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# Viewing Helen of Sparta and Draupadi of Pancala: A Comparative Approach

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Viewing Helen of Sparta and Draupadi of Pancala: A Comparative Approach.

by

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A THESIS

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### Abstract

This dissertation compares the narrative representations of Helen of Sparta in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* along with Krishnā- Draupadī of Pāñcāla in the *Mahābhārata*. The Trojan War in the *Iliad* and the devastating war in the *Mahābhārata* reveal a similar myth that appears in the *Cypria* of the Epic Cycle and the first book of the *Mahābhārata* itself. Similarly, Helen in the *Iliad* and Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* are born as *casus belli* by divine order. Further, they silently follow their fathers' instructions in choosing their suitors in marriage. While these women are subjects to the wishes of the gods and to their fathers, I argue in this dissertation that these two heroines are capable of expressing themselves with a powerful speaking voice. As a result, my project reveals that Homer and Vyasa grapple with a surprisingly similar situation in the epics showing the layers of two cultures of pre-Indo-European and Indo-European in characterizing Helen and similarly, pre-Vedic and Vedic in the portrayals of Draupadī.

This dissertation is broken up into three parts and two chapters each. While the first part of the dissertation focuses on Helen and Draupadī as *casus belli* and also as silent women, the second part examines their powerful self-presentations, particularly their rhetorical skill encountering men and women (goddess Aphrodite in Helen's case) in various situations. Thus Homer in his epics and Vyāsa in the *Mahābhārata* create two heroines who subvert the established system with their use of multiple voice.

The third part of this dissertation investigates how the metaphorical presentations of Space and Time in Homeric and Indic epics act as nonverbal signifiers of the many voices of Helen and Draupadī. Finally, this dissertation asserts that Helen's ambivalent character is the social manifestation of the pre-Indo-European culture at the beginning of Indo-European society. Likewise, the equally equivocal character of Draupadī displays

pre-Vedic era while actively maintaining her position in the patrilineal society embedded in Vedic ideology.

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Ratna Chatterjee.

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## Introduction

It is a general assumption that an epic is an extensive poem singing the deeds of heroes of a particular cultural tradition in the past. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer represent the major epic tradition of the West, whereas the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* represent the epic tradition of India. If epic depicts the world of heroes, then, how do the women fit in the songs of the mighty heroes? The women in the world of heroes weave like Helen and Andromache in the *Iliad* or Penelope in the *Odyssey*, for example. By contrast the women in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* do not weave. Further, the women in the Homeric epics as well as the Indic epics do not seem to hold much independence, as following the rules of patriarchal societies, they must be under the guardianship of a man. Yet it appears that Helen in the epics of Homer and Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* of Vyāsa exert significant power. The purpose of this dissertation is to compare the role of Helen in the Homeric epics with Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*.

Scholars who study the role of women in ancient literature have not shown much importance in exploring these two powerful princesses of the ancient Greek and Indic literatures in a comparative manner. Stephanie Jamison is the only Sanskritist/Indo-Europeanist who has contributed to the comparative field by comparing Helen of the *Iliad* and Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* through Indo-European perspective<sup>1</sup>. In fact, Jamison identifies a shared feature of Indo-European marriage rule behind Helen at the *Teichoscopia* in book three of the *Iliad* and the situation with Draupadī in the chariot of

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<sup>1</sup> Stephanie W. Jamison, "Draupadī on the Walls of Troy: Iliad 3 from an Indic Perspective", *Classical Antiquity* 13, no.1 (April, 1994): 5-16.

her abductor Jayadratha in book three of the *Mahābhārata*. Wendy Doniger<sup>2</sup> compares Helen with Sita of *Rāmāyana* and not with the Homeric Helen but with Helen as portrayed by Stesichorus in his *palinode*. However, James Fitzgerald<sup>3</sup> writes regarding the powerful women in this Indic ancient literature:

There is in the *Mahābhārata* a much more thorough and dynamic presence of energetic women and female powers that will remind Western readers more of Irish epic literature than Homer's *Iliad*.

As regards the definition of epic, it may be assumed drawing on scholarly views that while there can be no single definition accepted by all, it is very well known that in the era of Aristotle, epic was considered as the best kind of poetic composition and Homer was the poet par excellence (*Poetics* 1459). Aristotle did not consider Homer as the author of poetic works in the "Epic Cycle" (*Poetics* 1459b). Besides, Hesiod's literary works like the *Theogony*, *Works and Days*, and the *Catalogue of Women* also belong to the genre of epic. Then, what is the status of the *Mahābhārata* in the context of Western tradition of Epic? C.M. Bowra did not include the epics of India in his *Heroic Poetry* because they are "overlaid with much literary and theological matter"<sup>4</sup>. However, in his essay "The Meaning of a Heroic Age"<sup>5</sup>, Bowra acknowledges that a genuine tradition of a "heroic age" can be found beneath the layers of the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. Furthermore, he claims that the heroic tradition in India reached its peak around 1000

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<sup>2</sup> Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> James L. Fitzgerald "Mahābhārata" in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52-74.

<sup>4</sup> C.M. Bowra, *Heroic Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 11.

<sup>5</sup> "The Meaning of a Heroic Age" in *The Language and Background of Homer: Some Recent Studies and Controversies*. Selected and introduced by G.S. Kirk (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1964, reprinted, 1967), 22-47.

BCE and the poems were equally important to later generations in India as “the tale of Troy in Greece”.

Yaroslav Vassilkov, well-known Russian scholar of the *Mahābhārata* provides a threefold development of the epic in terms of typology: “1.archaic, 2.classic, 3.late epic”<sup>6</sup> while adding the stage of archaic epic to the stages of transformation of the epic as proposed by Pavel Grinster (in Russian and not translated into English). Thus Vassilkov writes:

Indeed, the Mbh went through the stage of the classical heroic epic and was partly transformed into a religious didactic épopée. But during this process, the Indian epic paradoxically retained some features typical of the epic folklore at the archaic stage. And it seems to me that this very fact constitutes the true uniqueness of the Mbh. There is no other epic in the world which combines in the same way the features of three main historical stages of development: archaic, classical and late.

It is important to note that there are scholars like Martin West, Gregory Nagy, Deborah Boedeker, Ann Suter, Linda Clader, and Nick Allen who impart how the poetic and mythical aspects in Greek society belong to a much older Indo-European heritage. Deborah Boedeker (*Aphrodite’s entry into Greek Epic*, 1974) writes how Aphrodite resembles Eos in Greek epic and shares a number of epithets with the Indic Dawn-goddess *Ushas* in the Vedic hymns. Ann Suter explains further (“Aphrodite/ Paris/ Helen: A Vedic Myth in the *Iliad*” 1987) how the Vedic myth of Dawn-goddess is evident with some changes in the relationship between Aphrodite, Paris and Helen. West’s article “Immortal Helen”<sup>7</sup> explains Homeric Helen’s divine origin connecting her to the Indo-

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<sup>6</sup> Yaroslav Vassilkov, “The Mahābhārata’s Typological Definition Reconsidered”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 38, (1995): 249-256.

<sup>7</sup> M.L. West, “Immortal Helen” in *Hellenica: Selected Papers on Greek Literature and Thought*. Volume I: Epic (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80-96.

European Sun-maiden and to her cult in Sparta. Similarly, Linda Lee Clader's<sup>8</sup> discourse on Helen's character in Homeric epics and also on Helen's divine origins is illuminating. It must be noted that the above scholars' works are important in understanding Helen and her pre-Homeric origins. Equally important is the voluminous work of French comparative philologist Georges Dumézil who analyzed the main characters of the *Mahābhārata* through Indo-European perspective.

A few scholars do engaging work comparing the characters from the *Mahābhārata* with the characters in the Homeric epics. Nick Allen focuses on the common Indo-European origin lying behind the *Mahābhārata* and ancient Greek epic traditions. Allen, however, compares the male characters belonging to different traditions. Emily Blanchard West, for example, focuses on a particular book or female/male characters of the *Odyssey* and compare them with the characters from the *Mahābhārata* through Indo-European perspective or in the comparative context of Greek and Sanskrit epic ("An Indic reflex of the Homeric *Cyclopeia*"<sup>9</sup>, 2005. "Circe, Calypso, Hidimbā: The Odyssey and Graeco-Aryan Proto-Epic"<sup>10</sup>, 2014). *Stealing Helen: The Myth of the Abducted Wife in Comparative Perspective* by Lowell Edmunds<sup>11</sup> is the latest publication on seeing Helen through a comparative aspect.

In general, scholarly works on Helen are voluminous and continuing, whereas works on Draupadī are relatively few. My purpose in this dissertation is to view them in a

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<sup>8</sup> Linda Lee Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Emily Blanchard West, "An Indic reflex of the Homeric *Cyclopeia*", *The Classical Journal* 101, no.2 (Dec.-Jan., 2005-2006): 125-160.

<sup>10</sup> West, "Circe, Calypso, Hidimbā: The *Odyssey* and Graeco-Aryan Proto-Epic", *The Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 42, no. 1-2, (2014): 144-174.

<sup>11</sup> Lowell Edmunds, in *Stealing Helen: The Myth of the Abducted Wife Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).



comparative approach but not to restrict my approach within a particular perspective. I attempt to understand them interacting with their men in existential situations mainly through close readings of the texts, while utilizing sociocultural/literary theories, Bronze Age history of the Aegeans, Vedic/pre-Vedic cultures, and Indo-European contexts.

The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer started the epic tradition in the western world. But the Indic tradition defines the *Mahābhārata* as the *itihāsa* or *itihāsapurāna* and the *Rāmāyana*, the *ādikāvya*.<sup>12</sup> The term “*kāvya*” is generally translated into English as “poem” and thus the “*ādikāvya*”, the “primary poem”.<sup>13</sup> The term “*itihāsa*” is translated into English “thus (*iti*) indeed (*ha*) it was (*āsa*)”.<sup>14</sup> Although the final part “*āsa*” denotes the third person singular form of the perfect tense of the verb “*as*” (to be), Pathak following William D. Whitney’s *Sanskrit Grammar*<sup>15</sup> aptly points out that “in the Sanskrit used at the time of the *Mahābhārata*, the perfect is a past tense tantamount to the imperfect.”<sup>16</sup> Considering that the *Mahābhārata* as a text that was told/narrated by bards, Sheldon Pollock’s interpretation of this text as “the narrative of the way things were” renders appropriate definition.<sup>17</sup>

As a narrative tradition, it has flourished in oral form and sometimes in written form in vernacular as well as Sanskrit in South Asia for “over two thousand years.” James Fitzgerald the translator of books eleven and twelve of the *Mahābhārata* aptly points out:

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<sup>12</sup> John Brockington provides a detailed history on the growth of the Indic epic studies in *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Shubha Pathak, *Divine yet Human Epics: Reflections of Poetic Rulers from Ancient Greece and India* (Washington, DC: Centre for Hellenic Studies, Trustees for Harvard University, 2014), 36-55.

<sup>14</sup> M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically arranged with special reference to cognate Indo-European Languages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889).

<sup>15</sup> William Dwight Whitney, *Sanskrit Grammar: Including both, the classical language and the older dialects of Veda and Brāhamana* (Leipzig: Brietkopf and Härtel, 1879; fifth edition, 1924: reprints: Delhi, 1962, 1969, 1977, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Pathak, *Divine yet Human Epics*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Sheldon Pollock, “Sanskrit literary culture from the inside out” in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstruction from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 44.

“What needs to be said immediately is that the word *Mahābhārata* refers first to a multi-media narrative tradition rather than a text.”<sup>18</sup> Fitzgerald stresses that a written Sanskrit text evolved from this tradition sometime between 200 BCE and 400 CE.<sup>19</sup> Although the written Sanskrit text and its manuscript traditions provide great resources for academic purpose, its oral traditions transmitted by bards, sometimes enacted by drama, dance for entertainment and especially, for rituals or festivals continue to flourish in India even today.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, from the very beginning the *Mahābhārata* is considered as a sacred “scripture” and it plays a dominant role in shaping Hindu society, customs, and rituals even in India at present. Whereas, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have never been considered as holy “scriptures” but they had a central role in the literature of ancient Greece, Rome and continues to have a pervasive presence in western literature even today.

However, much work has been done on the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* since the beginning of the twentieth century when Indological research started in the West. In India itself the earliest commentaries on the *Mahābhārata* could have been made earlier than the thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The publication of the critical editions of the *Mahābhārata* (April 1919-Sept. 1966) has created a renewed scholarly interest in the Indic Epic.<sup>22</sup> In fact, scholars<sup>23</sup> who can compare early Greek narratives with the epic narratives

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<sup>18</sup> James L. Fitzgerald, “No Contest between Memory and Invention: The Invention of the Pāndava Heroes of the *Mahābhārata*” in *Epic and History*, ed. David Konstan and Kurt A. Raaflaub (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 103-121.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>20</sup> Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadī, I. Mythologies: From Gingee to Kuruksetra* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988); *The Cult of Draupadī, 2. On Hindu Ritual and the goddess*, 1991. See also William S. Sax, “Ritual and Performance in the Pāndavalīlā of Garhwal” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 274-295.

<sup>21</sup> John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998). This is an excellent book that provides a detailed history on the growth of the Indic epic studies.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 57-62.

of India have found a common, Indo-European heritage not only in the area of language but also in the level of social institution. Emile Benveniste's <sup>24</sup>*La vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* exemplifies the relationship of the Indo-European patrilineal society and its language. Georges Dumézil preceded by Stig Wikander's work approached the *Mahābhārata* in terms of Indo-European common themes. Dumézil's structural approach has been notable in the broader or comparative scholarship on the epic. The Indo-Europeanist Jaan Puhvel following the insights of Dumézil and Wikandar affirms that the *Mahābhārata* in its entirety "points back to a mythic inheritance of Vedic, para-Vedic, pre-Vedic, Indo-Iranian, and ultimately Indo-European provenance."<sup>25</sup> The anthropologist N.J. Allen seeks to expand the trifunctional ideology of Dumézil by adding another function and to compare the narratives of heroes from Homeric epics and Indic epic through the Indo-European perspective. Stephanie Jamison has compared Draupadī to Helen foregrounding important Indo-European traces in a particular narrative context of the *Iliad* and the *Mahābhārata*. Recently, Emily Blanchard West's articles that compare the female characters of the Homeric epics and the Indic epics through the Indo-European lenses prove to be insightful.

While Dumézil's structural approach examines the epic through common Indo-European themes, Madeleine Biardeau investigates the epic with a similar structuralist approach through Hindu perspective of devotion. Dumézil and Biardeau are the two most

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). See also Andrew Ford, "Introduction" in the *Iliad*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, translated by Elizabeth Palmer; summaries, table and index by Jean Lallot (London: Faber and Faber, 1973).

<sup>25</sup> Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1987), 82.

notable Western scholars regarding the epic studies. Alf. Hiltebeitel<sup>26</sup> has examined the main episodes in books two, three and four, for example, of the *Mahābhārata* in relation to the Indo-European mythology and to the Hindu perspective with an unbiased approach building on both Dumézil and Biardeau. While a lot of scholarly works continues to offer insightful meanings to the *Mahābhārata*, comparatively fewer works have been carried out on the narratives of the women who exhibit a strong presence in this text.

Furthermore, a wider study of the women of the *Mahābhārata* along with the women characters of ancient narrative especially, of the *Iliad* on a comparative level is almost negligible.

It has been mentioned at the beginning that my dissertation aims to examine Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* in relation to Helen of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. There are myriad of scholarly works on Helen whereas, scholarly works on Draupadī are only emerging in the last few decades. Therefore, I intend to analyze the character of Draupadī using Helen as my model example.

### **Structure and Approach**

This task will be undertaken in three parts comprising two chapters under each part, one for Helen and one for Draupadī. First, I will follow a comparative approach that is classified as *typological* by Gregory Nagy<sup>27</sup> in the first section of the dissertation. A *typological* approach entails a comparison of visible parallel motifs among the traditions that are to be compared without any presuppositions regarding the motifs themselves.

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<sup>26</sup> Alf. Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976). See also, Hiltebeitel “Śiva, the Goddess, and the disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī,” *History of Religions*, 20, no. ½, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Aug.-Nov. 1980): 147-174.

<sup>27</sup> Gregory Nagy, “The Epic Hero” in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. J.M. Foley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 71-90.

This method of comparison will show a strong feature of a common Indo-European motif present in the background of the *Iliad* and in the *Mahābhārata* as well.

First, I wish to emphasize that both Helen and Draupadī are divinely ordained to be the cause of a devastating war, be that Trojan War or the war in the *Mahābhārata*. In other words, they have been designated as *casus belli* in the Greek as well as Indic epic traditions. Second, although the narrators portray these women as *casus belli* without any agency of their own, yet in the epics, the same narrators grant them remarkable power of speech suitable for various situations. The contradictory narratives of these two epic heroines belonging to distinctively different cultures raise doubts about their original provenance. In order to resolve this paradoxical image found in the epic texts, I argue that the narrators of the aforementioned epics borrowed the basic motif from a common tradition and blended the motif with the culture of the different geographic locations where these epic narratives took shape.

In order to examine Helen's role as the cause for a war I will explore the *Cypria* of the epic Cycle. The *Cypria* reports the Earth's request to Zeus for her protection from the burden of impious people. Zeus following the advice of Momos/Cavil, creates a beautiful daughter by uniting with Leda/ Nemesis, and arranges a marriage between a mortal and an immortal goddess. Homer introduces Helen as the "daughter of Zeus" in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. Similarly, Achilles is known as the semi-divine son of mortal Peleus and the river goddess Thetis. Furthermore, the Hesiodic text of *Work and Days* writes about the "race of men-heroes" who attacked Troy to rescue Helen from the Trojans. Hesiod describes this race as "more just and superior" and the "godly race of men-heroes, who are called demigods (ἡμίθεοι)." Clearly, three different texts are needed to understand the background of the Trojan War and the status of Helen in the *Iliad*.

Book one (book of the Beginning) of the *Mahābhārata*, on the contrary, states clearly the episodes of the Earth's complaint to the Creator god, and also the need for demigods to fight a war to reduce the Earth's oppression by evil men. The same book also narrates the birth of Draupadī and her divinely ordained role as the destroyer of the warrior race.

