent on making the Kuru princes his students and using them against Drupada" (68). Instead of motivating the princes to look at the greater meanings of life and royal commitments, he instigated them with the potentiality of vengeance and hatred. According to the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, "...dreams are not nonsensical but meaningful...made out of the residues of individual lives chosen by the unconscious to represent the fulfillment of a wish" (Leitch 786). The teachings provided to Duryodhana by Dronacharya regarding the potential of revenge in fulfilling one's own wishes trajected him into the extensive hatred towards the Pandavas as they were the ones he was competing with in order to prove himself and attain the throne. As a result, neither the eldest Kauravas or his other brothers had the opportunity to learn about the notion of compassion and resilience.

According to Juliana M. Sobolewski and Paul R. Amato “...the quality of early parent-child relationships tends to persist into young adulthood” (1107). Since Dhritarashtra was born blind and Gandhari also committed to wear a blindfold for the rest of her life as an act of empathy towards her husband, Duryodhana did not have the opportunity to create healthy and meaningful memories with his parents that he could cherish. On the other hand, the Pandavas had spent most of their childhood in close association with their mother Kunti, who often taught them about love, compassion, mercy and unity. “... is most valuable to any human for those who possess even the smallest bit of earth have food and shelter, they have 'the mother' caring for them” (Cederman 14). Thus, the difference in the upbringing of the two branches of princes of *Hastinapura* is evident. Instead of learning about the virtues of mankind, all Duryodhana could learn from his guru was to avenge insults and snatch one's belongings for fulfilling desires. As a result, the psychological well-being of Duryodhana was influenced by the elders whom he was closely associated with at the age when children are often introduced to ideologies, morals and principles that constructs one's personality trait that they carry with them till adulthood.

3.2 The Chessboard of Doom:

“People are conceived as complicated human beings, exhibiting an extremely wide range of behaviors that result from an equally wide variety of causes. One of these behaviors is their appeal to manipulation. What drives them to such a kind of behavior is their desire to achieve certain goals regardless of what kind of means they make use of in this regard. In other words, they utilize myriad means which are available at their disposal to influence the behavior of others by stimulating their (other's) perceptual, cognitive, and emotional feelings” (Sharma 3).

The statement mentioned above by Nitesh Sharma from the Konsole Group explores the autocratic ability of words to convert themselves into a wide variety of meanings that can be applied to influence the behaviors of others. Communication is an essential instrument of mankind since childhood, such as sign-language, broken words, and sounds to transmit one's thoughts and emotions. However, this section investigates the extent to which verbal communication and activities can influence the psychological well-being of the other. In this case Shakuni's manipulation of Duryodhana.

The scope for Shakuni to manipulate Duryodhana was set by the *Pandavas* at an early age when he was abused and discredited through offensive words and gestures. "Bhima often bullied the Kauravas, picking them up and throwing them to the ground, or shaking trees that they had climbed on until they fell down like nuts" (Pattanaik 81), explains Duryodhana's psychological development which got hampered in such a way that made him desperate to prove his eligibility and re-establish his free identity. For the development of a healthy psychic condition, the importance of a peaceful and friendly context is crucial. However, in the case of Duryodhana, he was subjected to verbal and psychological abuse at the time when his blind parents could not console him or express their support for their young child. Eventually, in the time of desperate need, Shakuni took the role of a guardian where he had the scope of engaging himself to get closely associated with Duryodhana. Moreover, it also allowed Shakuni to guide Duryodhana in such a way that his commitment of destroying the *Kuru* dynasty started to seem more unchallenging since Duryodhana was already in a mentally disturbed state, making him easier to manipulate.

“But they are not the true sons of Pandu. They were conceived by the law of *niyoga* through other men. Truly, ours is the royal bloodline” (Pattanaik 81) - this statement by Duryodhana explains the extent to which he was frustrated by the frequent bullying of the *Pandavas*. Additionally, it also reflects the level of detestation which Duryodhana perceived that he started to question the lineage of his cousins (the *Pandavas*) with the hope that he can live a peaceful life without anyone to harass him. “Unconscious history contained impossible or forbidden wishes, repressed... wishes that remained active in the unconscious and sought expression in dreams, mistakes, jokes, myths, and other discredited or discounted forms of communication” (Leitch 788). Leitch’s statement explores Duryodhana’s argument about the *Pandavas*’ birth history where a traumatized child, not knowing how to find a sense of security for himself, was desperately seeking help from the elders.