In the light of the cause of cathartic war in the epics from two separate geographical locations, first, I argue that the same myth of the overburdened Earth has been borrowed from the Indo-European tradition. Since it is well accepted that the Indo-European society is patrilineal/ patriarchal<sup>28</sup>, a beautiful woman had to be created as a substitute for the overburdened female Earth and the “men- heroes” fought the heroic battle in order to rescue this beautiful woman (Helen) in the *Iliad*. In other words, Helen was created as the uniting object over which the Achaean and the Trojan heroes fought. Similarly, Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* was created as a beautiful object intended to be the common wife of five demigods/heroes and her unnecessary assault turned out to be the cause in uniting her husbands in fighting the great battle.

Second, it must be noted that Homer depicted a strong image of Helen in both epics while juxtaposing an image of prized object to be fought for by the heroes in the *Iliad*. Similarly, the narrator Vyāsa delineated a strong image of Draupadī who had to defend herself in various situations while being married to five men who were great

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<sup>28</sup> I use these terms interchangeably. The term “patrilineal” connotes a kinship system and the term “patriarchal” denotes a social system that is ruled by masculine power. This masculine power derives from masculine functions endorsed by patrilineal kinship structure. Accordingly, a woman after marriage leaves her clan and enters into her husband's clan. Emile Benveniste (*Indo-European Language and Society*) points out that in ancient Indo-European language, “kinship by alliance has its own terminology”. These terms of “kinship by alliance” designate the tie of kinship through husband.

My work involves ancient Indo-European society, although I am aware that the term “patriarchal” has a wide array of political meanings in its contemporary usage.

heroes/demigods. To put it another way, neither Helen nor Draupadī remains as a simple object of the war; rather, each of them subverts the system by crossing the boundary of her designated role. The purpose of my dissertation is to emphasize the polarized narratives of the two heroines through a critical analysis of these texts. This dissertation is divided into three parts: 1. *Casus Belli*. 2. Power of Speech. 3. Viewing Space and Time. Each part devotes one chapter on Helen and one on Draupadī.

I, therefore, will establish at first, a common Indo-European motif found in the background of the *Iliad* and in the *Mahābhārata*. Second, on the basis of the discourse in this prologue I will pursue a critical analysis of the aforementioned texts attempting to illustrate Helen as *casus belli* through the perspectives of Birth, Beauty and Marriage. Likewise, I will follow the same model of three perspectives in defining Draupadī's character in the Indic epic. The first part, therefore, includes two approaches: first, to establish a common Indo-European motif behind a devastating war noted in the Greek and Indic epics; second, to discern the characters of Helen and Draupadī in relation to the motif of *casus belli* through textual analysis. I will examine the roles of these two heroines through their particular textual contexts in two separate chapters.

The second part will discuss the narrative ambiguities in the portrayals of Helen and Draupadī through their verbal representation, and I will analyze their characters in relation to this theme in two separate chapters. Each chapter will attempt to elucidate the contradictory narrative in portraying the selected heroine against the background of a silent woman. Both Helen of Sparta and Draupadī of Pāñcāla evolve from their silent existence without any agency of their own and then become well known for their verbal skill. In addition, I wish to focus on their nonverbal elements along with their verbal delivery. To put it another way, I will concentrate on the self-presentation of these two

epic heroines and how their physical deportments along with their garments contribute to their self-presentation.

The first chapter of the second part of this thesis begins with an analysis of Helen of Sparta in the context of her various voices. I will explore her individual style in exhibiting her verbal manipulation as the situation arises. Books three, six, and twenty-four in the *Iliad* demonstrate the remarkable rhetoric maneuver of Helen. When Helen speaks to Priam at the *Teichoscopia*, she speaks with respect and modesty: “Respected are you in my eyes, dear father of my husband, and dread.” (*Il.* 3.172) Clearly, she knows the value of the social hierarchy and her manner of addressing the king reinforces her awareness. Next, she expresses her emotion of regret by *ophelon* phrases: “I wish that evil death had been pleasing to me” (3.173) and it is the same phrase with a death wish comes back in books six and twenty-four. Then Helen reproaches herself by referring to herself as “dog-faced” (κυνώπιδος, 3.180) and she continues her self-abusive words in book six (6.356) as well as in the *Odyssey* (4.145). Yet, the same voice of regret turns into a voice of self-aggrandization while she introduces the Achaean warriors to Priam. Her past takes a central role in describing other heroes. But her voice changes in books three and six while she reproaches Aphrodite and Paris.

Book six depicts a complex usage of many voices of Helen. Hector rebukes Paris when he finds Paris in his bedroom instead on the battlefield. Upon seeing Hector in their bedroom, Helen speaks to him gently, calling herself “evil-devising, dreadful dog” (κυνὸς κακομηχάνου ὀκρυοέσσης: 6.344). Further, she wishes for her death on a grand cosmic scale, scorns Paris for not knowing nemesis, and wishes for a better husband. Finally, she predicts that she and Paris along with Hector will be the subject of the poet’s song in future.



The narrator of the *Iliad* grants a highly unusual role to Helen of Sparta in book twenty-four in which she impresses the audience with her rhetorical skill as a mourner at Hector's lamentation. First, she voices her wish that it would have been better for her to die. However, it is important to note that Helen's lamentation for Hector is different from the keening of Andromache or of Hecuba. Unlike the other Trojan women, Helen does not fear her own enslavement or death without Hector. She rather worries about her own public image in the Trojan society, as Hector will not be there to defend her public reputation. The *Iliad* ends with Hector's funeral but Helen of Sparta appears again in the *Odyssey*.

Helen appears with her husband Menelaus in books four and fifteen of the *Odyssey*. Here, instead of being a stranger or an uninvited guest in a foreign country, Helen along with Menelaus are the hosts entertaining Telemachus and Peisistratus in their shiny palace in the midst of the joyous feast of the double weddings of Hermione and Megapenthes. In the *Odyssey*, Helen is likened to "Artemis of the golden distaff." While book four demonstrates Helen's narrative control from the beginning, book fifteen displays her prophetic ability, thereby establishing her divine status.

Likewise, in the chapter on Draupadī, I will also analyze her self-presentation through her various voices along with her physical deportment and her garments. Like Helen in the *Iliad*, Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* evolves from a silent bride to a powerful speaker. I will examine her speaking style mainly in books two, three, four, and five. In addition, some sections of book twelve are worth investigating in relation to her manner of speaking.

The audience hears Draupadī's voice for the first time in book two when she is dragged into the assembly hall of the Kuru king. She has been gambled away by her

senior husband, the king Yudhishtira, and thus she has lost her status as a free woman. Doubting the legality of her husband's rights in staking her in a dice game, she does not accept her new status. Therefore, she asks the king and the elders present in the hall to answer her question. Moreover, her defeated husband along with her four other husbands are also present in the hall. Draupadī addresses them all. The narrator paints a pitiable picture of her and yet she speaks with great force. Unlike Helen wrapped in shiny garment receiving courteous behavior from the king Priam at the *Teichoscopia*, she does not receive any gentle acceptance from anyone in the hall and her garment is notably bloodstained. Even the royal women witnessing her assault remain silent. Although the situation of Draupadī at the assembly hall is quite different from Helen's at the *Teichoscopia*, they both share nevertheless a common theme that begins with their silence and ends with powerful speech. In this chapter, I intend to analyze Draupadī's speech in the aforementioned books while pointing out the situational difference between her and Helen.

The third part or the final part of this thesis will attempt to construct a spatial and temporal relationship pivoting on the powerful voices of these two Indo-European princesses belonging to distinctly different cultures. Irene de Jong writes: "Highly important in the Homeric epics is the *symbolic* function of space."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the awareness of time is equally significant in the Homeric epics; Helen remembers how she left her marriage bed, her child, her childhood friends and followed Paris to Troy (*Il.* 3.173-175). Helen also predicts how she will be included in song of men in future generation (*Il.* 6. 357-358). Equally important is book four of the *Odyssey* where

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<sup>29</sup> Irene J.F. de Jong, *Space in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 33.

description of space and awareness of time are built around objects (*Od.* 4.125-132, 227-232). Furthermore, the contradictory narrations of the same event by Helen and Menelaus regarding the story of Odysseus in Troy accentuate important functions of space and time. In addition, drawing from Irene de Jong and Christoph Tsagalis's brilliant studies on the space and time in the narratives of the *Iliad*, I shall aim to view her in a new dimension.

Viewing Draupadī in relations to space and time is no less important yet it received little or no attention from scholars. Scholars typically read time in the *Mahābhārata* in eschatological terms or even as pure destiny. I will, rather, consider the representation of time for viewing Draupadī in a chronological/secular sense. She also, like Helen, goes back and forth in time in reminding her senior husband about her assault in the hall of the Kuru kingdom. In addition, Draupadī's movement with her husbands in various locations renders possibilities for analyzing her character in relation to her space. Moreover, her garments like Helen's signal symbolic functions. Note that the frequent description of her beautiful body recalling the ritual altar evokes desire among men and also attracts the attention of women as well. Hers is a divine body that has risen from the ritual altar and yet, it does not create any reverential awe as Helen's body does to the elders at the rampart in the *Iliad*. It is important to note that in the *Mahābhārata*, the narrative of Draupadī begins as a divine being who rises from a sacred space on earth and ends in the revelation of her identity as the goddess Śrī in a divine space.

Finally, building on my analysis, I wish to argue that Homer's Helen represents a society that reflects an Indo-European patrilineal layer on the preexisting Aegean matriliney.

Likewise, Vyāsa's depiction of Draupadī endowed with powerful personality and the virtue of a devoted wife conveys the patrilineal/brāhmanic culture of the Indo-European

society along with the goddess culture of the pre-Vedic society that merges into modern Hinduism.

I use the term pre-Vedic interchangeably with Indus Valley civilization or Harappa civilization. I understand the Vedic culture as a culture derived from Indo-European tradition. According to the recent archeological findings Indus Valley civilization disintegrated at c. 1900 BCE. Rig Vedic corpus does not mention any cities but only ruins. The beginning of the Rig Vedic period is somewhat vague but there must have been some overlap of incoming migration of Vedic clans with the people of later Indus Valley civilization. Stephanie Jamison and Vedic scholar Michael Witzel<sup>30</sup> tentatively suggest 1500 BCE-500 BCE as convenient limiting dates when Vedas were orally composed in parts of present day Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and northern India. Further, mentioning of Vedic gods (Varuna, Mitra, Indra, Nāsatya= Aśvin) in the Hittite-Mitanni agreement around 1380 BCE provides the *terminus ad quem*.

It has been claimed that the war in the *Mahābhārata* that happened in the Kuruksetra reflects the battle of the “ten kings” and the winner of the battle was the chieftain Sudās.<sup>31</sup> As Sudās represented the Bharata tribe, his tribe settled in the Kuruksetra area. The rise of the Kuru and Pāñcāla tribes are mentioned in the literature of the late Brāhmans/Early Upanishads belonging to the late Vedic period. James Fitzgerald mentions that the *Mahābhārata* “has antecedents of some kind in older Indo-Āryan, oral bardic literature and even more ancient Indo-European

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<sup>30</sup> *Vedic Hinduism*, 1992, [www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel.vedica.pdf](http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~witzel/vedica.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Witzel, “Early Sanskritization. Origins and Development of the Kuru State”, [Michaelwitzel.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ejvs010article.pdf](http://Michaelwitzel.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/ejvs010article.pdf).

bardic songs about warriors and wars.”<sup>32</sup> It seems that the tradition of the *Mahābhārata* could be traced back to the Indo-European culture but the written Sanskrit text was fixed and propagated in Northern India around 300-450 CE under the reign of the Gupta Empire of India.

My emphasis is on analyzing the character of Draupadī as an inheritor of the Indo-European tradition that merged into Vedic and also integrated pre-Vedic goddess culture of India. Further, it must be noted that the Vedic ideology influenced the Brāhmanic culture in ancient India. In view of the above background I intend to point out that the character of Draupadī shares the similar situation with Homeric Helen who also manifests the amalgamation of Aegean culture and Indo-European tradition.

My thesis aims to analyze the characters of Helen of Homeric epics and Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* mainly through textual readings with tools of literary analysis with the assumption that theological ideology is embedded in ancient texts, especially in the *Mahābhārata*.

My dissertation reveals that far from being mere catalysts for devastating war, these female epic characters play ambiguous roles only to assert their cultural identities while trying to fit in patrilineal society.

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<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald, “Mahābhārata,” 52.

## Part One: *Casus belli*

### Introduction

This part explores the motif of *casus belli* using two different approaches as explained at the beginning of this thesis. First, I will examine the myth of the overburdened Earth that bolsters my argument that both Helen in the *Iliad* and Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*<sup>33</sup> are divinely ordained to be the cause of a catastrophic war, be that the Trojan or the war in the *Mahābhārata*. While Helen in the *Iliad* is frequently referred to as the primary cause of the Trojan War, Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* is proclaimed only once at the time of her birth as the cause of the destruction of the warrior class. Due to their disparate cultural backgrounds belonging to different geographical locations, the literary characters of these two heroines unfold in their own distinct ways. But the main motif of a woman being divinely ordained as the cause of war in the Greek and Indic epics does exist in the background that is common to both epics. In other words, Helen and Draupadī do share a common background without even belonging to a culturally similar society.

### Common Background: Indo-European Heritage

In order to corroborate my argument, first I shall examine the fragments of *Cypria* in relation to the divine justification for the devastating war in the *Iliad*. Second, I shall examine the divine logic regarding the *Mahābhārata* war in the very first book of the *Mahābhārata* itself. After exploring the textual sources that establish the divine logic behind the births of Helen as well as of Draupadī, four strikingly parallel motifs emerge: First, a complaint of a personified Earth to the primary God figure (it is Zeus in the Greek

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<sup>33</sup> The *Mahābhārata* contains nearly 75,000 verses.  
See John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 41.

context, and Brahmā in the *Mahābhārata*) about the burden of an impious population; second, the unusual birth of a divine/semi-divine woman, and third, her unparalleled beauty; and finally, the marriage of the divine/semi-divine beautiful woman. As a result, the issue of explaining these similarities between these two disparate cultures becomes essential.

I will explore the first motif, that is, the dual complaints of a personified Earth in both traditions concurrently, as the same divine logic is conspicuous surrounding the birth of both Helen and Draupadī. I will treat the other three motifs separately as these motifs appear in distinctly different manner in the lives of these two queens. As it has been indicated at the beginning that in order to clarify the intended comparison between the above two literary works, I will follow the comparative approach that is classified as *typological* by Gregory Nagy<sup>34</sup>. After observing the identical myth found in the narratives of both Helen and Draupadī, I construct a type—*casus belli*—through which the narratives of these two beautiful princesses in relation to the respective wars of these two epics can be perceived. In the following sections, I will explore the divine logic that explains the necessity of the Great War in the *Iliad* and the *Mahābhārata*.

### **The myth of the overburdened Earth**

The myth of the overburdened Earth explaining the very cause of the Trojan War is not found in the *Iliad*. The narrator of the *Iliad* does not inform the audience about the origin of the ‘strife’ for which Helen is blamed. The first book of the *Iliad* begins *in medias res*, with a request to the goddess to sing the ‘wrath’ (μῆνιν) of Achilles that caused sufferings to the Achaeans. Then in the fifth line of the same paragraph, the

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<sup>34</sup> Gregory Nagy, “The Epic Hero” in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John M. Foley (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 71-89.

narrator announces: ‘thus the will of Zeus was brought to fulfillment’ (Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείτο Βουλὴ). To understand the will of Zeus in the context of the war in the *Iliad* and to explain Helen’s involuntary involvement in the Trojan War, I propose to look into the fragments of the Epic Cycle *Cypria*. The Epic Cycle comprises a large body of early Greek heroic poems and they belong either to the Theban Cycle or to the Trojan Cycle.<sup>35</sup> The *Cypria*, a part of the Trojan Cycle, tells us the origin of the Trojan War and the role of Helen in this war.

The first fragment in the *Cypria*, relates the scholiast’s (D) explanation for the ‘will of Zeus’ mentioned in the fifth line of the first book of the *Iliad*:

Others have said that Homer was referring to a myth. For they say that Earth, being weighed down by the multitude of people, there being no piety among humankind, asked Zeus to be relieved of the burden. Zeus firstly and at once brought about the Theban War, by means of which he destroyed very large numbers, and afterwards the Trojan one, with Cavil as his adviser, this being what Homer calls the plan of Zeus, seeing that he was capable of destroying everyone with thunderbolts or floods. Cavil prevented this, and proposed two ideas to him, the marriage of Thetis to a mortal and the birth of a beautiful daughter. From these two events war came about between Greeks and barbarians, resulting in the lightening of the earth as many were killed. The story was found in Stasinus, the author of the *Cypria*, who says:

There was a time when the countless races <of men> roaming <constantly> over the land were weighing down the <deep-> breasted earth’s expanse. Zeus took pity when he saw it, and in his complex mind he resolved to relieve the all-nurturing earth of mankind’s weight by fanning the great conflict of the Trojan War, to void the burden through death. So the warriors at Troy kept being killed, and Zeus’ plan was being fulfilled.<sup>36</sup>

ἄλλοι δὲ ἀπὸ ἱστορίας τινὸς εἶπον εἰρηκέναι τὸν Ὅμηρον. φασὶ γὰρ τὴν Γῆν βαρουμένην ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων πολυπληθείας, μηδεμιᾶς ἀνθρώπων οὔσης εὐσεβείας, αἰτῆσαι τὸν Δία κουφισθῆναι τοῦ ἄχθους· τὸν δὲ Δία πρῶτον μὲν εὐθὺς ποιῆσαι τὸν Θηβαϊκὸν πόλεμον, δι’ οὗ πολλοὺς πάνυ ἀπώλεσεν, ὕστερον δὲ πάλιν τὸν Ἰλιακόν, συμβούλῳ τῷ Μώμῳ χρησάμενος, ἦν Διὸς

<sup>35</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, ed. and trans. M. L. West, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.