“Despite having ninety-nine brothers, Duryodhana felt weaker than the Pandavas. Yudhisthira had beside him an archer in Arjuna, a strongman in Bhima and an adviser in Sahadeva. Who did he have besides Dushasana? Things changed...for advice, he had Shakuni, his mother’s brother” (Pattanaik 83). It was the moment when Shakuni was in a position from which he could take decisions on behalf of Duryodhana by psychologically making him believe that he was not mature enough to take decisions on his own. As a result, Duryodhana slowly started to depend on his uncle and loosen his own ability to make any choice or decisions on his own. According to Sigmund Freud, “...notion of the *unconscious*...is the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions” (Barry 97). Shakuni had psychologically exploited his consciousness and was in control of his unconscious mind.

Shakuni manipulated situations in such a way that in the moment of need Duryodhana's unconscious mind overtook his consciousness and performed tasks according to Shakuni desires.

The well-being of an individual depends upon the maintenance and enhancement of philosophical, psychological and spiritual traditions that allows one to be aware of their own activities and what is happening around them. Due to the constant manipulation of Shakuni, Duryodhana's eudaimonic factor began to be influenced in a dark manner. He began to believe that happiness and satisfaction lies in the destruction of the Pandavas. Despite having extraordinary potential, Duryodhana's sentiments were trajected towards the bindings of hatred. As a result, instead of making any efforts for achieving the heights of greatness on behalf of *Hastinapura*, Duryodhana started to implement his time in the constant plotting for the end of the *Pandavas*, such as the fire in the *lakshya griha* (palace made of inflammable materials built to kill the *Pandavas*) and the dice game which will be discussed later. On the other hand, the *Pandavas* in their exile were subjected to eudaimonic psychological well-being. With Lord Krishna as their guide, they were able to project their thoughts and times towards the understanding of their own potentials through *sadhana* (spiritual practice, such as meditation).

3.3 The Rage of Fire:

According to *The Mahabharata*, *Kauravas* were born to Gandhari as a lump of meat which was later divided into one hundred and one pieces which later took the form of one hundred sons and one daughter (Dussala). On the other hand, the *Pandavas* were born to Kunti (mother of Yudhisthira , Bhima and Arjuna) and Madri (mother of Nakula and Sahadeva) by the

grace of *mantra* (magical spell) given by *rishi* Durvasa, they had superhuman/divine abilities that set them apart from ordinary human beings. Below is a list of the gods who fathered the *Pandavas*:

- Yudhisthira was fathered by Yama or Dharmadeva (God of *dharma* or death)
- Bhima was fathered by Vayu or Pavana (God of winds and the messenger god)
- Arjuna was fathered by Indra or Devaraja (God of thunder and the king of gods)
- Nakula and Sahadeva was fathered by Ashvini Kumaras (God of health, medicine and science)

Since the births of the *Pandavas* were associated with divine gods, they proved to be superior to the *Kauravas* in terms of *vedic* knowledge, war tactics, politics or *dharma*. “The smallest of things would lead to quarrels in the palace between the cousins. Kunti and Gandhari advised their sons to show restraint but their words were left unheeded. Sometimes, even the mothers submitted to the rivalry” (Pattanaik 83). The *Kauravas* had to face immense struggles to prove themselves equally worthy as their cousins which eventually laid the foundation for a competing relationship between the two branches of the *Kuru* dynasty. Due to the imbalance of power distribution between the two branches of the dynasty and the constant support of Bhishma and Dronacharya to the *Pandavas*, Duryodhana suffered from a sense of insecurity which gradually turned into loathing for the *Pandavas*.

Shakuni on the other hand proposed to Duryodhana to initiate a plan that would give them the opportunity to remove the *Pandavas* from *Hastinapura*. “...anger rumination as a

maintaining factor for emotional arousal and stress that can lead to behavioral dysregulation” (Offredi et al. 2), the statement explores the psychological condition at the point where emotional extremes such as anger or stress can impact the behavioral capability and restrain the ability to integrate thoughts logically. Duryodhana did not consider the destructive possibilities of Shakuni’s problem, nor did he think about reconsidering his choices which further establishes the extent of Shakuni's control over Duryodhana’s mind. According to the plan, Duryodhana approached Dhritarashtra, “We must look to our safety; the time has come ... You made a mistake in declaring [Yudhisthira] heir to the throne. People conclude that you are abdicating because of your handicap, as you had done once in favor of Pandu. We must wake up ... it is important that we get Pandu’s sons out of the capital” (Narayan 41).



The *Pandavas* set out for their journey to *Varanavata* to meet the people who were eagerly waiting to greet them. However, at the end of the day and attending all the visitors, the *Pandavas* were made to stay at the palace that was built under the supervision of Duryodhana.