βουλὴν Ὅμηρός φησιν, ἐπειδὴ οἶός τε ἦν κεραυνοῖς ἢ κατακλυσμοῖς ἅπαντας διαφθεῖρειν· ὅπερ τοῦ Μώμου κωλύσαντος, ὑποθεμένου δὲ αὐτῷ γνώμας δύο, τὴν Θέτιδος θνητογαμίαν καὶ θυγατρὸς καλῆς γένναν, ἐξ ὧν ἀμφοτέρων πόλεμος Ἑλλησὶ τε καὶ βαρβάροις ἐγένετο, ἀφ’ οὗ συνέβη κουφισθῆναι τὴν γῆν πολλῶν ἀναιρεθέντων. ἡ δὲ ἱστορία παρὰ Στασίνοι τῷ τὰ Κύπρια πεποιηκότι, εἰπόντι οὕτως·

ἦν ὅτε μυρία φῦλα κατὰ χθόνα πλαζόμενα <αἰεὶ ἀνθρώπων ἐ>βάρυ<νε βαθυ>στέρνου πλάτος αἴης. Ζεὺς δὲ ἰδὼν ἐλέησε, καὶ ἐν πυκιναῖς πραπίδεσσιν κουφίσαι ἀνθρώπων παμβώτορα σύνθετο γαῖαν, ῥιπίσσας πολέμου μεγάλην ἔριν Ἰλιακοῖο, ὅφρα κενώσειεν θανάτῳ βάρος. οἱ δ’ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ ἥρωες κτείνοντο, Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή.<sup>37</sup>

The most compelling point in the myth according to the scholium (D) of the *Iliad* 1.5 in the *Cypria* is that the Earth is not a mere object and being endowed with speech, but she personally asks Zeus ‘to be relieved of the burden’ created by the ‘multitude of the people’. It is equally important to note that physically Earth is not able to carry the weight of so many impious people: ‘there being no piety among humankind’. The second century Oxyrhynchus papyrus (P. Oxy. 3829 ii 9) also relates that Zeus, upon consulting with Themis, decides to destroy people ‘finding the race of heroes guilty of impiety’ (ἀσέβειαν καταγνοὺς τοῦ ἡρωϊκοῦ γένους)<sup>38</sup>. The two pertinent factors are given in the first part of the Scholium (D) *Il.* 1.5. First, the Earth’s request to Zeus for lightening her burden of people; second, these people are impious. Curiously, Scholium (D) is the only fragment where these two issues, namely, the Earth’s request and the impiety of people, appear simultaneously.

Furthermore, it is in the same part of the scholium where Momos advises Zeus not to destroy all by his thunderbolt or by creating a flood. Momos rather proposes two ideas: the marriage of immortal Thetis to a mortal and the birth of a beautiful daughter. Zeus

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 80-82.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

accepts the advice of Momos. Accordingly, the immortal Thetis marries Peleus and Achilles is born. Zeus united with Nemesis and the beautiful Helen was born.

Consequently, the Trojan War happened and the earth was lightened, as a myriad of men were killed in the Trojan War. It is important to note that Achilles, the hero of the Achaeans, is half mortal and half divine and, therefore, belongs to the race of ‘demigods’ (ἡμίθεοι) as Hesiod (160)<sup>39</sup> describes. Clearly, the first part of the scholium (D) in the *Cypria* imparts five distinct concepts: First, the Earth as a speaking being requests Zeus to relieve her burden of overpopulation; second, people are impious; third, instead of using his thunderbolt or creating a deluge, Zeus makes a decision following the advice of Momos; fourth, necessity of a half mortal/immortal hero and of generating a beautiful daughter; fifth, the Earth is relieved of her burden of impious people through a devastating war. Towards the end of the *Catalogue of Women*, Hesiod writes how Zeus designs to end the race of the mortals and the lives of the semi-gods through a ‘difficult warfare’ (94-105): hence the end of the heroic age.<sup>40</sup>

The Greek playwright Euripides alludes to the myth of the overpopulated earth at the beginning of the play *Helen* (36-41):

Joined to these woes were further woes in turn, the plan of Zeus. He brought war upon the Greeks and the poor Trojans to relieve Mother Earth of the throng and press of humankind and also make plain who was the most valiant man in Greece.<sup>41</sup>

Euripides alludes to the same myth towards the end (1639-42) of the play *Orestes*:

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<sup>39</sup> Hesiod. *Works and Days*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 100-101.

<sup>40</sup> Hesiod. *Catalogue*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2007), 233-235.

<sup>41</sup> Euripides. *Helen, Phoenician Women, Orestes*, ed. and trans., David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2002), 36-41.

For it was by her beauty that the gods brought Greeks and Phrygians to one place and caused deaths, in order to relieve the earth of the rank growth of mortals' boundless population.<sup>42</sup>

It is to be noted that the myth that appears in the first three lines of the scholium (D) is not repeated anywhere in its complete form, nor is it discussed by classicists. Yet a remarkably similar myth of the overburdened Earth personally complaining to the God is found in the first book of *Mahābhārata*. The first book of *Mahābhārata* is called the book of the Beginning (*Ādikāṇḍa*), where the narrator narrates how the Earth came to Brahmā, 'the grandfather of all beings', seeking help. The Earth sought help because the impious kings at that time oppressed 'all the races of creation' with their menacing power. These demonic kings had a multitude of vicious people who roamed all over the earth. Under these circumstances the Earth came to Brahmā:

Therefore, Earth, sagging under her burden and brutalized with fear, sought refuge with the God who is the grandfather of all beings.<sup>43</sup>

tato mahī mahīpāla bhārātā bhayapīḍitā jagāma śaraṇaṃ devaṃ  
sarvabhūtapitāmahaṃ<sup>44</sup>

However, Brahmā (the Creator of the universe) told the Earth that in order to fulfill her request, he would "appoint all the dwellers in the heavens." Having said thus, the God Brahmā asked the Earth to leave. Then Brahmā himself gave orders to all the gods: "To throw off the burden of Earth," he said, "you must each be born with a part of yourselves on her to halt them"<sup>45</sup>

asyā bhūmer nirasitūṃ bhāraṃ bhāgaiḥ prthak prthak asyām eva  
prasūyadhvaṃ virodhāyeti cābravīt<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 1639-42.

<sup>43</sup> *The Mahābhārata: 1. The Book of the Beginning*, ed. and trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 137. I will use van Buitenen's translation unless otherwise stated.

<sup>44</sup> Sacred Texts.com Mahabharata. Book 1, chapter 58, verse 37.

<sup>45</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.1, 38.

<sup>46</sup> Sacred Texts.com Mahabharata. Book 1, chapter 58, verse 46.

Undeniably, the first three lines of the myth found in the scholium (D) *Il.* 1.5 appear here in the Book of the Beginning of the *Mahābhārata*. This is the only myth other than the one reported in the *Cypria* where the Earth is endowed with speaking powers and she requests the creator God Brahmā to relieve her of the burden of impious people.

Furthermore, the creator God himself orders the gods to be born on earth as demigods and to be engaged in a battle to contend these impious people who are known as *Asuras* in the Indic context.

The famous five heroic brothers (Pāndavas) in the *Mahābhārata* are half mortals and half immortals. The book of the Beginning also reports that the goddess Śrī became incarnated as Draupadī. It is to be noted that the birth of a half-immortal hero is a necessary requirement both in the *Cypria* and in the *Mahābhārata*. While Achilles, the ‘best of the Achaeans’ was born as the needed consequence of the pre-ordained marriage of immortal Thetis and mortal Peleus, five semi-mortal brothers were born according the demand of the creator god in the *Mahābhārata*. However, these five semi-divine brothers do not have the same mother. The first three of the brothers were born from the first wife of the king Pāndu and the other two from the second wife of the same king. Hence: they are known as Pāndava brothers. The important point is that these five brothers have mortal women as mothers and gods as their fathers. For further clarification of the remarkably similar motif found in *Cypria* and in the first book otherwise known as the book of the Beginning of the *Mahābhārata*, I propose to follow the typological approach arranged in a tabular form:

<i>Cypria</i> of The Epic Cycle	The first Book known as “The Book of the Beginning” in the <i>Mahābhārata</i>
The Earth as a speaking being requests Zeus to relieve her burden of overpopulation.	The Earth personified comes to Brahmā the Creator god in the Indic epic tradition, seeking help to relieve her burden of overpopulation.
The Earth is populated with impious people.	The Earth is oppressed with multitude of vicious people.
Birth of a semi divine mortal hero is ordained.	Birth of five semi-divine heroes happened following the order of the lord of creation.
An Unusual birth of immortal/ semi-mortal female possessed with alluring beauty. A royal family adopts this attractive female as their own daughter.	An Unusual birth of an immortal female possessed with enchanting beauty. A royal family adopts this charming female as their own daughter.

Table 1: The motif of the overburdened Earth in *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Evidently, it can be inferred from the myths of the Greek and Indic traditions the striking similarity in their epic narratives. Thus the original trace of the myth reported in the first part of the scholium (D) *Il.* 1.5 appears in the book of the Beginning in the *Mahābhārata*. I argue, therefore, while the heroes in the Indic myth are demigods like the Hesiodic ἡμίθεοι from the Heroic Age; the divine Draupadi is *casus belli* like Helen in the *Iliad*. In other words, it is not beyond the bounds of probability that the *Mahābhārata*, the Greek epic tradition, and the Homeric epics draw upon a common traditional belief system. On the basis of this comparison Gregory Nagy writes:

In this way the major epic narratives of the Greek and the Indic peoples are inaugurated with a cognate theme, and it is hard to imagine more compelling evidence for the Indo-European heritage of the epic traditions about the Trojan War.<sup>47</sup>

Recently, in another article, Nagy underscores how there exists a correlation between the idea of the war of depopulation and the idea of demigods in both of these epic

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<sup>47</sup> Gregory Nagy, “The Epic Hero”, in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Milles Foley (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 82.

traditions. Furthermore, in order to understand the Indo-European heritage of these two epic traditions, Nagy asserts, it is extremely important to identify this ‘essential’ correlation between the idea of a war of depopulation and the idea of demigods. On the basis of this ‘essential’ correlation between the God’s decision of initiating a war to depopulate the overburdened Earth and a decision to create demigods as heroes appearing in both Greek and Indic epic traditions, Nagy concludes:

So I conclude that the Greek myths about *hēmitheoi* and the primal disasters that befell them could not have been selective borrowings from corresponding myths produced by neighbouring civilization in the Near East. Rather, these myths must derive ultimately from Indo-European traditions.<sup>48</sup>

Here I draw attention to the comment of M. L. West regarding the similarity in the motif of overpopulation used in *Cypria* and in the *Mahābhārata*:

We can hardly avoid the assumption that the overpopulation motif used in the *Cypria* likewise has its source in Babylonian epic. It is true that a similar myth is found in Indian epic: it is related that the earth once complained to Brahmā of the ever-increasing weight of mankind, and Brahmā created death to alleviate the problem. But it would be very rash to infer from the coincidence between the Indian myth and the *Cypria* that some ancient Indo-European tradition lay behind both passages. The motif appears only in a late phase of the Greek epic tradition, and at an even later date in India. It is attested over a thousand years earlier in Mesopotamia, and as it is certain that Mesopotamian influence extended eastwards to India as well as westwards to Greece, we must conclude that this is an example of it.<sup>49</sup>

After eight years, West proposes the same argument in *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* in a different manner. After citing the same myth of earth complaining to Brhamā, West writes:

Some have inferred from the coincidence that an Indo-European tradition lies behind the story, although it appears in the late phase of the Greek epic

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory Nagy, “Cataclysm and Ecpyrosis, two symmetrical actions of Zeus as sky-god” in *classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu*, (May 19, 2016) accessed, March 27, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> M.L. West. *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 482.

tradition and at an even later date in India. What is more important is that a similar myth is attested over a thousand years earlier in Mesopotamia. The natural conclusion is that the Greek and the Indian poets were both using a motif somehow derived from Mesopotamia, not one inherited from Graeco-Aryan antiquity.<sup>50</sup>

While continuing to insist upon the far-reaching influence of the myth of overpopulation from Mesopotamia on both India and Greece, West in this passage is unsure how this motif of overpopulation came to the poets of India and Greece. Thus he writes in his later book that this “motif somehow derived from Mesopotamia”, whereas in his earlier book, West wrote “as it is certain that Mesopotamian influence extended eastwards to India as well as westwards to Greece, we must conclude that this is an example of it.”

The problem, however, is that the motif of overpopulation seems to signify different meanings to Nagy and West. While the influence of Near Eastern tradition on the Greek tradition is undeniable, this particular myth regarding the overpopulation in the Babylonian epic *Atrahasis* does not include a key element, that is, the story about the earth’s request to the great God to alleviate her burden. The first tablet of this epic tells the story about how human beings were created to do the hard work that used to be done by the gods. The second tablet reports that the land expanded and the human beings multiplied. Then the noise of humankind began to annoy the gods:

600 hundred years, less than 600, passed,???  
 And the country was as **noisy as a bellowing bull**.  
 The god grew restless at their racket’  
 Enlil had to listen to their noise.  
 He addressed the great gods,  
 The noise of mankind has become too much,  
 I am losing sleep over their racket.  
 Give the order that suruppu-desease shall break out,<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> M.L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Excerpt from *Atrahasis* at webserv.jcu.edu/bible/200/Readings/Atrahasis.htm (accessed January 18, 20016).

In order to stop ‘the noise of mankind’ the god proceeded to mastermind plague, famine, and flood for the mankind. It is clear that the theme of the ‘noise of mankind’, rather than the ‘overpopulation of earth,” plays the most crucial role in *Atrahasis*. The Babylonian god created plague, famine, and flood to reduce the noise of mankind; whereas Brahmā in the *Mahābhārata* and Zeus in the *Cypria* chose to create war to destroy the impious people/ Asuras in the Indic context and thus lightened the burden of the personified earth.

For further clarification of the thematic commonalities among these three epics, namely, *Cypria*, *Atrahasis*, and the *Mahābhārata*, I propose to follow a typological approach as a methodology of comparison.

<i>Atrahasis</i>	<i>Cypria</i>	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
Theme of overpopulation.	Theme of overpopulation	Theme of overpopulation
The humans reproduce at a fast rate and the “country was as noisy as a bellowing bull.”		
“The God grew restless at their clamor.”		
Eventually, the God (Enlil) decided to send a devastating <b>flood</b> to annihilate the mankind.		
	Zeus decided to alleviate the burden of the overpopulated earth through a devastating <b>war</b> .	Brahmā decided to alleviate the burden of the overpopulated earth through a devastating <b>war</b> .

Table 2: Theme of overpopulation in the *Atrahasis*, *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata*.

Viewed from the above perspective, it must be noted that West makes a sweeping generalization of the theme of the overpopulation without paying attention to their particularities. In regard to the Indian myth of alleviating the burden of earth, West writes that Brahmā created ‘death’ to solve the problem of overpopulated earth.



However, there exists a separate myth regarding the motifs of overpopulation and death in book seven (*Dronaparvan*) of the *Mahābhārata* in which Brahmā became upset that he could not devise any plan to destroy the creatures at the request of the Earth goddess. For this reason, a terrible wrath possessed him and out of this wrath came out a terrible fire that started to burn animated world including trees, rocks, and rivers. When (Mahādeva) Śiva requested him to stop this fury, Brahmā answered:

No lust to destroy brought this to pass. Rage possesses me because I fear for the survival of the earth. The goddess is pained by her burden and it is she who drives me to seek the destruction of the creatures. She is too kind o Mahadeva and she suffers terribly for it. But I can find no way of destroying this manifold and measureless cosmos, and this is why such fury burns within me.<sup>52</sup>

Samhartum na ca me kāma etad evaṃ bhaved iti prthivyā hitakāmam tu tato mam manyur āviśat. Iyam hi mām sadā devī bhār'ārtā samacūdat samhār'ārtham Mahādeva bhāren'ābhihatā sati. Tato'ham n'ādhigacchāmi tapye bahuvidham tadā samhāram aprameyasya tato mām manyur āviśat.<sup>53</sup>

Eventually, at Śiva's request he controlled his wrath and the burning fire was extinguished. Then, Death appeared from Brahmā's body in the form of a woman.

Brahmā said this to the Death:

O Death, you are the earth's guardian. Destroy these creatures. You were born of my rage to bring about the end of things. Gather in all these beings from idiot to sage and know that only good can come from to you for it will be my command that you obey.<sup>54</sup>

Mṛtyo iti mahīpāla jahi c' êmāḥ prajā iti. Tvam hi samhārabuddhy ātha prādurbhūtā ruso mama tasmāt samhara sarvās tvam prajāḥ sajadapanditāḥ. Mama tvam hi niyogena tataḥ śreyo hy avāpsyasi.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Mahābhārata: Dronaparvan*, ed. and trans., Vaughan Pilikian (New York: The Clay Sanskrit Library co-published by New York University Press and the JJC Foundation, 2006), 397. The *Dronaparvan* is the seventh book of the *Mahābhārata*. V. Pilikian has translated from Nilakantha's manuscript and in addition, he has drawn from Calcutta Edition (1834-39), Bombay Edition, and the two Devanagari manuscripts of the Critical Edition

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 398.

It is possible that the aforementioned myth is the one that West was referring to. This myth does confirm that Brahmā created Death to alleviate the Earth's burden of creatures that the Creator God created. However, the context is quite different from the myth of the overpopulation that appears also in the Greek epic cycle. While this myth comprises the creation of Death who will claim all human beings regardless of good (sage) or bad; the myth that originates from the Indo-European tradition relates the Creator God's decision of punishing the cruel kings on earth by creating war. Yet, West writes that "Brahmā created death to alleviate the problem" of overpopulation. This crucial point regarding the usage of 'death' fails to draw attention to the scholars who express their disagreement regarding the myth of overpopulation<sup>56</sup>.

With a particular attention to the myth I have pointed out a few lines earlier, I find his comment about the myth of overpopulation untenable. This is largely because, his claim that the Babylonian epic *Atrahasis* is the source of the myths of overpopulation in the *Cypria* as well as in the *Mahābhārata* simply on the basis of the chronological<sup>57</sup> antiquity is obscure. I must point out again that West writes that the poets in India and Greece "were using this motif somehow derived from Mesopotamia" and with the help of this vague notion of 'somehow derived', he concludes that this myth is not "inherited from Graeco-Aryan antiquity". In addition, let me specify how West label the Babylonian,

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<sup>56</sup> N.J. Allen, Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford; Wendy Doniger in London Review of Books; and Gregory Nagy in "The Epic Hero", for instance.

<sup>57</sup> N.J. Allen in his review (Bryn Mawr Classical Review, 2007.10.53) on M.L. West's *Indo-European Poetry and Myth* writes: "As has long been recognized, Ge's complaint to Zeus, which causes the Trojan war, parallels Prithivi's complaint to Brahma, which causes the central Mahabharata war. Since a third parallel occurs a millennium earlier in *Atrahasis* (a Babylonian mythological poem), W. judges that the motif is not Graeco-Aryan but rather spread both west and east from Mesopotamia. However, the argument from chronology does not merit so much weight, and Graeco-Aryan common origin remains likely."

Greek and Indic myths under the general classification of the myth of ‘overpopulation’ regardless of their inherent differences from the Babylonian epic itself.

To reiterate: In the *Atrahasis*, Enlil the king of the gods becomes annoyed by the noise of the humanity (‘noisy as a bellowing bull’) created by the gods themselves less than twelve hundred years ago. Being ‘restless at their racket’, the gods sent famine, pestilence, and deluge to stop the noise created by humankind on earth. Again, I must point out that in this epic, noise from the earth constitutes the central motif, whereas the overpopulated earth does not. By the same token, I argue that if the population had grown quietly without making any noise Enlil would not have noticed the humankind. Therefore, the motif of noise is of paramount importance in the *Atrahasis*. Furthermore, the *Atrahasis* lacks the five crucially important motifs shared by the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata*: 1. Speaking Earth complains. 2. People on Earth are Impious. 3. Creation of a beautiful woman. 4. Creation of five heroes who are demi-gods. 5. Alleviating the problem of overburdened Earth by creating a devastating War.

In like manner, the thematic commonality between the *Cypria* and the *Mahābhārata* draws the attention of J.W. de Jong, a Buddhistologist and Indologist. J. W. de Jong comments regarding the myth of the over-burdened earth:

Both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Cypria* relate that the supreme God (Brahmā and Zeus in Greece) brought war to lighten the earth of her burden (Skt. *Bhāra*, Greek βάρος). It seemed to be interesting to point out that the same theme is found in both ancient India and in ancient Greece. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that this theme belongs to a common Indo-European heritage, but in any case it is noteworthy that this myth is found in almost the same wording in two different cultures.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> J.W. de Jong. “The Over-Burdened Earth in India and Greece,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, no 3, Indological Studies Dedicated to Daniel H.H. Ingalls (Jul.- Sep., 1985): 397-400.

On the one hand, de Jong finds the existence of the same myth having “almost the same wording in two different cultures” worthy of attention. On the other hand, he believes that there is not enough evidence to acknowledge a common Indo-European heritage behind their thematic similarity. De Jong’s reluctance to accept a common Indo-European heritage behind the myth of overpopulation in *Cypria* and in the *Mahābhārata* cannot be called an oversight on his part. Likewise, West’s assumption of the Mesopotamian influence in creating similar myths in both Greece and India must be his selective belief. If the same myth in a same thematic form in ‘almost the same wording’ appears in two different Indo-European linguistic traditions that are culturally different and spatially far away from each other; then it seems unavoidable to accept that this myth of the overburdened earth belongs to a common Indo-European heritage.

Clearly, the myth of the overburdened Earth found in *Cypria* helps the readers to understand the phrase “and thus the will of Zeus was brought to fulfillment.” found in the fifth line of book one of the *Iliad*. Furthermore, it has been noted that *Cypria* of the epic Cycle also recommends the birth of a “beautiful daughter” and the marriage of mortal Peleus with the river goddess Thetis. These two proposals had been met and subsequently, the Trojan War happened in order to lighten the burden of the Earth. Similarly, the first book of the *Mahābhārata* reports the myth of the overburdened Earth who complained to the main god of the Indic pantheon. Subsequently, the five demi-gods were born as heroes to fight against the unrighteous kings in devastating war in the Indic epic tradition.

Besides sharing a common Indo-European heritage, the *Iliad* and the *Mahābhārata* employ a similar motif of a devastating war that happens at a transition moment from one age to the other. Hesiod placed the age/race of the heroes/demi-gods

between the Bronze and the Iron Age.<sup>59</sup> This motif will be discussed later in the final chapter of this thesis.

Having established that there is a common Indo-European tradition behind the Trojan War and the *Mahābhārata* War as well, I shall examine the portrayal of Helen as narrated in the *Iliad*. Homer in the *Iliad* does not relate the story of Helen's birth nor of her marriage. In addition, the most beautiful woman's beauty is not described in ornate terms, except a few epithets like "white armed" or "fair among women", for example. The first two books of the *Iliad* allude to Helen as the cause for the war and she appears in the third book as a silent weaver. Then the same book third introduces her as eloquent speaker at the *Teichoscopia*. Thus there is a certain gap between Helen the silent weaver and Helen the authoritative speaker. I intend to focus on Helen's past in relation to her Birth, Beauty, and Marriage. To put it differently, I wish to analyze Helen as a woman without any active agency of her own.

Likewise, Draupadī is the divine instrument for the wars or the *casus belli* without any active agency of her own. Although Helen as the prime cause of the war (*casus belli*) in the *Iliad* has been implied many times throughout the epic, the portrayal of Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* does not present her as the direct cause of the war. It is only at the time of Draupadī's unusual birth, a divine voice declares that Draupadī will bring the ruin of the existing kshatriya kings. From then on, the various events regarding Draupadī unfold

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<sup>59</sup> The theory of world-ages (*yugas*) plays an important role in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Yugas* are named not after metal but after the throws of the game of dice. Their names indicate the gradual degeneration of righteousness among human beings. Thus the Winning throw (four) represents the *Krita Yuga* or the *Satya Yuga*, that is, the age representing the most righteousness. As the throw of the dice decreases, the righteousness in the world also decreases. Accordingly, the third or the *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* or the Second, and finally, comes the *Kali Yuga* that represents the worst throw as well as the worst human beings with no respect for law. The *Mahābhārata* war took place at the transition of the *Dvāpara* and the *Kali* Age. See M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 313-16.

in a manner leading to the war. Apparently, the problem of royal succession between the two cousins on the basis of primogenitary rights seems to be the main cause of the *Mahābhārata* war.

I propose that the *Mahābhārata* war would not have happened if Draupadī had not been born as the divinely ordained cause of the destruction of the warrior race. Notably, her birth as *casus belli* is as essential in the epic as Helen's in the *Iliad*. However, the narrator of the *Iliad* does not tell the audience about the story of Helen's birth; nor does he narrate elaborately about her beauty. I will analyze their roles as *casus belli* separately in the contexts of their birth, beauty, and of marriage as narrated in the texts. The first chapter of this part will discuss the role of Helen as *casus belli* in relation to her birth, beauty, and marriage.

## Chapter One: Helen

### 1.1 Birth of Helen

In the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*, Homer's formulaic epithet for Helen is the 'daughter of Zeus or 'sprung from Zeus' (Διὸς ἐκγαυῖα). Helen's mother's name is not given in the Homeric epic tradition. How did Zeus create this beautiful woman? In the *Iliad*, (3.238) Helen claims that the Dioscuroi are her own brothers 'whom the same mother bore' (τόμοι μία γείνατο μήτηρ). In the *Odyssey* (11.298-300), Odysseus recounts the story of his visit to the underworld where he met Leda who bore Dioscuri to Tyndareus. Euripides in his play *Helen*, introduces the story that Helen herself relates as the child of Leda and Zeus in a skeptical manner:

As for me, glorious Sparta is my homeland, Tyndareus is my father (though there is a story that Zeus flew to my mother Leda in the shape of a swan [who was fleeing from an eagle and had his way with her by treachery, if that story is reliable]), and Helen is my name. (16-22)<sup>60</sup>

ἡμῖν δὲ γῆ μὲν πατρίς οὐκ ἀνώνυμος  
Σπάρτη, πατήρ δὲ Τυνδάρεως· ἔστιν δὲ δὴ  
λόγος τις ὡς Ζεὺς μητέρ' ἔπτατ' εἰς ἐμὴν  
Λήδαν κύκνου μορφώματ' ὄρνιθος λαβών,  
ὃς δόλιον εὐνήν ἐξέπραξ' ὑπ' αἰετοῦ  
δίωγμα φεύγων, εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος·

The *Cypria*, on the contrary, reports a story where Zeus united with Nemesis and Helen was born. However, the fragments in the *Cypria* relate two different versions of the same story. The version according to Atheneus (10 Ath. 334b) recounts that Zeus chased

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<sup>60</sup> Euripides, *Helen*, 15.

Nemesis and in order to flee from him, Nemesis changed herself into various forms including fish.<sup>61</sup> The version of Apollodorus (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.10.7) in the *Cypria* writes:

But some say that Helen was the daughter of Nemesis and Zeus. For Nemesis, fleeing from intercourse with Zeus, changed her form into a goose, but Zeus too took the likeness of the swan and congress with her, and as a result she laid an egg. A shepherd found this among the trees and bought it and gave it to Leda, who put it away in a chest and kept it; and when in time Helen was born from it, she raised her as her own daughter.<sup>62</sup>

If Helen is the daughter of Zeus and Nemesis, then, she must be completely immortal. Being the daughter of Nemesis grants her to change her mental state in order to conform to situation according to her own need. It is well known, as given in the version according to Apollodorus, that Leda and Tyndareus adopted Helen as their own daughter. According to Helen in Euripides's play, she is the daughter of Leda and Tyndareus. If Helen's mother is Leda, then she is semi-mortal. One thing remains certain that she is the daughter of Zeus and she is the beautiful girl who was supposed to be created by Zeus as advised by Momos. However, Homeric tradition is vague about the identity of Helen's mother. Furthermore, Helen was born from an egg. This motif of egg-born recalls to mind the myth of the cosmic egg attributed to Orphic tradition according to which a dual sexed creature known as the Protogonos or the Firstborn emerges from this cosmic egg. However, Helen is not an androgynous being but in light of her birth from an egg, I suggest, that duality must be her only image that generates a polarized meaning. In other words, Helen's status at the human level, with her unusual birth and the supreme God as her father, is charged with radical ambiguity.

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<sup>61</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, Loeb, trans. and ed. Martin West (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 88-90.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.



Despite Helen's divine ancestry, the poet of the *Iliad* does not depict her with any divine power. The first book of the *Iliad* alludes to Helen as the cause for whom the Trojan War was fought (1.159-60). The name of Helen is not clearly mentioned as the cause of the war. It is Achilles who in his wrath towards Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaeans, claims that Achilles has no interest fighting the Trojans:

I did not come here to fight because of the spearman of Troy, since they are in no way at fault toward me<sup>63</sup>.

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ Τρώων ἔνεκ' ἦλυθον αἰχμητάων  
δεῦρο μαχησόμενος, ἐπεὶ οὐ τί μοι αἵτιοί εισιν· (1.152-3)

Then Achilles accuses Agamemnon for dragging him into this war:

But you, shameless one, we followed here in order to please you, seeking to win recompense for Menelaus and for you, dogface, from the Trojans.<sup>64</sup>

ἀλλὰ σοὶ ὧ μέγ' ἀναιδὲς ἄμ' ἐσπόμεθ' ὄφρα σὺ χαίρης,  
τιμὴν ἀρνύμενοι Μενελάῳ σοὶ τε κυνῶπα  
πρὸς Τρώων. (1.158-160)

In book nine Achilles raises the same question of fighting the war on account of Helen:

But why must the Argives wage war against the Trojans? Why has he gathered and led here an army, this son of Atreus? Was it not for fair-haired Helen's sake?"<sup>65</sup>

τί δὲ δεῖ πολεμιζέμεναι Τρώεσσιν  
> Ἀργείους; τί δὲ λαὸν ἀνήγαγεν ἐνθάδ' ἀγείρας  
Ἀτρεΐδης; ἥ οὐχ' Ἑλένης ἔνεκ' ἠϋκόμοιο;(9.337-339)

Achilles is dragged into this war in order to help Menelaus and Agamemnon in recovering Helen from the Trojans. Yet, Achilles does not abandon this war and return home. Because, for Achilles, fighting on account of Helen equates with 'a heroic quest'

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<sup>63</sup> *Iliad* with an English translation by A. T. Murray, revised by William F. Wyatt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 25.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 419.

and thus rescuing Helen on behalf of Menelaus brings κλέος ἄφθιτον (imperishable fame) to Achilles<sup>66</sup>. Keeping Helen as a physical cause, Achaean heroes continue their war with the Trojans. The violent process of retrieving Helen turns into a symbol for the Achaean heroes. Fighting on account of Helen is a quest to Achilles; honour to the sons of Atreus, victim to Nestor, and an object of ‘boast’ to the goddesses Hera and Athena. In fact, the Achaean soldiers are not even sure whether it is worth fighting this protracted war in order to recover Helen, the wife of Menelaus while putting their own return to their wives in uncertainty.

If Helen is the *casus belli*, she is also the one who is suffering due to the war between Trojans and Achaeans. Nestor rouses the Achaeans by planning to avenge Helen’s ‘struggles and groans’ (Ελενης ὀρμήματά τε στοναχάς τε, 2.356). After a few lines the poet uses the same terms as Nestor had for Menelaus’ motive for fighting (2.589-90). I like to point out different interpretations of the same formulaic phrase. G.S. Kirk writes, “Admittedly grammar is ambiguous.”<sup>67</sup> He explains, *Ormemata* could be either Helen’s own or of others on Helen’s account. Following the tradition of the *Odyssey* (4.262-63), Kirk<sup>68</sup> suggests that it is unlikely that the struggles and groans were Helen’s own. Richmond Lattimore translates “to avenge Helen’s longing to escape and lamentations”. Robert Fitzgerald translates the same phrase as “to avenge the struggles and the groans of Helen”. If we accept Kirk’s interpretation then it is clear that Helen had been responsible for her own decision. But Kirk’s example comes from the *Odyssey*, not from the *Iliad*. If we accept Lattimore and Fitzgerald’s translations then Helen has no part

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<sup>66</sup> Linda Lee Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 10-12.

<sup>67</sup> G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary. Vol.1: Books 1-4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 153.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

in making her own decision: hence she is suffering. I believe that this particular phrase in the *Iliad* shows that the narrator is deliberately paradoxical in order to conforming to the ambiguous nature of Helen. Clearly, Helen is the cause of the war and also the victim of the war. The same book (book two) projects another significance of Helen: Helen as a precious object. Athena urges Odysseus into rallying the army to fight and not to let Helen remain as a (*Il* 2. 160) ‘boast’ (εὐχολήν) to Priam and the Trojans.

The theme of Helen as a precious object is more prominent in book three. We do not see Helen in person in the first two books, we only know of her through the imagination of the Achaeans. The very first time we see Helen is in book three where Iris in disguise comes to summon Helen asking her to witness the duel between Menelaus and Paris (3.130). Iris informs that “the one who wins, his dear wife you will be called” (3.138). Primarily, Helen is a war prize and this time the war between the Trojans and Achaeans has been narrowed down to a duel between her two husbands. Paris himself decides that he will fight the duel ‘for Helen and her possessions’ and whoever will be the winner should ‘duly take all the wealth and the woman and take them home’ (3.72). The same decision set by Paris was heralded to Priam: ‘woman and treasure will follow the winner’ (3.255). Shortly afterwards, Agamemnon takes the oath that if Menelaus dies then ‘let him keep Helen and all her treasure’ but if Menelaus is alive then ‘let the Trojans give back Helen and all her treasure’ (3.282-85). Clearly, the Achaeans fought to recover Helen and her possessions from the Trojans while the Trojans insisted on keeping her in Troy. There remains an unresolved puzzle: the approval of this devastating war by Priam on behalf of his son, Paris who not only abducted the married wife of Menelaus, he also abused the sacred institution of guest-friendship (*xenia*) that requires mutual obligations between host and guest. Yet, Priam claims that this war is the will of the gods. At the

*Teichoscopia*, Priam tells Helen, “it is the gods, surely, who are to blame, who roused against me the tearful war of the Achaeans...” (*Il* 3.164-65). Furthermore, at the Trojan assembly when the wise Antenor proposes to return Helen along with her possessions to the Achaeans and stop this war; Priam following his son’s refusal proposes to continue the war “until a god judges between us, and gives victory to one side or the other” (*Il*. 7.377-78). Priam’s attitude towards this war suggests that the abduction of Helen by Paris has been instigated by a divine power. Although in the *Iliad*, Helen does not clearly state her position regarding her elopement with Paris, in the *Odyssey*, while reminiscing her past in Troy, Helen blames Aphrodite for bringing her to Troy (4.261-4). Towards the end of the epic Hector even ponders over the possibility of returning Helen along with her treasure that his brother had brought back from Sparta (22.114).

Neither Hector nor Priam blames Helen as a cause of the war. Hector rather blames Paris for this terrible war calling him ‘evil’, ‘deceiver’, and ‘woman-crazy’ (3.39). Hector rebukes Paris for being afraid of approaching Menelaus in the battlefield (3.46-52):

Was it in such strength as this that you sailed over the deep in your sea-fairing ships, having gathered your trusty comrades and, mingling with foreigners, brought back a fair woman from a distant land, a daughter of warriors who wield the spear, but to your father and city and all the people a great misery—to your foes a joy, but to yourself a cause of shame? Will you then not face Menelaus, dear to Ares? Then you would learn what kind of man he is whose lovely you have.

ἦ τοιόσδε ἐὼν ἐν ποντοπόροισι νέεσσι  
 πόντον ἐπιπλώσας, ἐτάρους ἐρίηρας ἀγείρας,  
 μιχθεὶς ἄλλοδαποῖσι γυναῖκ' εὐεῖδ' ἀνήγας  
 ἐξ ἀπίης γαίης νυδὸν ἀνδρῶν αἰχμητῶν  
 πατρί τε σῶ μέγα πῆμα πόλῃ τε παντί τε δήμῳ,  
 δυσμενέσιν μὲν χάρμα, κατηφείην δὲ σοὶ αὐτῷ;  
 οὐκ ἂν δὴ μείνειας ἀρηϊφίλον Μενέλαον;  
 γνοίης χ' οἴου φωτὸς ἔχεις θαλερὴν παράκοιτιν·

Hector blames the Trojans as ‘cowards’ for not punishing Paris for his wrong doings towards his own people: “But the Trojans are utter cowards: otherwise by now you would have put on a coat of stone because of all the evil things you have done.”(3.56-7).

ἀλλὰ μάλα Τρῶες δειδήμονες· ἧ τέ κεν ἤδη  
λάϊνον ἔσσο χιτῶνα κακῶν ἔνεχ' ὅσσα ἔοργα

Hector’s comment about the Trojans does raise a valid question. I would argue that it is Helen’s mesmerizing or rather emasculating beauty that stops the Trojan people from punishing Paris in the usual way. According to the epic cycle, Helen’s irresistible beauty is divinely created to set the Trojan War.