According to Shakuni's plan, Duryodhana ensured that the palace (known as the *lakshya griha*) was made from resin, oil and straw (inflammable material) with the hope that the *Pandavas* will be burnt alive once they go to sleep at night. "...the palace was given to the Pandavas and their mother and as soon as they moved in, on the first night itself it was set afire" (Pattanaik 84). Shakuni ensured that he will get associated with Duryodhana to the degree at which he can not only instigate Duryodhana's unconscious mind, but also provoke it so that it can overlap his conscious thoughts. Using this psychological technique of manipulation, Duryodhana's cognitive abilities (logical reasoning, problem solving and critical thinking) were substantially obstructed. In reference to the chart provided above, his cognitive qualities were substituted by anger which existed deep within the unconscious mind that leaked out into the conscious mind when provoked by Shakuni.

Chapter 4

Karna: The Shadowed Sun and The Burden of Fate

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥

(भगवद गीता २.४७)

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमानोति पुरुषः ॥

(भगवद गीता ३.१९)

Transliteration:

karmany-eva dhikaraste ma phaleshu kadacana.
ma karma-phala-hetur bhur ma te sango'stv-akarmani.

(Bhagavad Gita 2.47)

Tasmad asaktah satatam karyam karma samacara.

Asakto hyacaran karma param apnoti purusah.

(Bhagavad Gita 3.19)

English Translation:

Your right is to perform your work, but never to the results. Never be motivated by the results of your actions, nor should you be attached to not performing your prescribed duties.

(Bhagavad Gita 2.47)

Therefore, continue to perform your prescribed duties perfectly without attachment to the results.

By acting without attachment, one attains the Absolute.

(Bhagavad Gita 3.19)

The above-mentioned verses from the Bhagavad Gita form the key ideologies of the importance of *karma* or everyday discourse that is essential for the sustaining of a stable society. According to the ancient belief of the Indian subcontinent, *karma* forms the basis of the quality of living (as people believe that the *karma* decides the fate where the past activities influence the present and the present deeds affect the future). “...actions have consequences which will affect the doer of the action at some future time...the law of karma is nothing other than the law of universal causation, according to which every action, event, or contingent being is caused” (Reichenbach 2).

According to the verses of Bhagavad Gita mentioned earlier, *karma* or deed that involves no emotional attachment or the hope of achievement is the purest form to attain the knowledge of truth. It seeks for complete detachment from worldly matters and to completely surrender one's own power of will to the fate that has been allocated by the divine authority. Furthermore, it advocates the theory of performing acts with disinterest and only to follow the duties bestowed upon a person, can assist one remain righteous as these acts have no *karmic* consequences. “...actions which are performed with an interest in achieving some result or which arise from desire and passion ... bring about karmic effects. Actions which are performed in a disinterested way, which stem from no desire for the fruits [repercussions] of the action, or which are offered to Isvara, have no fruits” (Reichenbach 2).

However, the ethical and moral factors that form the basis of human cognitive (reasoning, learning from experiences, problem solving and comprehension of complex ideas) abilities do not always abide by the laws of *karma* in certain contexts. “...consequences might be partially

determinative of the morality of an act; they are irrelevant or minimally relevant to karmic considerations” (Reichenbach 5). This chapter has explored the character of Karna in reference to the *karmic* concept and how it impacted his decisions and psychological well-being.

4.1 Childhood Whispers:

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the caste system was one of the most practiced traditions of ancient India, that did not allow people from the lower caste attain equal benefits which were available for the higher castes such as the *Kshatriyas* and the *Brahmins*. Since Karna was brought up by a foster family belonging from the *Shudra* community, he often had to face discrimination and marginalization. Even though he had the potential and courage of performing noble tasks, he was constrained by the rules associated with caste which were implemented by the society of the contemporary time. As a result, he was subjected to both physical and psychological struggle in establishing his own independent identity.

Since Karna’s childhood, he had an optimistic view about the underlying meaning of *karma* that contrasted the ideology of the wider community. Karna believed ‘a person is free to choose the way of life according to *karma* or potential rather than being subjected or being confined within a certain administrative structure’. According to Sigmund Freud’s concept of *ego*, it involves participation of both the conscious and the unconscious level of the mind. However, *ego* also takes into account the constraints of societal norms and practices in reference to the desires from *id*. Since Karna knew about the administrative policies of the society and the limitations of the caste structure, he kept on struggling with his internal desires. As a result, he

later started to disregard the traditions and cultural practices which also impacted his psychological well-being.

His urge to establish himself equally worthy to the *Kshatriyas* and the *Brahmins* inspired him to be a disciple of a *guru* or sage who would allow him to get the knowledge of *vedas*, war tactics and politics. As a result, he approached Dronacharya who was appointed by Bhishma to teach the royal princes of *Hastinapura*, the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas*. However, due to the contemporary norms, Dronacharya did not accept Karna and offended him for wanting to attain a life that was designated only for the people from the upper classes. It was the moment when Karna faced a traumatic experience as he was disregarded not because of his ability but for his lineage. As a result, he grew a bitter view about societal norms (*ego*) and was more inclined to fulfill his internal desires (*id*) at any cost.

“... Unconscious mind consists of Deeply repressed thoughts, feelings and desires” (Panchal 93). The encounter with *guru* Dronacharya resulted into a traumatic experience for Karna, but due to the desire of his unconscious mind his actions got influenced. Thus, he approached Parasurama (*guru* of Dronacharya), in the hope that he would accept him as his disciple. However, when Parasurama asked him to introduce himself before accepting him, Karna thought he would be rejected once more if he accepted his identity as a *Shudra*. Hence, he introduced himself as a *Brahmin* and started his initial journey in establishing himself as equal as the others by learning about the knowledge of *vedas*, art of war and governance. “Karna was a young acolyte; he had gone to Parasurama to learn from him the use of Brahmastra. Since Parasurama had set himself up as an implacable enemy of all kshatriyas (and attempted

wholesale extermination of that community), Karna had announced that he was a brahmin in order to be admitted as Parasurama's pupil" (Narayan 156).

However, one afternoon Parasurama was sleeping on Karna's lap when a bug bit him and despite the immense pain, Karna did not dare to move, fearing that his *guru* would be interrupted. But when Parasurama woke and saw Karna bleeding from the bug's bite, he demanded Karna to reveal his true identity, since *Brahmins* were not considered to have much resilience. Thus, Karna accepted his lies and declared himself as *Shudra* which enraged Parasurama, who immediately cursed Karna for acquiring education through trickery. "None but a kshatriya could have borne this pain in silence. You have deceived me by calling yourself a brahmin, and for this grave lapse I decree that the Brahmastra I have taught shall remain in your memory until you actually find an occasion to employ it; at the crucial moment, you shall forget the mystic syllables" (Narayan 156).

Since, *gurus/sages/teachers* are the first stage of education after the parents, Karna's experience with Parasurama and his curse set a profound impression of the world which adversely affected Karna. His inspirations of validating himself and his belief in his own ability to perform noble tasks were deeply shattered, he was again subjected to marginalization not because of his potential, but again because of his lineage. "...trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance ..." (Caruth 11). The repetition of the similar situation was a heavy psychological blow that traumatized Karna at both conscious and unconscious level. "Freud points out... repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not

to be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control" (Caruth 2).

4.2 Stain of Injustice:

The event of the graduation ceremony held to examine the abilities of the princes of *Hastinapura* was a focal point of Karna's life where he experienced some of the most devastating situations which had a profound effect on him. The event held by Bhishma was to justify the best suitable candidate for the position of *yuvraj* (heir presumptive) since the princes had successfully graduated from Dronacharya's *ashram* (hermitage). Even though the ceremony was held to evaluate the individual abilities of the young princes, they participated not out of enthusiasm but of mutual hate for each other (the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas*).

When Arjuna was praised by Dronacharya as the most skillful archer of the universe for successfully defeating his opponents, Duryodhana was enraged. His dream of attaining the throne was slipping away by the constant support of Dronacharya and Bhishma. However, Karna reached the venue and challenged Arjuna, "...there entered in the tournament another archer. On his chest dazzled a brilliant armor and on his ears were radiant jewels. Identifying himself as Karna, he declared, 'I can do all that Arjuna can and more'" (Pattanaik 75). However, despite being able to prove Karna's skills by bravely defeating the princes, he was asked to cease. Karna had little idea about the events that were about to happen.

“‘What! This man is the son of a charioteer. How dare he challenge Kshatriyas in an archery tournament?’ shouted Bhima. Karna did not know what to say. The cruel words of Bhima stung him like a swarm of bees. Was his skill not good enough? Why should his birth matter?” (Pattanaik 75). Karna was exposed to a situation where all his fine skills were disregarded because of being affiliated to a low caste. His extraordinary skills of war went unnoticed when the *Pandavas* started to curse him because of the reason on which he had little control. “Karna swallowed his pride and kept quiet” (Pattanaik 76), yet Karna chose not to protest against the injustice of the society, for he knew he would not be able to establish his views in front of the people who were traditionally misguided by the oppressive caste system. The psychological concept of *ego* as described by Sigmund Freud enabled Karna to consider the context, where the people were not prepared to allow a *Shudra* to perform a task which was assigned for the *Kshatriyas*. The *ego*, having the protection to run through the reality principle, focuses on creating a realistic view of the world and enables a psychoanalytic defense mechanism to minimize the internal conflicts and struggle. Karna’s conscious part of the mind was exposed to experience a traumatic situation where the society judges people through the lens of lineage rather than the deeds performed/*karma*.