### **1.2 Helen’s Beauty**

How could any man resist the mesmerizing charm of Helen’s emasculating beauty? The daughter of Zeus was destined to arouse (Eros) passion among men through her beauty. Let us not forget that Eros and Eris (strife) are closely associated in Helen’s case. In *Cypria*<sup>69</sup>, we find that it was Eris who threw the apple of discord on the fine day of wedding of Thetis and Peleus, to set a conflict about beauty among Athena, Hera and Aphrodite. It is not a surprise that Zeus sent them to Alexandros/Paris on mount Ida for adjudication. These three goddesses promised Paris gifts for choosing one of them as being the most beautiful. Hera offered the Trojan prince the kingship over all; Athena promised him the victory in war, and Aphrodite offered him the prospect of sexual union with Helen, the daughter of Zeus and the most beautiful woman in the world. The winner was, of course, Aphrodite. Although none of these goddesses is physically imperfect, only Aphrodite is known for her sexual allure. At the judgment of Paris, each goddess offered

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<sup>69</sup> West, *Cypria*, 69.

the Trojan princess the gift that is emblematic of her own power<sup>70</sup>. More broadly, Zeus designs the Trojan War and Aphrodite sets the plan in motion. Following the scheme of Aphrodite, Paris sails to Sparta and abducts Helen along with her treasure. In other word Helen's beauty is pivotal in the deadly war between Achaeans and the Trojans.

*Cypria* (fragment 12) informs us that the Athenian hero Theseus abducted young Helen when she was dancing in a group of preadolescent girls. The story of abduction of Helen by Theseus becomes a proof of Helen's supreme beauty in the *Encomium of Helen* by the fourth century Athenian rhetorician Isocrates. Isocrates claims that even Theseus known for his great deeds, pursued Helen for her beauty. There is no clear indication in the *Iliad* whether Helen followed Paris willingly or not. While Helen's abductions by Theseus and again by Paris after her marriage with Menelaus happened in pre-Iliadic stage, we find the conspicuous effect of Helen's beauty in the *Iliad*.

There is no elaborate description of Helen's beauty either in *Cypria* or in Homeric poems. It is taken for granted that Helen was the most beautiful daughter who was ordained to be born in order to lighten the Earth from her burden of impious people and to fulfill the plan of Zeus (*Cypria*, West, p.81). Likewise, the poet of the *Iliad* does not dwell upon the details of Helen's beauty, except, the common epithet that the 'fairest' (Ἐλένην κάλλισται)<sup>71</sup> among women. However, it must be noted that Helen in the *Iliad* shares the epithets that are given to the goddesses like Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, for example<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> According to G. Dumézil, the Judgment of Paris is the most obvious Greek example of a general Indo-European social ideology of 'trifunctionalism'. See Nagy, *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 17.

<sup>71</sup> *Iliad*, 3.171; 9.139-40, 281-82.

<sup>72</sup> M. Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 149.

Linda Lee Clader describes in detail the epithets given to Helen in Homeric epics<sup>73</sup>. I wish to dwell on a particular epithet of Helen used by Homer in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. Homer uses the epithet of ‘Argive Helen’ (Ἀργεῖην Ἑλένην) nine times in the *Iliad* and twice in the *Odyssey*. Hera shares this epithet with Helen twice in the *Iliad* (4.8; 5.908). It may mean Hera as worshipped in Argos. Hera herself claims that Argos is one of the three cities that ‘are far dearest’ to her (4. 51-52). Homeric Helen does not come from the geographical location of Argos; she is the queen of Sparta. She may belong to the Argives in the broader sense of the term representing the united Achaean force fighting to rescue her. I suggest that the epithet ‘Argive Helen’ may indicate Helen’s radiance. Linda Clader notes that the epithet Ἀργεῖη is an adjectival derivative of the root ἀργός that means ‘bright’. Clader also mentions that ‘argos’ with this meaning (‘bright’) is an appropriate description for any divine figure and more specifically, for someone associated with Dioskouroi<sup>74</sup>. Helen’s beautiful body wrapped in shinny cloak corroborates her divine parentage.

The very first public entrance of Helen in the *Teichoscopia* (*Iliad*, 3. 156-60) shows the effect of Helen’s irresistible beauty even on the Trojan elders. Helen appears for the first time in the third book of *Iliad* where Iris, the messenger goddess, shows up in Helen’s chamber and summons her to be at the *Teichoscopia* (viewing from the walls) to witness the duel between Menelaus and Paris. Iris comes to “white- armed” Helen (Ἑλένη λευκωλένω) in the guise of Priam’s most beautiful daughter. Helen shares this epithet of being “white-armed” with the goddess Hera the wife of Zeus in the *Iliad*. Having been

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<sup>73</sup> Linda Lee Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic in Greek Epic Tradition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 41-62.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

summoned by Iris, ‘immediately she veiled herself with shining linen’ (αὐτίκα δ’ ἄργεννήσι καλυψαμένη ὀθόνησιν) and darted out of her room accompanied by her two maids.

While approaching the rampart, Helen is viewed by the Trojan elders. Her body veiled by gleaming fabrics, and her eyes in particular, produce a sense of awe among the Trojan elders:

Small blame (νέμεσις) that Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans should for such a woman long suffer woes; she is dreadfully like immortal goddesses to look on. But even so, let her go home on the ships, and not be left here to a bane to us and to our children after us.<sup>75</sup>

οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἑὺκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς  
τοιγῇδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν·  
αἰνῶς ἀθανάτησι θεῆς εἰς ὧπα ἔοικεν·  
ἀλλὰ καὶ ὥς τοίη περ ἐοῦσ' ἐν νηυσὶ νεέσθω,  
μηδ' ἡμῖν τεκέεσσιν ἐπίσσω πῆμα λίποιτο.

At the rampart the Trojan elders view Helen approaching. The Trojan elders are struck by Helen’s bewildering beauty. They now know the reason behind the Trojan War where both Trojan and Achaean heroes are fighting to possess this woman whose beauty is comparable to ‘immortal goddess’. Her beauty, especially her eyes, creates a sense of awe in the Trojan elders. Euripides in his play the *Trojan Women* has Hecuba expressing this fearsome beauty of Helen’s gaze. Hecuba warns Menelaus:

I approve your intention, Menelaus, to kill your wife. But avoid looking at her lest she capture you with desire. For she captures the eyes of men, destroys their cities, and burns their houses. So powerful is the spell she creates, as you and I and others who have suffered know well (891-94)<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Murray, *Iliad*, 141.

<sup>76</sup> Euripides, *Trojan Women*, trans. and ed. David Kovacs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, 1999), 101.



Another example in the play involves Andromache. After hearing that her child Astyanax is to be killed, Andromache in her desperate frustration cries out against Helen:

Never, I am certain, was Zeus your father, you who were death to so many barbarians and Greeks. A curse on you! From your fair eyes you brought foul ruin on the glorious plains of the Phrygians (770-773).<sup>77</sup>

Though veiled in shining cloak, Helen's flashing glance overwhelms them with desire and fear at the same time. The glitter of Helen's brightly veiled body impedes the onlookers' access to gain knowledge of her. She is the manifestation of the most desirable beauty yet she generates frustration to those males who desire to know her.<sup>78</sup> Hence, the Trojan elders cannot decide whether to let her stay or leave Troy. Helen's elusive yet seductive body traces back to her birth story in *Cypria* where it writes that she is the product of the union of Zeus and Nemesis. However, Homer does not even mention about Helen's mother. Jasper Griffin writes: "The *Iliad* is notably more cautious with the fantastic."<sup>79</sup> According to Griffin, the story of Zeus pursuing Nemesis and their transformations into different animals belongs to the category of fantastic. However, the very first appearance of Helen in the *Odyssey* is also associated with bright surroundings. The narrator of the *Odyssey* compares Helen with "Artemis of the golden distaff" (4.122). One recalls that Theseus abducted Helen when she was dancing (χορεύω) at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia (Cypria). When the 'beautiful-haired' Helen reached her marriageable age, the reputation of her beauty became 'renown' among the Achaeans. Hence many noble suitors from all over Greece came to woo her, 'desiring to be her husband'.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>78</sup> Nancy Worman. "The Body as Argument: Helen in Four Greek Texts," *Classical Antiquity* 16, no.1 (April, 1997): 151-203.

<sup>79</sup> Jasper Griffin. "The Epic Cycle and the Uniqueness of Homer," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 97 (1977): 39-53.

### 1.3 Helen's Marriage

A list of twelve names of Helen's suitors has survived from the *Catalogue of Suitors* in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*<sup>80</sup>. The catalogue of Helen's suitors especially, points out Helen's divine beauty by comparing her with golden Aphrodite as it writes that she is the 'maiden who possessed the beauty of golden Aphrodite'. As numerous heroes wooed for Helen's hand in marriage, Tyndareus made them swear an oath before the choice of a groom. The oath stipulated that they should punish anyone who would harm Helen: 'he commanded all of them together to set out against him to exact punishment'<sup>81</sup>. Many heroes wooed Helen but it is to be noted that these heroes tried to win Helen's hand by offering her the most wealth. However, Odysseus, for instance, wooed from Ithaca knowing fully well that Menelaus from Mycenae would win due to his enormous wealth. In the catalogue, Helen's suitors do not get to show their prowess to win her hands in marriage instead they have to compete as the best giver of lavish gifts to Helen's father and brothers.

It is important to note that Helen does not physically appear in the Catalogue instead, the readers get to know about the 'renown' of her beauty, in other words, Helen's beauty, that is talked about. Naturally, the heroes who woo Helen have not seen her. Thoas from Aitolia 'desiring to be beautiful-haired Helen's husband', sent Tyndareus many wedding-gifts without even seeing her. Thoas from Aitolia did not have to see Helen because he heard what the others had said about her (ἀλλ' ἄλλων μῦθον ἀκούων). Then Podarces and Protesilaus from Phylake offered many wedding-gifts to Tyndareus

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<sup>80</sup> Hesiod. *The Shield, Catalogue of Women, Other Fragments*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 233.

because ‘the woman’s glory was great’ (μέγα γὰρ κλέος). Ioannis Ziogas observes a very unusual feature of the *Catalogue* regarding Helen’s beauty:

The almighty renown of Helen’s beauty motivates the greatest Greek heroes; her female κλέος is set above the fame of all men. In the episode of the wooing of Helen, there is no mention of male κλέος, a pointed absence of the subject of Homeric epic (defined as κλέα ἀνδρῶν, *Il.* 9.189, 524; cf. *Od.* 8.73 ‘glorious deeds of men’). Actually, the suitors seem to try to appropriate Helen’s κλέος by marrying her.<sup>82</sup>

Clearly, these suitors of Helen reverse the traditional concept of marriage regarding Helen. Furthermore, the term *kleos* that is traditionally reserved for heroes who seek it through their heroic deeds is associated to Helen’s beauty in the *Catalogue*. In other words, Helen’s beauty becomes a symbol of *kleos* that can be earned through lavish gifts by the suitor who possesses the largest amount of wealth. Furthermore, most of the suitors including Menelaus as noted in the *Catalogue* want to be Helen’s husbands. Linda Lee Clader’s<sup>83</sup> brilliant observation brings out the significance of the phrase ‘desiring to be beautiful-haired Helen’s husband’. Clader notes that the phrase ‘Alexander, husband of faire-haired Helen’ (Ἀλέξανδρος Ἑλένης πόσις ἡϋκόμοιο) appears six times in the *Iliad*. Furthermore, she points out that another female in the *Iliad* shares this same epithet with Helen, who happens to be Hera. Most importantly, in the *Iliad*, Zeus is described as ‘the husband of the fair-haired Hera’ (πόσις Ἥρης ἡϋκόμοιο). Clader aptly argues that these two instances signify the inferior position of the husband. She explains:

The parallel is striking, particularly when one considers the relative importance of the πόσις and his lady; Helen is certainly the stronger figure in her context, and grammatically Zeus, too, loses out to Hera (after all, he is being identified by means of her). The expression would seem to be rooted in a period when Hera was still the earth goddess and Zeus was her consort, or

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<sup>82</sup> Ioannis Ziogas, *Ovid and Hesiod: The Metamorphosis of the Catalogue of Women*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 27.

<sup>83</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 45.

was taking place of her consort. Can it justifiably be claimed that the Helen expression is equally old?<sup>84</sup>

Helen's divine origin through the Indo-European myths or her own cult in Sparta or Rhodes has been discussed by scholars, especially by Martin L. West.<sup>85</sup> However, the question remains why do the suitors desire to be Helen's husband.

In the same vein, I add another question regarding 'Helen and her possessions' that should be returned to the winner of the duel between Menelaus and Alexandros. What possessions? Are these the possessions that Menelaus had furnished her with? Or there is something more that is included in her possessions? It makes sense when the valuable information that whoever wins Helen also succeeds Tyndareos of Sparta by virtue of marriage to Helen, is considered. Not only did Helen receive enormous gifts from Menelaus, also being a royal princess she must have been showered with precious gold as her dowry. It is easily understandable that the royal treasury of Menelaus definitely diminished after Paris and Helen took off along with Helen's treasure. According to Barry Strauss Greek kings and queens possessed enormous collection of gold, silver, and various precious gems in their treasury. More importantly, Menelaus would lose his kingdom if he could not retrieve his queen from Troy. Barry Strauss<sup>86</sup> writes:

Unless he punished Paris, Menelaus would be branded as an easy mark. Since he ruled Sparta by marriage and not birth, unless he forced the return of his wife, he would eventually face someone wanting to knock him off his throne.

Thus it is out of a dire necessity that Menelaus had to seek the help of his brother Agamemnon, the king of Mycaenea and proceeded to attack Troy. Eventually, after ten

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<sup>84</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 46.

<sup>85</sup> Martin L. West, "Immortal Helen" in *Hellenica*, volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80-96.

<sup>86</sup> Barry Strauss, *The Trojan War: A New History* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2006), 20.

years of pan –Hellenic war, Troy was burnt to the ground. Yet, Helen the queen of Sparta survives as beautiful as before and in the *Odyssey* she appears with her glorious attire entertaining her famous guests with stories of her adventure at Troy. How is it possible? Is it because of her mesmerizing beauty? According to some version (Ibycus, sixth century BCE poet), after the sack of Troy Menelaus wanted to kill Helen but as soon as Helen returned her gaze Menelaus dropped his sword.

I argue that it would make more sense to assert that Helen had to be carried back alive if Menelaus were to reign as the king of Sparta. Herodotus reports about the comments of the Persians on this matter:

Although the Persians regard the abduction of women as a criminal act, they also claim that it is stupid to get worked up about it and to seek revenge for the women once they have been abducted; the sensible course, they say, is to pay no attention to it, because it is obvious that the women must have been willing participants in their own abduction, or else it could never have happened. The Persians claim that whereas they, on the Asian side, did not count the abduction of their women as at all important, the Greeks, raised a mighty army because of a woman from Lacedaemon, and then invaded Asia, and destroyed Priam and his forces (*The Histories*, 1.4).<sup>87</sup>

However, Helen is not any ordinary Lacedaemonian woman, she is the queen of Lacedaemonia, the daughter of Zeus and above all the most beautiful woman. Helen is the personification of absolute beauty that is bestowed upon her by her divine father. She acquired her position as the queen of Sparta through her mortal/adopted mother. Helen's divine parentage, enchanting beauty, and her hereditary status distinguish her with unparalleled value. Thus, seen in the context of economic value as well as in the context of her divine status in ancient society, Helen has enormous currency. In other words, Paris had cut off the very existence of the royal power in the kingdom of Lacedaemonia

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<sup>87</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, Translated by Robin Waterfield, with an Introduction and Notes by Carolyn Dewald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

by abducting its beautiful queen. Perhaps king Priam might have realized the capital value of Helen. It is for the same reason, I suggest, that the Trojans did not want to lose the possession of the most beautiful woman, the queen of Sparta and the daughter of Zeus. While it is clear that Helen is the *casus belli* as she had been created by Zeus to end the race of the heroes, it is also evident that Helen being the queen of Sparta generated an enormous economic worth. At this point, I like to draw attention to Aegean Royalty in Bronze Age.

Margalit Finkelberg<sup>88</sup> proposes that the Bronze Age Greece as seen through the mythological traditions does not provide the examples of succession of kingship from father to son. She finds a recurring pattern of kingship by virtue of marrying the daughter of a king, for example, “the first kings of Athens and Megara” and also “Pelops, Bellerophon, Melampous, Peleus, Telamon, Teukros, Andraimon, Diomedes, and many others achieved kingship by virtue of their marriages to the daughters of their predecessors”.<sup>89</sup> Thus kingship was achieved through father-in-law to son-in-law. Then, what was the status of the Queen? According to Finkelberg, wherever the kingship is achieved by marriage, there ought to be a succession of a line of queens.

Consequently, when Menelaus succeeded Tyndareus in Sparta, Helen also succeeded her mortal/adopted mother Leda the Queen of Sparta. However, Tyndareus had two good sons, Kastor and Polydeukes and following the patrilineal system, one of them should have succeeded their father’s throne. But it did not happen, as one would have expected. After marriage Menelaus moved in with Helen and became the king of Helen’s

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<sup>88</sup> Margalit Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition*. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65-89.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

land. Menelaus did not lead Helen to his home in Mycenae, as it is normal in patrilineal system<sup>90</sup>. Therefore the only plausible argument that would explain the rule of succession in the house of Tyndareus is to accept a female line of succession, that is, the existence of a matrilineal system.

In the same vein, for example, the puzzling factors of the suitors of Penelope could be explained<sup>91</sup>. According to the patrilineal system, Telemachus the son of Odysseus and Penelope should have been the successor to the throne of Ithaca. Yet the local nobilities strived to marry Penelope in order to be the king of Ithaca and Laertes the father of Odysseus resolved to stay in isolation in his farm. Unfortunately, Penelope and Odysseus had no daughter. However, Helen and Menelaus had a daughter, Hermione. According to some versions, Orestes became the king of Sparta by virtue of marrying Hermione. Therefore, it seems, that succession from mother to daughter in the Bronze Age Sparta, continued from Leda to Helen and then to Hermione.<sup>92</sup> However, it must be noted that although Helen was to inherit the kingdom through matrilineal succession but her father and brothers did organize the whole procedure. In other words, given the male control over the institution of marriage in the Bronze Age Sparta, it seems that a trace of patrilineal/patriarchal ideology was apparent in the matrilineal system of the royal heritage. Clearly, Helen's marriage indicates the existence of matrilineal system and the coming of patrilineal ideology.