Defense Mechanisms



Mechanism	Description	Example
Repression	Unconscious suppression of unwanted thoughts or information from consciousness	After being mugged, a person is unable to recall the experience
Denial	Ignoring or refusing to acknowledge unacceptable realities	Planning a vacation in a year after receiving terminal diagnosis
Projection	Attributing one's own feelings, thoughts, behaviors, or motives to others	A partner who had an affair is convinced their partner is cheating
Displacement	Redirecting feelings to a safer, substitute object	When placed to sit in time-out, a child kicks and knocks over the chair
Regression	Reverting to behaviors from an earlier stage of development in response to extreme stress	A teenager experiences episodes of wetting the bed after being bullied
Sublimation	Channeling negative emotions or socially unacceptable impulses into socially acceptable behavior	Deep cleaning the entire house after a breakup

The above-mentioned diagram has been used to understand the psychic condition of Karna in reference to Sigmund Freud's concept of the unconscious mind and its activities.

Since Karna was going through a traumatic experience, his repressed thoughts, desires, unfulfilled dreams and emotions were left suppressed till Duryodhana came forward to his aid. “‘This man is a great archer. I will not let him be insulted. I take him as my friend, closer to my heart than my brothers. He who insults him insults me.’... ‘Father, if you declare him warlord, no one will insult him again.’ Dhritarashtra who could never deny his son anything, agreed to make Karna a warlord, the king of Anga.” (Pattanaik 76).

All the past events of Karna's life that were suppressed in his unconscious mind, managed to find their way back to Karna's consciousness that were suddenly triggered by Duryodhana's words. As a result, Karna successfully managed to overcome his guilt, shame and melancholic feelings to trigger his psychological defense mechanisms that allowed him to channel disturbing and traumatic thoughts, "No one had ever come to his defen[s]e thus. He was eternally obliged to Duryodhana. He swore that he would be the friend of the Kauravas till the day he died" (Pattanaik 76). Karna did not surrender himself to his catastrophic past, rather his belief in performing war to achieve recognition and establish his own individual identity despite belonging from a lower caste, made him one of the greatest warriors of the *Mahabharata*.

Karna had to fight for his life since his birth, followed by offensive words directed towards him by the society for being brought up in a low caste. As a result, Karna had to fight for his rights not only for himself but for the entire low caste community, the *Shudras*, which directed him towards the path of struggles and curses. However, when Duryodhana offered him to be the king of *Anga*, Karna found it to be his only option that could aid him establish equal rights for the *Shudras*, not knowing of the consequences of his decision. Being the King of *Anga*, Karna had no other choice but to abide by the instructions bestowed upon him by Duryodhana. When the society has been oppressive towards him, Duryodhana came forward to his aid because of which he became indebted to the eldest *Kaurava*. Due to his commitment to maintain his *dharma*, Karna had no option to refrain himself from being affiliated with the kingdom of *Hastinapura*, "...the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2).

Chapter 5

Twilight of Heroes: The Diverging Fates and The Echoes of Valor

श्रेयान्स्वधर्मो विगुणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।
स्वभावनियतं कर्म कुर्वन्नाप्नोति किल्बिषम् ॥

(भगवद गीता १८.४७)

असक्तबुद्धिः सर्वत्र जितात्मा विगतस्पृहः ।
नैष्कर्म्यसिद्धिं परमां सन्न्यासेनाधिगच्छति ॥

(भगवद गीता १८.४९)

Transliteration:

śhreyān swa-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt
svabhāva-niyataṁ karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣham

(भगवद गीता १८.४७)

asakta-buddhiḥ sarvatra jitātmā vigata-sprīhaḥ
naiṣkarmya-siddhiṁ paramāṁ sannyāsenādhigachchhati

(भगवद गीता १८.४९)

English Translation:

It is better to perform one's own duty (dharma) imperfectly than to perform another's duty perfectly. One is never subject to bad karma by performing one's prescribed duties according to one's own nature.

(Bhagavad Gita 18.47)

The stage of perfect renunciation is attained by becoming unattached to material objects, disregarding material enjoyment, by doing one's duty and being unattached to the results.

(Bhagavad Gita 18.49)

While *karma* (deeds) had been an essential factor of the religious system of ancient India, the concept had always intertwined with *dharma* (righteousness). Throughout the events of *The Mahabharata*, the characters involved in different events were in distress arising from the complications of *karma* and *dharma*. Since the social structure of ancient India was largely dependent upon these concepts, the characters involved in the epic suffered from a psychological anguish in balancing these notions.

As the verses from the Bhagavad Gita mentioned above, Lord Krishna had advocated mankind to perform duties that align with *dharma*. According to the verses, a person who performs deeds (*adharmic*) in accordance with the instructions made by another, cannot be held accountable. To deal with the perplexity of being right or wrong, Lord Krishna suggested mankind not to hope for any benefits for the deeds they perform and proposed a psychological detachment from the goals that might be achieved by implementing a task. According to him, a *karma* that is done with total detachment can ensure that the person is on the right track or abiding with *dharma*.

Since morality and ethics are the baseline factor of human personality development, the concept of *karma* and *dharma* has been explored to identify the intricacies of choices made by Duryodhana and Karna. This chapter has examined how both the characters were in control of each other and from others that led to their inability of establishing their individual perception. Furthermore, this chapter has also identified how the concept of *karma* and *dharma* formed a vicious cycle that imprisoned Duryodhana and Karna into their own reality made by their subconscious mind.

5.1 Fabric of Dignity:

The *Pandavas* were allocated a proportion of the kingdom of *Hastinapura* known as the *Indraprastha* by the elders of the *kuru* family in order to resolve the tension between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas*. The intention of dividing the kingdom into two parts was to keep the two major branches of the royal family to stay away from each other and establish peace and order. "... the only way to keep peace was to divide the kingdom. Bhishma protested at first but relented later realizing that there was no other way out. In a public ceremony, Dhritarashtra gave the Pandavas the forest of *Khandava-prastha* [later known as *Indraprastha*]. 'Make your home there. Go in peace,' said the elders of the Kuru clan blessing the Pandavas" (Pattanaik 117).

Soon after, a coronation ceremony was held by Lord Krishna to declare Yudhisthira as the king of *Indraprastha* where kings from all over the *Bharatavarsha* (Indian subcontinent) were invited including Duryodhana, Karna and Shakuni. Even though Duryodhana always suffered from detestation towards the Pandavas, he agreed to attend the coronation ceremony on behalf of *Hastinapura*. With Karna and Shakuni as his companions, he was welcomed by the Pandavas and was offered an honorable place in the royal court. Soon after they decided to look through the city of *Indraprastha*, "He saw the grandeur of the palaces, the organization of the streets, the beauty of the gardens and the orchards. He realized the main palace was built such that a breeze moved gently through all its corridors and sunlight bounced off all its walls. Poets equated the great palace of the Pandavas to the *sabha* [court] of Indra, the city to Amravati [city of the Gods] and the kingdom to Swarga [heaven]. Duryodhana was filled with envy" (Pattanaik 138).

While walking through the corridors of the palace, Duryodhana slipped and fell into a pond of water and was humiliated by Draupadi who was walking nearby. “Draupadi ...let out a peal of laughter [at the sight of Duryodhana in the water] and said, ‘The blind son of blind parents’” (Pattanaik 138). Duryodhana thus felt a deep surge of hatred due to the humiliation that he committed to avenge by humiliating Draupadi similarly in front of everyone. Despite the presence of Draupadi’s husbands, the *Pandavas*, they took no step to minimize the intensity of the situation. The *Pandavas* were unable to comprehend the severity of humiliating Duryodhana - who was always subjected to discrimination because of the *Pandavas* from his childhood.

Upon Duryodhana’s return to *Hastinapur* after attending Yudhishthira’s coronation ceremony, he was still furious about his humiliation at *Indraprastha* by Draupadi. Shakuni saw it as a scope to heighten the tension between the *Pandavas* and the *Kauravas* in fulfilling his ambition of destroying the *Kuru* dynasty. Thus, he proposed to Duryodhana to arrange a dice game and snatch everything from the *Pandavas* and take revenge by humiliating them in front of the royal court. Furthermore, Shakuni also trajected Duryodhana into thinking that it was the only scope to suspend the *Pandavas* from all sorts of royal identity through trickery and deceit. Since Duryodhana was most associated with Shakuni, he did not object to the plan, but rather agreed to arrange everything according to Shakuni’s requirements. Blind by extreme emotion of hatred for the *Pandavas*, he had lost the ability of logical reasoning and establishing his own opinion in the matter.