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<sup>90</sup> Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, translated by Elizabeth Palmer, summaries, table and index by Jean Lallot (London: Faber and Faber, 1973). Also see Kenneth Atchity and E.J. W. Barber, "Greek Princes and Aegean Princesses: The Role of Women in the Homeric Poems" in *Critical Essays on Homer*, edited by Kenneth Atchity with Ron Hogart and Doug Price (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> Atchity and Barber, *Critical Essays on Homer*, 15-36.

<sup>92</sup> Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks*, 68.

In sum, the Trojan War happened because Zeus wanted to ease the overburdened Earth as she personally complained to Zeus and asked for help. In order to fulfill his will Zeus took the advice of Momos and accordingly, created Helen the most beautiful woman. Thus Helen had been divinely crafted for a violent purpose. Furthermore, the case of Helen's succession through the female line and the kingship of Menelaus by virtue of marriage provide evidence towards the very cause of the Trojan War. There are two factors that incriminate Helen as the *casus belli*. Firstly, Helen had been divinely ordained as *casus belli*. Secondly, given the social practice of royal succession by marriage in the Bronze Age Greek tradition, it becomes clear that the Trojan War was the only solution for Menelaus to retain the kingship of Sparta. Thus viewed from divine perspective or the will of Zeus and the Bronze Age tradition as reflected in Greek epic tradition, it becomes clear why Helen was the *casus belli* without any agency of her own.



## Chapter Two: Draupadī

### Introduction

At the beginning of the part one I have established that the divine logic of creating Helen and Draupadī to alleviate the Earth from overburden of impious people originates from a common Indo-European heritage. In the first chapter of the part one, I have asserted Helen as *casus belli* in the context of her birth, beauty, and marriage. In this chapter I propose to compare Draupadī with Helen using the same parameters (birth, beauty and marriage) as I have used in the case of Helen in the previous chapter of the first part. Further, I shall also discuss the myth of Sovereignty in Irish tradition in connection with Draupadī.

### Introduction to the *Mahābhārata*

It is well accepted that the *Mahābhārata* like the other epic (*Rāmāyana*) in Indic tradition portrays the final form of a long tradition of oral poetry that was transmitted through the recitation of bards. The narration of the *Mahābhārata* starts with a bard (sūta) Ugraśravas who recites the ancient lore to the brāhmins who are gathered in the Naimisha forest to perform a twelve year sacrificial session. This bard declares that he has just come from a great snake sacrifice performed by king Janamejaya and at this place he heard the story of the *Mahābhārata* as, it was narrated by Vaiśampāyana who heard it from its composer Krishna Dvaipāyana also known as Vyāsa. Thus the narration of the bard Ugraśravas represents the third level of the *Mahābhārata* in the line of transmission.

Naturally, the original verses grew with the number of reciters. At the very beginning of the *Mahābhārata*, the bard Ugraśravas informs that Vyāsa composed “the collection of the *Bhārata* in twenty-four thousand couplets (1.1.64).”<sup>93</sup> Yet, traditionally,

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<sup>93</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata: The Book of the Beginning*, 22.

the text of *Mahābhārata* is known to have one hundred thousand verses. Thus from the *Bhārata* it became the *Mahābhārata* and a myriad of manuscripts in Sanskrit including various vernaculars of India appeared to exist.

During the early part of the twentieth century, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Poona, India began a project of creating a critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* under the direction of V.S. Sukthankar, a former student of Moriz Winternitz. This project finally completed in 1966 and since then the scholars of the *Mahābhārata* are mostly using the Critical edition of the *Mahābhārata*. In the Prolegomena to the first volume V.S. Sukthankar proclaimed that the aim of the Critical Edition was to reconstruct “the oldest form of the text which it is possible to establish on the basis of the manuscript material available”(p. lxxxvi)<sup>94</sup>. To achieve this task a large number of manuscripts were collated. However, a complete list of these manuscripts was not possible to compile. The manuscript material had been classified into two recensions following the scripts in which they were written. Thus there exist two recensions: Northern and Southern. These manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* were again subdivided into different provincial scripts into which they were written with exception made to the Devnāgarī script, as it was a kind of ‘vulgar’ script in India. The Critical Edition (Sukthankar *et al.* 1933-66) is a ‘reconstituted’ text comprising nearly 75,000 verses.

All the *Mahābhārata* references in my work mostly come from the Critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* in Sanskrit that is now available online. It is accepted that the Critical Edition is closer to the Northern Recension while Bengali, Nepali and Maitheli manuscripts constitute the Eastern sub-group of it. The Southern Recension is longer than

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<sup>94</sup> V.S. Sukthankar, S.K. Belvalkar, P. L. Vaidya, *The Mahābhārata* (Critical Edition) 19 vols. (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1942), lxxxvi.

the Northern Recension. The citations in English translation in this work, mainly comes from the work of J. van Buitenen for the first three books of the *Mahābhārata*. However, occasionally, Ganguli/Roy's (Ganguli 1970, first published in 1883-1896) English translation (available at sacred-texts.com) is also used for transmitting a better understanding of the original verse. In addition, I have used Clay Sanskrit library edition for English translation. Ganguli/Roy English translation of the *Mahābhārata* uses Bengali version of the *Mahābhārata* as well as the Devnagari version of Nīlakantha: the vulgate: whereas the Clay Sanskrit library edition mainly uses Nīlakantha's version.

### **Outline of the *Mahābhārata***

The epic is divided into eighteen books known as *parvans* and each book is subdivided into chapters that are mainly made of verses composed in various meters and also occasionally in prose passages. The very first book of the *Mahābhārata* begins with the *Ādi-Parvan* (The Book of the Beginning) containing 225 chapters (*adhyāyas*). In its role as an introductory book, it announces the root of the conflict between the Pāndava brothers and their cousins the Kauravas. It informs about the origin of the Kuru dynasty and how it grew into the present generation. Furthermore, it includes the information about the *Pāñcāla* dynasty in which Krishnā Draupadī was born. This is the book where not only do we get the report of the semi-divine birth of the Pāndavas, we also find the information about the miraculous birth and marriage of Krishnā –Draupadī.

Book second known as *Sabhāparvan* (Book of the Assembly Hall) contains 72 (*adhyāyas*) chapters. Here we get to know how Yudhisthira the elder brother of the Pāndavas becomes the universal emperor and how the brothers celebrate a great sacrificial ceremony to mark him as the universal emperor. This book is especially significant regarding the analysis of Draupadī's portrayal in the epic.

Book of the Forest known as the *Āranyakaparvan* or *Vanaparvan* is the third book containing 299 chapters (*adhyāyas*). This book being one of the longest books of the epic consists of many instructions preached by the sages in the forest where the Pāṇdavas along with Draupadī spend their exile for twelve years. Here we find supernatural phenomena, myths, and legends including a valuable summery of the *Rāmāyana*, the *Rāmopākhyāna*.

*Virāṭaparvan* (Book of *Virāṭa*) is the fourth book where the five brothers with their common wife spend the final year of their exile at the court of the king *Virata*. This book consisting of 67 chapters further contributes to the complex image of Draupadī. I will mainly focus on the aforementioned chapters regarding Krishnā Draupadī's portrayal while occasionally drawing material from the other fourteen books. At this point, a family tree of the *Kuru* dynasty is in order:

Gangā (an auspicious river in anthropomorphic form) is the <b>first wife of the Kuru king Śantanu</b> . According to the myth of Gangā every time she gave birth to a son, she had to drown her son in the river. Thus when the eighth son arrived, the king intervened. As a result, she left the king.	Śantanu is the king of the Kuru dynasty. The Kuru king married to the river Ganga and subsequently, to Satyawatī.	Satyawatī (the daughter of a chieftain of fishermen) is the <b>second wife of the king Śantanu</b> . She got married to the king on the promise that her son would succeed to the throne.
Bhīshma the only son out of eight sons produced from this marriage was left alive. But he took a vow to remain celibate so that the lineage from his stepmother would continue.		Satyawatī gave birth to two sons, namely, Citrāngada and Vicitravīrya. Citrāngada, the first son died early.
Ambika the princess of Kāśi becomes the <b>wife of Vicitravīrya</b> . Bhīshma arranges for this marriage	Vichitravīrya marries two princesses of Kasi.	Ambalika the sister of Ambika also becomes <b>the co-wife</b> through the same marriage.

by abducting the princesses: a typical tradition of the kshatriya (warrior) caste.		
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Table 3: Family Tree of the Kuru dynasty.

Vicitravīrya died without producing any children and his brother Citrāgada died in childhood. Thus, in order to keep the lineage, the queen Satyawatī asked her son Vyāsa who was born out of wedlock to impregnate the queen's daughters-in-law.

This sage Vyāsa is the narrator of the *Mahābhārata* and the progenitor of the next generation.

Ambikā has one son by Vyāsa.	Ambālikā has one son by Vyāsa.	A maid of them has one son by Vyāsa.
Dhritarāshtra (born blind)	Pāndu, the pale	Vidura, the wise.

Table 4: Vyāsa, the progenitor.

Although all these three male children had the same father (Vyāsa), Vidura was not considered as one of the Kuru princes due to his low-born mother. Dhritarāshtra, though the eldest among them could not become king due to his blindness. They all were married and Bhīshma was the matchmaker for them too. The king Pāndu after performing a lot of heroic deeds went to forest for a while with his two wives (Kuntī and Mādrī) and Dhritarāshtra became the interim king.

Gāndhārī =	Dhritarāshtra	Kuntī=	Pāndu	=Mādrī
Duryodhana the eldest among their hundred sons and a daughter.		1. Yudhishtira (by the god Dharma). 2. Bhīma (by the god Vāyu) 3. Arjuna (by the god Indra).	Due to some curse Pāndu is unable to produce children.	Nakula and Sahadeva the twins (by the twin gods Asvins).
		Three sons of Kuntī=	Draupadī the common wife	= The twins of Mādrī.

Table 5: Families of Dhritarāshtra and Pāndu.

It must be noted that before her marriage with Pāndu, Kuntī had a son named Karna by the god Surya. These names mentioned in the table and the name of Karna will appear frequently in relation to Draupadī.

## 2.1 Birth of Draupadī

The description of Draupadī's physical beauty, unlike Helen, is copious and it overshadows the all three criteria under which I wish to find her as *casus belli*.

Apparently, the birth of Draupadī was not expected to happen nor was her birth sought for. Draupadī is a patronymic name. The birth of Draupadī involves a long story.

However, her father the king Drupada of Pāñcāla was eager to have a son who could retaliate against Drona who took a half of the Pāñcāla kingdom. Drona was a Brahmin but known for his great skill of archery and thus he was appointed as a teacher of archery for the sons of the king Dhritarāstra as well as for their cousins the Pāndavas. Drona and Drupada having studied under the same teacher developed a great friendship. Due to this close friendship, Drupada the future king promised his friend Drona a half of his kingdom. Naturally, when Drupada became king, he could not keep up his promise to his friend. Disappointed Drona asked his pupils to attack the kingdom of Drupada and take a half of his kingdom.

Since then humiliated king Drupada had been seeking revenge against Drona. Realizing that it was difficult to defeat Drona at war, the king Drupada approached many Brahmins to perform a rite through which he would obtain a powerful son who could kill his enemy, that is, Drona. The poet tells us that Drupada had to go through an enormous amount of trouble to find priests who would agree to perform such a rite. When the priest performed the rite with the intention of obtaining a son who would be fit to kill Drona; then at the end of the offering of oblation, a youth resembling a god with the colour of fire

wearing a diadem and entirely armed arose from the sacrificial fire while riding on his chariot. The Pāñcālas thrilled with joy roared their approval. A great invisible being from the sky announced: “ This fear-averting prince, who shall raise the fame of the Pāñcālas and dispel the king’s grievance, has been born for the destruction of Drona”.<sup>95</sup>

Immediately, after this much sought after event, gratuitously, a young girl arose from the middle of the sacrificial altar (*vedi*):

Thereupon a young maiden arose from the center of the alter, the well-favored and beautiful Daughter of the Pāñcālas, heart-fetching, with a waist shaped like an altar. She was dark, with eyes like lotus petals, her hair glossy black and curling—a lovely Goddess who had chosen a human form. The fragrance of blue lotuses waited from her to the distance of a league, the shape she bore was magnificent, and no one was her peer on earth.<sup>96</sup> And over the full-hipped maiden as soon as she was born the disembodied voice spoke: “ Superb among women, the Dark Woman shall lead the baronage to its doom. The fair-waisted maiden shall in time accomplish the purpose of the Gods, and because of her, great danger shall arise for the barons.” Hearing this, all the Pāñcālas roared like a pride of lions, and earth was unable to hold them so full of joy.<sup>97</sup>

kumārī cāpi pāñcālī vedimadhyāt samutthitā  
subhagā darśanīyāṅgī vedimadhyā manoramā  
śyāmā padmapalāśākṣī nīlakuñcita mūrdhajā  
mānuṣaṃ vighrahaṃ kṛtvā sākṣād amara varṇinī  
nīlotpalasamo gandho yasyāḥ krośāt pravāyati  
yā bibharti paraṃ rūpaṃ yasyā nāsty upamā bhuvi  
tāṃ cāpi jātāṃ suśroṇīm vāg uvācāsarīriṇī  
sarvayoṣid varā kṛṣṇā kṣayaṃ kṣatraṃ ninīṣati  
surakāryaṃ iyaṃ kālē kariṣyati sumadhyamā  
asyā hetoḥ kṣatriyāṇāṃ mahad utpatsyate bhayaṃ  
tac chrutvā sarvapāñcālāḥ praṇeduh siṃhasaṃghavat  
na caitān harṣasaṃpūṇān iyaṃ sehe vasaṃdharā<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata: The Book of the Beginning*, 318.

<sup>96</sup> Note that K.M. Gangooli (Sacred-texts: *Mahabharata*) adds here one line: “Like a celestial herself, she could be desired (in marriage) by a celestial, a *danava*, or a *yaksha*.”

<sup>97</sup> Van Buitenen, 318. Van Buitenen translates Ksatriya kings as the ‘barons’.

<sup>98</sup> This is the Sanskrit text of the *Mahābhārata* provided in the sacred texts online. This text comes from the electronic files created by Prof. Muneo Tokunaga of Kyoto and edited by John D. Smith.

It is clear that like Helen in the *Iliad*, Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* was born as a divine instrument for a destructive purpose. However, unlike Helen, she was not born from any union between immortals or mortals. Draupadī has no human mother or father; she is ‘non-womb-born’ (*ayonija*)<sup>99</sup>. Although Draupadī appeared from the altar of a sacrificial rite that was performed with a desire to obtain a slayer of the king Drupada’s enemy Drona the Brahmin teacher of archery; it is clear from the above narration that the epic poet wanted Draupadī to do more than mere killing of one enemy of Drupada. While the bodiless voice announced that the youth who came out of the sacrificial fire would be the slayer of Drupada’s Brahmin enemy, the same voice announced a different task for Draupadī: It was Draupadī who would be the cause of the destruction of the warrior class<sup>100</sup>. Kevin McGrath aptly points out that this destructive task of Draupadī recalls the myth of a warrior Brahmin in the *Mahābhārata*: “The only other figure in the poem of whom such a statement could be made is Rāma Jāmadagnya, a fighting Brahmin, who actually did destroy the *Kshatriyas* several times.”<sup>101</sup> Evidently, Draupadī was born to be the *casus belli* like Helen in the *Iliad* of Homer. As mentioned before, unlike in the *Iliad* where the poet presents Helen in a general epithet of ‘fairest of women’ with a few other ones for example, the poet of the *Mahābhārata* presents Draupadī with a detailed description of her physical beauty almost to the point of objectification.

## 2.2 Draupadī’s Beauty

This unusual birth for nefarious purpose is juxtaposed with the praise of this maiden’s physical beauty. She is a beautiful maiden, she is a ‘full-hipped’ maiden and she

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<sup>99</sup> Mary Carroll Smith, “Epic Parthenogenesis,” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 84-100.

<sup>100</sup> The *Mahābhārata* narrates of a warrior Brahmin who destroyed the kshatriya class several times.

<sup>101</sup> Kevin McGrath. *Strī: Women in Epic Mahābhārata* (Boston, Mass: Ilex Foundation, 2009), 118.



has narrow-waist (*sumadhyamā*). Her large eyes are shaped like the petals of a lotus flower and fragrance of blue lotuses exudes from her body. Does this perfectly shaped body with attractive eyes provoke any erotic desire? The English translation of Van Buitenen following the critical edition of *Mahābhārata* does not entertain any such possibilities. However, the online version of the English translation by K.M. Ganguli available on sacred-texts adds more physical description of Krishnā-Draupadī: ‘Her nails were beautifully convex, and bright as burnished copper; her eye-brows were fair and bosom was deep....Like a celestial herself, she could be desired (in marriage) by a celestial, a *danava* or a *Yaksha*.’<sup>102</sup> It should be noted that K. M. Ganguli’s translation is based on a careful mixture of Bombay edition with commentary of Nilakantha and Calcutta edition (Bengali version). From the last line of the above translation of Ganguli, it seems that the other versions of *Mahābhārata* imply the erotic effect of Draupadī’s beauty on male audiences. I argue that the erotic effect of Draupadī’s beauty on the heroic Kshatriyas is of primary importance towards the ultimate war in the *Mahābhārata*. It is puzzling that the king did not ask for a daughter who would be the slayer of his Brahmin (Drona who taught the art of war to the Pāndavas and the Kauravas) enemy; yet, a maiden appeared for even wider destructive purpose that is, the destruction of the warrior class or the class of the heroes. Seen from this point of view, the birth of Draupadī was superfluous. But if we recall the Earth’s request to Brahmā for alleviating her burden of impious people and the Lord Brahmā’s order to the gods to achieve the very method to fulfill the Earth’s request; then it is not difficult to understand the birth of Draupadī. By the same token, Hiltebeitel’s statement regarding the birth of Draupadī aptly explains this

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<sup>102</sup> Ganguli, sacred-texts.com, Book 1, section, CLXIX, 341-2, accessed May 17, 2016.

apparently irrational fact. He writes: “Draupadī’s birth is the outcome of the fact that the purpose of the gods exceeds the purpose of the rite.”<sup>103</sup> In other words, although the king Drona performed the sacrificial rite in order to get a son who would destroy his father’s enemy in war; Draupadī came along to fulfill predestined purpose already put in motion by divine logic.

At this point it is important to recall the myth of the overpopulation of the earth according to which Draupadī’s appearance on earth in human form along with the other gods have been ordained by the Lord Brahmā and this order has also been approved by Vishnu. However, the *Mahābhārata* tells another story regarding the birth of Draupadī and five Indras on earth. This story takes place in the context of the Lord Yama’s sacrificial rite where all the gods also came to watch the rite. At this time Indra notices golden lotuses floating down the Gangā (Ganges) river. He traces them to the source of the river where he finds a young woman weeping. This young woman is Śrī who is weeping because her husbands, the former four Indras have been forced to lie inside a cave. These former Indras with their proud deportment have insulted Śiva and the present Indra will also follow the similar behavioral pattern of the former Indras; thereby, this Indra is also destined to stay inside the cave with former four Indras. However, they can regain their ‘world of Indra’ only by being reborn in human wombs (as the Pāṇdavas) and this was ordained by Śiva. Śrī was also ordered by Śiva with the ‘approval’ of Nārāyaṇa to be born as Draupadī, the common wife of the Pāṇdavas.

Although she was not on the wish list of the sacrificer, the king of Pāñcāl; the king and his queen adapted Draupadī as their own daughter. Since then she became

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<sup>103</sup> Hildebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata*, 188.

known as Draupadī, that is, the daughter of Drupada and also Pāñcālī as the daughter of the king of Pāñcāl. Since Draupadī arose from the sacrificial altar (*Vedi*) as a beautiful maiden with a dark complexion, she was also known as Krishnā. Now the fire-hued young warrior who arose from the sacrificial fire to fulfill the stated purpose of the rite became known as Dhristadyumna and naturally, Draupadī became his twin sister. Although the invisible voice announces that the beautiful dark maiden arising from the sacrificial altar (*Vedi*) will be the cause of destruction of the kshatriya power; at this point, it is not clear how Draupadī who has no agency of her own will play the role of *casus belli* as announced by the oracle in the *Mahābhārata*. After her miraculous birth, the poet is silent about Draupadī until she appears in the ancient Hindu tradition of marriage prescribed only for the royalties. Here I will explore how the superhuman beauty of Draupadī will act as a potential towards the future devastating war in this epic.

### 2.3 Marriage of Draupadī

Draupadī appears on the sixteenth day of the festival regarding her marriage ritual that is known as *svayamvara* (self-choice)<sup>104</sup>. Although it had always been the king Drupada's wish that he would give Krishnā-Draupadī in marriage to Arjuna (one of the Pāndava brothers), he never divulged his wish to any one. As a result, the king had a very strong bow made and one was supposed to string that bow to strike a target set up extremely high. Then he announced: "The man who can string this bow and, when he has strung it, can shoot arrows through the contraption into the mark will have my daughter" (1.176, Van Buitenen). The poet describes Draupadī entering the arena carrying a

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<sup>104</sup> This is not a *Svayamvara* in the technical sense of the term, although traditionally known as *Svayamvara*. See Sally J. Goldman, "Sītā and Draupadī: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no.1 (Jan.-Mar., 1989), 63-79.

*vīrakāmsyam* (hero-goblet) made of fine gold. It is her brother Dhrishtadyumna who opens the contest by announcing the names and lineage of the contestants. Then he advises his sister to select the victor at the end of the contest. A myriad of renowned kings and princes came from all parts of India to participate in this contest and win the hands of Draupadī in marriage. The poet narrates the effect of the astounding beauty of Drupada's daughter on the suitor:

Their limbs besieged by the arrows of Love  
Hearts gone to Krisnā, the kings of men  
Went down to the pit for Draupadī's sake,  
Made even their old friends there their foes. (1. 178.5, Van Buitenen)

kandarpa bāṇābhiniṇīḍitāṅgāḥ; kṛṣṇāgatais te hṛdayair narendrāḥ  
raṅgāvatīrṇā drupadātmajārthaṃ; dveṣyān hi cakruḥ suhṛdo 'pi tatra (1.178.5).

Another example of the erotic effect of Draupadī's beauty on her heroic suitors is clearly visible when the Pāṇḍava brothers enter the arena in the disguise of mendicant brahmins:

The wide-armed sons of Pāṇḍu<sup>105</sup> by Prthā<sup>106</sup>  
And the two heroic and powerful twins  
They all kept looking at Draupadī –  
They were all struck by the arrows of Love. (1.178.12, Van Buitenen)

tathaiva pārthāḥ prthu bāhavas te; vīrau yamau caivamahānubhāvau  
tām draupadīm prekṣya tadā sma sarve; kandarpa bāṇābhihatā babhūvuḥ

Evidently, all the suitors were 'struck by the arrows of Love'. Duryodhana the son of the blind king Dhṛtarāshṭra (the Kuru king) came along with his many brothers to win the heroic contest for Draupadī's hands in marriage. King Karna the great warrior friend of Duryodhana joined the party of Duryodhana wishing to win the contest.

At this point I wish to dwell on the Sanskrit sentence: *Kandarpa bāṇābhihatā*

<sup>105</sup> Human father of the five heroes hence: Pāṇḍavas.

<sup>106</sup> Another name of Kuntī the mother of the first three brothers among the Pāṇḍavas.

*babhūvuh* in the above verse twelve. Almost the same description has been given in verse five when the powerful princes who saw Draupadī at the arena where they gathered to win her by winning this difficult contest: *kandarpa bānābhinipidītāngāh*. Instead of translating the sentence in verse five as “their limbs besieged by the arrows of Love”, K. M. Ganguli<sup>107</sup> renders the same part as “ Afflicted with the shafts of the god of the flowery bow”. Then in the English rendition of the Sanskrit verse<sup>12</sup> by Ganguli we find that all the Pāndava brothers “were all likewise struck by the shafts of *Kama*”; whereas the same portion of the verse 12 has been translated by Van Buitenen as “They were all struck by the arrows of Love”. It is important to note that *Kandarpa*<sup>108</sup> is the god of erotic love who carries the flowery bow and this god is also known as *Kamadeva* in Hindu mythology. Viewed from this perspective, Ganguli’s rendition transmits more powerful meaning of the Sanskrit term; on the other hand ‘the arrows of Love’ evokes the representation of Eros or Cupid in Latin. However, the fact remains that the unparalleled beauty of Draupadī exuded with erotic love. These powerful kings and princes who attended the court of Drupada the king of Pāñchāla could not succeed in the contest of this particular heroic proficiency test arranged by king Drupada and thereby, could not win Draupadī as wife but Arjuna the third brother among Pāndavas did win the famous contest. Ironically, these five brothers came in disguise of mendicant Brahmins, not as kshatriya princes. As a result Draupadi following her father’s wish selected Arjuna as her husband. Like Helen, Draupadī also had no choice in this matter. “She was *vīryaśulkā*: she was given by her guardian to the highest bidder, the price paid being heroism or rather proficiency in

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<sup>107</sup> Sacred-texts, book 1, section CLXXXIX (accessed January 18, 2016).

<sup>108</sup> Vettam Mani, *Pūranic Encyclopedia* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1975), 378-79, 384.

marksmanship.”<sup>109</sup>

Evidently, having lost the contest and the beautiful Draupadī to a Brahmin the powerful princes including the Kuru prince Duryodhana and Karna among the kings who participated in the contest, felt extremely insulted. Thus they led by Karna attacked the King Drupada who acted against the rule that declares: “The bridegroom choice is for the barons”<sup>110</sup> (*Syamvara ksatriyānām itīyam prathivā srutih*)<sup>111</sup>. This particular statement by the other kshatriya suitors of Draupadī demands some elaboration.

According to Sanskrit legal texts there are eight kinds of marriage of which Rāksasa form is the right kind of marriage for the Warrior class/caste (kshatriya)<sup>112</sup>. In the context of marriage, a warrior- king cannot accept a bride when she is given/transferred to him by her father. It is the practice of Brahmins to accept what is given: Brahmins are entitled to accept (what is given by others) but warrior-kings are those who give to others (*Mahābhārata* 12.192.81). In fact, the *Mahābhārata* has several passages that attach special importance to the strength of arm (*bāhu-vīryam*) for a warrior-king (5.130.7; 12.128.19; 5.130.29; 1.165.20). Thus, the suitors who participated in the contest in order to win Draupadī as bride-prize felt insulted for having Brahmin men as their competitors. Ironically, the royal suitors could not recognize the Pāndavas in their disguise of Brahmins. Naturally, the invited kings and princes who came as suitors began a fight led by Karna right there in the hall.

Being attacked by the invited kings, Drupada sought help from Arjuna and his

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<sup>109</sup> V. S. Sukthankar, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.1, LXI.

<sup>110</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.1, 354.

<sup>111</sup> Sacred-text, book1.180 (accessed January 20,2016).

<sup>112</sup> Minorou Hara, “A Note on the Rāksasa Form of Marriage,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no.3 (Jul-Sep., 1974): 296-306.

brother Bhīma. A chaotic fight broke out among the angry kings and Arjuna accompanied by his brother Bhīma; predictably, the angry kings lost to Arjuna and his brother. In this way the political alliance between the powerful Pāñcāla king Drupada and the Pāndavas deprived of their kingdom was sealed. I suggest that the fight over Draupadī at the royal court of the king Drupada is the mere indication of the devastating war<sup>113</sup> that will happen later. This is the beginning of Draupadī the *casus belli* for possessing astonishing beauty by divine design.

Furthermore, her beauty causes her to marry the other four brothers of Arjuna who won Draupadī as a bride-prize in the contest of strength arranged by her father the king Drupada. Unlike Helen, Draupadī did not stay in her father's palace; following the patriarchal rule of marriage she had to follow her husband to his abode. When Arjuna and Bhīma brought Draupadī to their temporary cottage where their mother Kuntī was waiting for them with great anxiety, Kuntī without even seeing Draupadī told them in her usual manner to share the alms among the brothers. After seeing Draupadī, however, she realized her mistake and asked Yudhisthira how to undo her error. Yudhisthira the embodiment of *Dharma* itself asked his brother Arjuna to marry Draupadī as she had been won by him in the suitors' contest. Unfortunately, the Vedas and Brāhmanas do not prescribe the marriage of younger brothers before their elder brother had been married. Naturally, Arjuna did not want to do anything that was not approved by the Vedic injunction. As the discussion was going on, the eyes of five brothers were fixated on Draupadī. At this point, the narration of Vaisampāyana regarding Draupadī's beauty is crucial:

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<sup>113</sup> Note that the suitors who wooed Helen of Sparta fought on behalf of Menelaus in the Trojan War.

They all stared at the glorious Kṛṣṇā who stood there, and sat looking at one another, holding her in their hearts. And as all these boundlessly lustrous men gazed at Draupadī their loves became evident, churning their senses. For the winsome beauty of the Pāñcāla princess, created by the Creator himself, surprised all other women and beguiled all creatures. Kuntī's son Yudhisthira knew their manifest feelings; and remembering the entire declaration of Dvaipāyana, O bull among men, the king spoke to his brothers, lest a breach among them occurred: "The lovely Draupadī shall be the wife of us all!"<sup>114</sup>

[vai]

te dṛṣṭvā tatra tiṣṭhantīm sarve kṛṣṇām yaśasvinīm  
 samprekṣyānyonyam āsīnā hṛdayais tām adhārayan  
 teṣāṃ hi draupadīm dṛṣṭvā sarveṣāṃ amitauijasām  
 sampramathyendriya grāmaṃ prādurāsīn mano bhavaḥ  
 kāmyaṃ rūpaṃ hi pāñcālyā vidhātrā vihitam svayam  
 babhūvādhikam anyābhiḥ sarvabhūtamano haram  
 teṣāṃ ākāra bhāvajñāḥ kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhiraḥ  
 dvaipāyana vacaḥ kṛtsnaṃ samsmaran vai naraṣabha  
 abravīt sa hi tān bhrātṛn mitho bhedabhayān nṛpa  
 sarveṣāṃ draupadī bhāryā bhaviṣyati hi naḥ śubhā

Although the above verses do not provide any physical description of Draupadī, the relentless gaze of the Pāndava brothers fixated on her express the impact of her beauty on them. The king Yudhisthira himself, though, fascinated by her charm could not help noticing his brothers' gaze burning with desire for possessing Draupadī. Realizing that their uncontrollable desire for the same woman might harm their brotherly solidarity, Yudhisthira came up with this practical decision. He did not even think for a moment whether Draupadī had any opinion in his decision (patriarchal society?) Draupadī quietly submitted to this most unnatural proposal.

## 2.4 Draupadī as Śrī

Then what about this marriage that does not follow tradition? The narrator of the *Mahābhārata* explains how it had already been pre-arranged for divine purpose (see above) and thus it had to be fulfilled. When king Drupada himself had much difficulty to

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<sup>114</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.1 (182.11-15), 358.



approve this kind of unusual marriage for her daughter, sage Vyāsa the redactor of *Māhabhārata* appears at the spot and tells him the true identities of the Pāndavas and Draupadī. Besides telling the king the past stories of Pāndavas and Draupadī, Vyāsa tells another story regarding Draupadī. It relates of an anxious maiden who repeatedly prayed to the god Śiva for a husband who has all the virtues. Śiva granted the maiden five husbands fulfilling her request that happen to be five times. Then, in order to witness their real identity, Vyāsa grants the king a celestial sight (*divyam caksuh*). The king was delighted to see the Pāndavas as ‘the youths divine with golden garlands and diadems, each like an Indra...’<sup>115</sup>. Then the awe-struck king looks at her daughter and the king admires her beauty that is like Śrī. Then he believes that she is “worthy to be their wife for her beauty (*rūpam*), majesty (*tejas*), and fame (*yaśas*).”<sup>116</sup>

Here it is worth drawing attention to the point that in many ritual texts of the Vedas, Śrī has special relation with “ruling power, dominion”. Śrī means ‘prosperity, material well-being, and fortune’. The Brāhmana literature of India mentions that the cushion of the royal throne is associated with Śrī.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore the twelfth book of the epic provides us with an elaborate mythology of Śrī (12.217.57-59). In her mythology Śrī is noted to be the symbol of Sovereignty and before coming to Indra she had been possessed by other Sovereigns. Sovereignty embodied in the form of a beautiful woman has been compared before with ancient legends of Ireland.

Again it is her beauty (*rūpam*) that Yudhistira accentuates first, though not ignoring her natural goodness, when he wagers Draupadī at the dice match.

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<sup>115</sup> Van Buiten, 374.

<sup>116</sup> Alf. Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 174.

<sup>117</sup> Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969), 188.

Book two of the *Mahābhārata* narrates how Yudhisthira wagers Draupadī at the dice match. He describes Draupadī's physical beauty and daily duty in a great detail:

She is not too short or too tall, not too black or too red, and her eyes are red with love—I play you for her! Eyes like the petals of autumn lotuses, a beauty that waits on autumn lotuses—the peer of the Goddess of Fortune! Yes, for her lack of cruelty, for the fullness of her body, for the straightness of her character does a man desire a woman, Last she lies down who was the first to wake up, who knows what was done and left undone, down to the cowherds and goatherds. Her sweaty lotuslike face shines like a lotus. Her waist shaped like an altar, hair long, eyes the colour of copper, not too much body hair...such is the woman, king, such is the slender-waisted Pāñcālī, for whom I now throw, the beautiful Draupadī...

[y]  
 naiva hrasvā na mahatī nātikṛṣṇā na rohiṇī  
 sarāga raktanetrā ca tayā dīvyāmy ahaṃ tvayā  
 śāradotpala patrākṣyā śāradotpala gandhayā  
 śāradotpala sevinyā rūpeṇa śrīsamānayā  
 tathaiva syād ānṛśaṃsyāt tathā syād rūpasampadā  
 tathā syāc chīla sampattyā yām icchet puruṣaḥ striyam  
 caramaṃ saṃviśati yā prathamam pratibudhyate  
 ā gopālāvi pālebhyaḥ sarvaṃ veda kṛtākṛtam  
 ābhāti padmavad vaktraṃ sasvedaṃ mallikeva ca  
 vedīmadhyā dīrghakeśī tāmṛākṣī nātiromaśā  
 tayaivaṃ vidhayā rājan pāñcālyāhaṃ sumadhyayā  
 glahaṃ dīvyāmi cārv aṅgyā draupadyā hanta saubala

Here again we find the description of Draupadī's beauty through formulaic expressions like “slender-waisted” (*sumadhyayā*). It is to be noted that by this time, she has already five sons, that is, a son to each of her five husbands. Yet the king Yudhisthira fails to mention that she is the mother of their sons. Draupadī like Helen of Sparta remains nubile forever.

Furthermore, it is possible to assume that in this situation Yudhisthira needlessly offers her as the object of desire, possessing the beauty of *Śrī* and she follows the duty of a perfect wife who is totally devoted to her husband (*pativratā*). While describing Draupadī's physical beauty and her mindfulness towards her household duty with great

attention, Yudhisthira, who apparently seems very loving and attentive towards his queen, does not hesitate to wager her. While she follows her wifely ideal as stipulated by the society, he does not follow his husbandly duty by providing her protection (*rakshana*). This is more than juxtaposition this is definitely a chiasmic situation.

My intention is to dwell upon one particular word in the verse 33: *śrīsamānayā* a fitting translation of which is provided by Kevin McGrath:<sup>118</sup> ‘like the deity *Śrī*’. This particular epithet of Draupadī recalls the two versions regarding the birth of Draupadi on earth. According to another version, it was the god Śiva who commanded five Indras to be born on earth and *Śrī* as their common wife. In other words, it is *Śrī* who incarnates as Draupadī.