The game of dice which was planned and later executed by Shakuni’s plans resulted in the doom of the *Pandavas*. They were snatched from all belongings, identity and self-respect by

the trickery that Shakuni employed during the game. Even though Karna was not completely in support of Shakuni's approach as he was more inclined to defeating the enemy through chivalrous means (fighting wars) rather than applying any evil tricks. However, due to his commitment to stand alongside Duryodhana at all means psychologically entrapped him to stay silent at the court where Duryodhana executed Shakuni's heinous scheme. The ancient customs of India made the kings or *yuvraj* bound to continue betting till the opponent is pleased. As a result, Yudishthira was forced to continue his betting till he lost his kingdom and lost the authority over the *Pandavas* including himself and all were compelled to ultimately become exiles. By the use of magical dice, Shakuni ensured that Duryodhana wins every time till the point where Yudishthira staked Draupadi in the game where he eventually loses. Eventually the royal court of *Hastinapura* witnesses Shakuni's wickedness where he instigates Duryodhana to disrobe Draupadi and avenge his humiliation that occurred at *Indraprastha*. Despite the warnings and protests by Dhritarashtra, Bhishma, Dronacharya and Vidura, Shakuni insisted Duryodhana to continue the game till the *Pandavas* were stripped of everything they owned including their right over themselves.

This event of the game stands as an example where the exemplification of psychological manipulation and the struggle between *karma* and *dharma*. Duryodhana, blinded by hatred and fury towards the Pandavas was unable to understand the intensity of his actions and its consequences. Shakuni's ability of total control was evident where he ensured that Duryodhana executes every order and fulfills his smallest of wishes. Duryodhana wished total control over the future of *Hastinapura* where there would be no *Pandavas* and can rule over the kingdom peacefully after his father. "... politics in their essence are authoritarian politics; reaction will

always assert itself... for we yearn to live within a system of total control” (Edmundson 21). Eventually the contrasting concept of *karma* and *dharma* stands evident as the humiliation of Duryodhana by Draupadi (*karma*) at *Indraprastha* resulted in an inverted form of dharma (*adharma*, where Draupadi was stripped of her honor). According to Praggnaparamita Biswas, “... Draupadi’s sexual harassment before the Puru elders at royal court somehow sows the seed of the ‘crusade’ at Kurushetra” (54).

On the other hand, Karna, bound by his unwavering loyalty towards Duryodhana, was unable to resist the injustice towards the *Pandavas*. He suffered from psychological distress where he knew about the difference between the right and the wrong but was still unable to speak on behalf of the *Pandavas*. By not opposing Duryodhana, he wanted to follow the ideological factors of *karma* but also resulted in not abiding with the concept of *dharma*. “To keep one’s word is the fundamental principle of dharma...” (Pattanaik 128).

5.2 From Fortified to Fragile:

The contrasting position of the concepts *karma* and *dharma* have been portrayed within a number of mythological events of ancient India. Such conflicts usually create an endless ripple where a minor effect has been observed to have a disastrous outcome in the later future. By prioritizing both these ideologies and considering them as the baseline model of humanity, characters such as Duryodhana and Karna had suffered from the inability to exhibit their ultimate ability. They were often subjected to limitations where an individual autonomy of actions cannot be observed.

Karna was renowned for being the most generous king of the entire *Bharatavarsha* as he was committed to give up anything asked for at sunrise while performing the *Surya Puja*. He adopted a tendency of performing the rituals every day in the early morning. Despite any natural or man-made calamities, he did not fail in performing the rituals offered to the Sun god, Surya. Upon learning of his selfless inclination to donate anything that is asked from him, Indra, the king of gods planned a strategy that would benefit the *Pandavas*, specifically his son Arjuna. He worked out a plan where the *Kaurava* forces would become weaker and Karna - the chief of *Kaurava* army, would not have much option to defend Duryodhana. Thus, he planned to take away the natural defenses of Karna - the *kavacha* and *kundala* (armor and earrings), that were gifted to him by his father, the Sun god.

Knowing about the intentions of Indra, Surya was greatly perturbed and reached the *Kaurava* camp to warn Karna about the wickedness of Indra. Upon listening to the plan, Karna however rejected Surya's suggestions of not offering the alms the next day. Instead, he was more inclined to perform his duties even at the cost of his own suffering. As commitment had been an unbreakable vow as discussed earlier, Karna could not step away from his responsibility of fulfilling his promise of providing alms. He was ideologically within the bindings of *dharma* because of which he had no other option, but knowingly going out to encounter the threats waiting for him. The warnings of Surya aroused an inner psychological struggle for Karna, where he knew that to follow the suggestions of his father would ensure his safety. But it would also mean that by not fulfilling his commitment would be *adharma*. His decision of executing his responsibilities by facing the threats allowed him to stay in the path of both *dharma* and *karma* which eventually resulted in his personal suffering and pain due to his loss of *kavacha* and

kundala the next day. “Without a second thought, Karna decided to part with his divine gifts—cutting them out like bark from a tree using a very sharp knife” (Pattanaik 261).

Upon hearing about the incident of Indra’s trickery, Duryodhana was furious and traumatized but had little to do as the loss had already been done. Duryodhana was subjected to discrimination since his childhood, but now it was his friend and the chief of his army who had suffered the loss. For Duryodhana, traumatic events have always repeated itself that eventually make him helpless as the moment of his revelation is always late as the losses are already done. “... traumatic experience repeatedly forces itself on the patient... is assumed to be proof indeed of just how deep an impression it made. The patient is assumed to be... fixated on the trauma” (Freud 87). This event of Karna’s encounter with Surya and Indra’s deceit performed as a heavy blow for both Karna and Duryodhana psychologically. Knowing about the upcoming threats, Karna was stressed upon how to abide by the laws of *karma* and *dharma*. Whereas, for Duryodhana it was a huge loss as his most important ally was subjected to trickery which eventually traumatized him.

5.3 Silence in the Shadows:

Childhood traumatic experiences can have fatal impacts on people in their adulthood. Those children who have been subjected to social deprivation and challenging environments are likely to suffer from weak mental wellbeing that can result in the blurring of the temporal order between the psychological outcomes and the recollected events. Since Karna was brought up in a low caste family, he frequently had to face social discrimination and negligence despite being

capable to perform tasks that were considered noble which influenced Karna to lie to Parashurama in order to achieve knowledge in his youth. On the other hand, Shakuni manipulating Duryodhana influenced him to get convinced that victory is achieved only through treachery and deceit rather than valor. According to Horwitz, Allan V., et al. “A related theoretical deficiency of most studies of childhood victimization is the assumption that there is a simple causal direction leading from childhood abuse and neglect to mental health outcomes in later life... a life course perspective assumes that the influence of childhood experiences is contingent upon historical changes across the lives of affected individuals” (185).

As a woman gives birth to a new life, she provides a gateway towards salvation and a favorable condition for development through her nurture and care for her child. According to the ancient tradition of India, the mother has always been placed at the most respected position resulting in the mother becoming the center of the world who is concerned only about her children and how to keep them safe from outside threats. However, the concept of mother being the first guide to her children becomes blurred for Gandhari and Kunti. Due to gender polarization women were often subjected to certain roles because of which both of them subsequently failed to accomplish their responsibilities towards Duryodhana and Karna. Since Dhritarashtra was always more inclined towards Duryodhana, he overlooked all his mistakes. Gandhari could not intervene even though she was not completely in favor of her son's actions. Similarly, fearing about the society and its blind faith in the religious system, Kunti could not express her love for Karna, nor did she manage to keep her son close to her. Due to the absence of a motherly figure who could have guided them, both Duryodhana and Karna in their later life landed themselves in the path of *adharma*.

Even though Duryodhana had personal disputes regarding the Pandavas, the elders of the royal family such as king Dhritarashtra, Bhishma, Vidura and Dronacharya did not take any effective steps in stopping the war of *Kurukshetra*. Rather, their ineffectiveness in establishing peace between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* escalated the tension. As a result, Duryodhana and Karna found themselves in a situation where one can do nothing but prepare themselves for the worst that can result in either life or death. “Duryodhana is found to be utterly helpless and moved by witnessing the extermination of his own army...” (Jena 38). Under tremendous psychological pressure and with no proper guidance from the elders of the royal court, Duryodhana had grown to be more desperate of achieving victory without any clear idea of the upcoming destruction that can affect thousands of people throughout the Indian subcontinent. Torkel Brekke explained how a family dispute spread to a national dispute leading to the death of thousands. “In India, there was almost no interest in [the] right authority... ethics and politics did not possess a concept of war that distinguished clearly between violence against external and internal enemies” (Brekke 61). The concept of *dharma* of the Indian subcontinent can therefore be questioned as it allowed family disputes to spiral into a national issue. Being engaged in maintaining one's own *dharma*, the elders did not consider the widespread effects and possibilities of the war and the fate of the princes' lives that was at stake which eventually developed into subversive psychology for both Duryodhana and Karna.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The Mahabharata has been a key literary source for the researchers for many years who have studied about the history of the Indian subcontinent. Focusing on factors such as history, culture, social and political structure of ancient India, researchers have tried to analyze the evolution of modern day social structure that has been transmitted into modern cultural structure of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan. The result of this research has aimed to critically explore the implicit psychological condition of the characters Karna and Duryodhana from *The Mahabharata*. In reference to the societal structure and ideological system of the contemporary period, this study has explored how they had the capacity of altering the psychology of an individual. Using the psychoanalytic theory of the Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud, this study has investigated how factors such as the caste system and entitlement factor influenced Duryodhana and Karna's conscious decision making abilities, identity crisis and ethical dilemma based on the concepts of *karma* and *dharma* in Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*. By critically examining the text this study has opened a gateway for a new perspective and understanding of the epic.

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