## 2.5 *Śrī* as the symbol of Sovereignty

*Śrī* has a long history in Indian tradition and religion. She is closely associated with royalty. Jan Gonda citing from Aitareya Brāhmaṇa identifies *Śrī* with kingdom (*rāstram*)<sup>119</sup>. The Brāhmaṇa literature also mentions that the cushion of the royal throne is associated with *Śrī*. Gonda explains that ‘the identification of the cushion and *śrī* is not fortuitous or meaningless. The cushion no doubt adds to the king’s *śrī*–“prosperity”, his kingship rests on it.’<sup>120</sup> However, Gonda provides a crucial point regarding *Śrī* from the thesis of Miss Gerda Hartmann written in German in 1933. In her thesis “Beiträge zur Geschichte der Göttin Laksmī”, Miss Hartmann writes that *Śrī* is a “pre-Aryan goddess of fertility”. Similarly, Heinrich Zimmer<sup>121</sup> also suggests the pre-Vedic existence of *Śrī* or

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<sup>118</sup> Kevin McGrath, *Strī: Women in Epic Mahābhārata* (Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2009), 122.

<sup>119</sup> Jan Gonda, “Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious point of View,” *Numen* 3, Fasc.2 (Apr., 1956): 122-155.

<sup>120</sup> Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism*, 188.

<sup>121</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, ed. Joseph Campbell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 91-96.

*Lakshmī*. In fact, the hymn to the goddess *Śrī* did not get entry into the main corpus of Rig -Veda and it was appended to one of the supplements of the Rig -Veda. The mythology of *Śrī* found its prominence in classical Hinduism. Most significantly, book twelve (Śānti Parvan) of Mahabharata provides us with an elaborate mythology of *Śrī* (217,57-59). In her mythology *Śrī* is noted to be the symbol of Sovereignty and before coming to Indra, she had been possessed by other Sovereigns. As the concept of Time plays an important role in this myth elaborated in book twelve of the *Mahābhārata*, this will be discussed in the final chapter. At this point it is equally important to highlight the obvious parallel between the myths of *Śrī* and Sovereignty of ancient Irish tradition.

## 2.6 Sovereignty in Irish tradition

The myth of *Śrī* has often been compared before, to the goddess Flaith or Flaith Érenn (Sovereignty) of Irish tradition.<sup>122</sup> It is worth relating here the two oldest versions of the Irish tradition from the “Book of Ballymote”:

1. When King Daire was told that a “son of Daire” named Lugaid would attain Ireland’s Sovereignty, he gave each of his five sons this name. At the assembly of Teltown, where his sons had come to race horses, Daire learned from a Druid that “a fawn with golden lustre” would enter the assembly and that whichever son caught it would rule. When the fawn came “into the assembly”, Daire’s sons pursued it until it was finally caught by Lugaide Laigde. Then snow fell, and one son went for shelter, finding a house occupied by “a huge old woman,...her spears of teeth outside her head, and great, old, foul, faded things upon her.” Refusing to lie with her on the bed she offered, he was told he had thus severed himself from “sovereignty”. After three more brothers came and went with the same events, Lugaid Laigde went and said, “I will sleep alone with thee.” Having followed her to the bed, to his astonishment “it seemed to him that the radiance of her face was the sun rising in the month of May.... Then he mingled in love with her. ‘Auspicious is your journey,’ said she, ‘I am the sovranity, and the kingship of

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<sup>122</sup> Alexander H. Krappe, “Sovereignty of Erin,” *The American Journal of Philology* 63, no.4 (1942): 444-454; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “On the Loathly Bride,” *Speculum* 20, no.4 (Oct.1945): 391-404; Dumézil, *Mythe et Épopée*, II, 342; Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 73-76; Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, 175-191.

Erin will be obtained by thee.” The other brothers then came and all feasted “on the freshest food and the oldest ale.”

2. Echoaid Muigmedón, king of Ireland, had four sons by the “witch-queen” Mongfind, and one, Niall, by a captive Saxon princess. In a test to see which of them was fittest to rule, they were told by a wizard to go on a hunt. When they stopped, they cooked what they had caught and became thirsty. Fergus, the first to volunteer, “went seeking for water, till he chanced on a well” guarded by a hideous hag who would let him drink only for a kiss. This he, and two more sons of Mongfind, refused to do and they got no water; then the fourth son, Fiachra, gave her only the barest brush of a kiss, and in return got a brief moment of kingship. Last of all Niall came for water and consented to kiss and “lie with” the hag, who then turned into a beautiful woman. Asked who she was, she answered, “I am Sovereignty,” and told him to establish “seniority” over his brothers.

Viewed in the context of the above two Irish variations of the legend of Sovereignty, it is possible to recognize the similar idea of Sovereignty embodied in the form of a beautiful woman in the concept of Indic *Śrī*. Hildebeitel<sup>123</sup> explains in detail by setting the two Irish variants of the myth of Sovereignty side by side with the myth of Indra and *Śrī*. Nonetheless, the concept regarding the transformation of this ugly woman into a beautiful Sovereignty deserves to be explained in the Indic context of *Śrī*. Note that *Śrī* is associated with the goddess *Laksmī* denoting every aspect of *Śrī*. In the hymn to *Śrī* (*Śrī Sūktam*) the main part of which goes back to the Vedic time, the two separate goddesses *Śrī* and *Laksmī* merge into each other. In this hymn *Laksmī* has an elder sister (*jyesthām alaksmīm*) who is the exact opposite of the goddess of beauty, prosperity, kingship. My intention here is to emphasize the point that has been shown before by A.K. Coomaraswamy<sup>124</sup>: the parallel myth of Sovereignty in the two opposite forms of a beautiful and also unwanted woman. It is quite possible to infer that the legends of

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<sup>123</sup> Hildebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, 175-180.

<sup>124</sup> “On the Loathly Bride”, *Speculum*, 20, no.4 (Oct.1945): 391-404.

Sovereignty in the form of a beautiful woman and lack of Sovereignty in the form of a not beautiful woman appear in the Indic and Celtic traditions from a common Indo-European source.

## 2.7 Sovereignty and the Number Five

The next pertinent point is to underscore that the grouping of five brothers around Sovereignty in the Irish legend strongly resembles the five brothers as the five husbands of Draupadī who is Sovereignty in human form. In both versions of the Irish legend, the king had five sons and when the ugly woman's request had been fulfilled, she revealed herself as the beautiful Sovereignty of Ireland. In the same vein, the narrator/character Vyāsa of the *Mahābhārata* reveals to Draupadī's father not only of her divine identities but also of her five husbands. It is important to note that number five is equally significant in the Indic and Celtic traditions. In *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*, Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees<sup>125</sup> underscore the significance of the number five in their discourse on five primeval peoples and also of five provinces of Ireland. In the Vedic view of the universe, creation is fivefold: "Whatever exists is fivefold" (Taittirīya-Upanishad 1.7). Aitareya Upanishad: 3.3 and Praśna Upanishad: 4.8 for example, mention about the five elements that constitute this universe. Thus the epic narrator/narrators relate Indo-European<sup>126</sup>, Vedic, mythic (Puranic)<sup>127</sup> tales to the audience in its own unique<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), 188.

<sup>126</sup> Georges Dumézil, *Aspects de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France (PUF), 1956), 69-76. Dumézil approaches the *Mahābhārata* through the structure of tripartite functions of the Indo-Europeans. In order to discern the characters of the Pāṇḍavas (the sons of Pāṇḍu) in the framework of three functions, see *Mythe et Épopée* 1. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 53-102.

<sup>127</sup> Madeleine Biardeau another notable scholar approaches the epic through the perspective of the *Purāṇas*. See "Études de mythologie hindoue," II, *Bulletin de l'Ecole française de l'Extrême-Orient* 55 (1969), 98.

<sup>128</sup> See Van Buitenen's comment on the above two scholars regarding their approaches to the *Mahābhārata* in *Mahābhārata* III, 163-64:

way.

The present study values the suggestions of both scholars while aiming to read Draupadī as a character that evolves in her own unique way. Considering Draupadī as *Śrī* denoting Sovereignty, it seems possible for Yudhishtira to secure the succession to the throne of the Kuru dynasty. The narrators of the epic also make sure to keep her with her five husbands at all times. But the question still remains regarding the co-existence of a deported king with his wife whose survival is tied up with the kingdom. Moreover, the epic highlights the theme of the goddess *Śrī*'s movement between the gods and the demons (12.124, 215-21). In light of the epic tradition, it is worth pointing that the virtuous character of Yudhishtira is of paramount importance of his wife's unwavering presence with the Pandavas. Whenever Krishnā- Draupadī becomes separated from them a catastrophic situation arises, episode at the royal dicing hall, for instance.

After wagering Draupadī at the royal dice game, Yudhishtira lost the game to Duryodhana. At this point, Draupadī became the property or the slave (*dāsi*) of Duryodhana. How can *Śrī* in the form of incredibly beautiful Draupadī be turned into anyone's property? She was forcefully brought to the royal hall where the kings assembled including the elders. Here it should be noted that the Kuru prince Duryodhana was also one of the suitors at the *svayamvara* of Draupadī. He tried to string the bow and failed. He missed the great chance of winning Draupadī in marriage and thereby losing the opportunity of having alliance with the powerful Pāñchāla king Drupada. Since then

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Van Buitenen writes: "While they share fundamental underlying views and attitudes, Dumézil and Biardeau stand on two sides of the Great Divide of the traditional periodization into Vedic and post-Vedic: Biardeau to the south of it, as she takes the *Mahābhārata* to be part and parcel of a Hinduism stretching indefinitely futureward; Dumézil to the north of it, as he mines the epic for a treasure of reminiscences of not only a Vedic, but a pre-Vedic, Indo-Iranian, even Indo-European trifunctional inheritance. Neither in so doing shows great respect for, or even much interest in, the possible integrity of the *Mahābhārata* as unique product in the growth of Indian civilization; the text seems fated to be relevant to anything but itself".

Duryodhana and his friend Karna another suitor of Draupadī have been plotting war against the Pāndavas (1.194.10-20).<sup>129</sup>

The brother (Duhśāsana) of Duryodhana drags out Draupadī into the gambling hall of the Kauravas by the hair. This is an intense moment for Draupadi when she informs him that she is menstruating<sup>130</sup> and yet the brother of Duryodhana at his brother's command tries to disrobe her in front of the distinguished men at the hall. The question remains why Draupadi has to be abused in front of her kinsmen some of whom are also the knower of the Vedas. Is it a violent display of overtaking the Sovereignty in anthropomorphic form? The Epic clearly indicates that Draupadī is the incarnation of the goddess Śrī. When Yudhisthira lost Draupadī at the final wager at the dice game, the brother of Duryodhana dragged her out of her chamber and brought her to the gambling hall where the entire family of the Kuru king and the other kings gathered. She implored to be free as she whispered: “It is now my month! This is my sole garment, you man of slow wit...” (śanair uvāca adya rajasvalāsmi ekam ca vāso mama mandabuddhe) (II.60.25).<sup>131</sup> In the gambling hall, as Duhśāsana forcefully began to disrobe Draupadī at the command of his brother (Duryodhana) and the king Karna; he could not succeed in pulling off her garment. A series of garments appeared to cover the body of Draupadī and this happened ceaselessly. Having gone through a pitiable assault in the middle of the hall in front of all the distinguished men, Draupadī wins back everything through her power of speech (will be discussed in the next chapter).

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<sup>129</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, Vol.I, 382.

<sup>130</sup> Taittiriya Samhita (2.5.1) informs that it is inappropriate to sit near, to talk or eat food cooked by a menstruating woman. Also this text tells that when Indra killed Vishwarupa, he transferred one-third of the stain of killing a Brāhmana to women. This stain is said to have taken the form of women's menstruation.

<sup>131</sup> Van Buitenen, Vol.II, p. 142. The literal meaning of *adya rajasvalāsmi*: “I am menstruating today.”



Nevertheless, whatever they won back through Draupadī's wit and clever deliverance was short lived. While the Pāndavas and Draupadī had travelled half the way towards their kingdom when the royal messenger of Dhritarastra got hold of them and announced that the king had summoned them to come back in order to engage in a second dicing match. The king Yudhishthira decided to abide by his elder's order and accordingly they all followed Yudhishthira. This time the stake was dwelling twelve years in a forest and finally one year in hiding. Yudhishthira lost and the Pāndavas were ordered to get rid of their shiny robes and wear antelope skins. Thus they are robbed off their princely status. Furthermore, Draupadī is described as (ekavastrā tu rudatī muktakeśī rajasvalā śonitāktāktārdra vasanā draupadī): 'Dressed in her sole garment, disheveled and weeping in her courses, her cloth wet and besmirched with blood...' This is the second time that the narrator highlights Draupadī's bloodstained garment. I read her bloodstained garment as the metaphorical expression of the unavoidable war<sup>132</sup>. Furthermore, her visual description coupled with her threatening words turn her into the very symbol of '*casus belli*':

"They because of whom I got this way, thirteen years from now their wives will have their husbands dead, their kinsmen and friends dead! Their bodies smeared with blood of their relatives, their hair loosened and themselves in their courses, the women shall offer up the water to their dead, no less, as the Pāndavas enter the City of the Elephant." <sup>133</sup>

yatkṛte 'ham imāṃ prāptā teṣāṃ varṣe caturdaśe  
hatapatyo hataśutā hatabandhujanapriyāḥ  
bandhuśonita digdhāṅgyo muktakeśyo rajasvalāḥ  
evaṃ kṛtodakā nāryaḥ pravekṣyanti gajāhvayam (2.71.18-20)

According to Hildebeitel, this "word" of Draupadī signifies that her husbands will carry

<sup>132</sup> See Douglas Cairns, "Mind, Body, and Metaphor in Ancient Greek Concepts of Emotion", *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques*, 16, 2016, 2-18.

<sup>133</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, Vol.II, 166.

out the act of revenge against their foes and thus her “ statement has more the look of a prediction or a curse”.<sup>134</sup> Then, one may wonder why did Draupadī curse that the Kaurava women would go through menstruation while mourning the death of their husbands.

Hiltebeitel aptly explains that in these instances *rajasvala* may mean ‘an impure condition’ or ‘defilement’.<sup>135</sup> Considering the mythical notion of menstrual blood in ancient India (already mentioned), I propose that the menstruating body of Draupadi incurs violence. Thus the body of Draupadī as *Śrī* personified becomes menstruating body thereby unleashing violence.

While Draupadī’s husbands witnessed their common wife’s molestation silently, Bhīma, the second brother among the Pāndavas reacts violently. The fiercely angry Bhīma not obediently following the decision of his elder brother (which is not appropriate conduct of an younger brother) wants to burn the two hands of his elder brother Yudhisthira (2.61.6). After witnessing that Duryodhana exposed his left thigh for drawing Draupadi’s gaze, Bhīma vows to smash Duryodhana’s thighs and drink Duhsāsana’s blood (2.63.10-15; 2.68.27-29). This theme of Bhīma’s vow is the basis for the Sanskrit drama *Venīsamhāra* of Bhatta Nārāyana (700 CE).<sup>136</sup> We find that Bhima successfully fulfills his vow on the seventeenth day of the cataclysmic battle. The stories of Draupadi’s vow and her disheveled hair have been well-known in the popular traditions of India. In fact, the epic simply mentions that Draupadī did not arrange her hair since Duhsasana dragged her into the hall (sabha) by the hair and she wore her hair beautifully again only

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<sup>134</sup> Alf. Hiltebeitel, “Draupadi’s hair”, in *Autour de la déesse hindoue, Purusārtha 5*, ed. Ecole Des Hautes Etude en Sciences Sociales (Avril, 1995): 188.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> In this play, Bhima will bind up Draupadi’s hair with his hands bloodied from broken thighs of Duryodhana. See David L. Gitomer, “Rāksasa Bhīma: Wolfbelly among Ogres and Brahmins in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata and the Venīsamhāra,” in *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, ed. Arvind Sharma, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2007), 296-333.

after Duryodhana had been slayed by Bhīma. While Bhīma urges, Yudhisthira to rule their kingdom as the great king, he points out that it is by good luck that Duryodhana along with his followers have been slain and also by good luck the condition of Yudhisthira is normal again like the condition of Draupadī's hair. This is the only way the epic alludes to the fact that Draupadī kept her hair loose 'till the battle had been won.

By good luck, the sinful Duryodhana has been slain with all his followers in battle. By good luck, you have gone the way of Draupadī's mass of hair.<sup>137</sup>

diṣṭyā duryodhanaḥ pāpo nihataḥ sānugo yudh  
draupadyāḥ keśapakṣasya diṣṭyā tvam padavīm gataḥ

Book second (Book of the Assembly Hall) of the *Mahābhārata* bolsters the very existence of Krishnā-Draupadī as the *casus belli*. Hildebeitel suggests that Draupadī's garment stained with blood or her loose long black hair evokes a reverse image of beautiful goddess Śrī. One would rather recognize here the goddess of destruction in the depiction of krishnā-Draupadī in the dicing hall<sup>138</sup>. It is important to note that the menstruating body of Draupadī in the dicing hall becomes a source of a religious celebration of the menstruating goddess in some traditions in India, especially, in the state of Orissa. What I wish to explore here is that there exists other myth that equates the female menstruating body with Earth and the Goddess.

## 2.8 Veneration of Draupadī as menstruating goddess in Folk Tradition of India

According to the tradition of the Goddess in India women, Earth, and the Goddess are

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<sup>137</sup> Hildebeitel, "Draupadī's hair," 200-201. Ganguli translates: "O king, the sinful Duryodhana hath been stain with all his followers. By good luck, thou too hast attained to the condition of Draupadī's locks".

<sup>138</sup> Hildebeitel writes: "For example, there can be little doubt that the epic poets know of a disheveled Goddess of destruction akin to and probably identical with Kālī. We know this, however, not because earlier texts or the epic itself tell us myths about Kālī, or even give us direct allusions to her, but because the epic alludes to such themes through its depiction of Draupadī." "Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāndavas and Draupadī", *History of Religions* 20, No.1/2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue, (Aug.-Nov., 1980): 147-174.

the manifestations of the Divine Reality<sup>139</sup>. This tradition venerating the power of the Goddess (*Shākta* tradition) goes back to the *Devīsukta* (*Rigveda* 10.125) where she reveals that she alone pervades the whole universe through her power. *Devī-Māhāmya* (Glory of the Goddess) belonging to the Mārkindya Purana is another important Hindu religious text that narrates the power (*Shakti*) of the Goddess. With this view in mind, a traditional text regarding the Goddess writes about 51 sacred places of pilgrimage (*Pīthas*)<sup>140</sup> that are considered to be auspicious to the Mother-Goddess. According to some *Purānas*, *Devībhāgavata* and *Kālikā Purāna*, for example, *Satī* the wife of Shiva went uninvited to attend a sacrificial fire ceremony held at her father's place. She became furious when she heard insulting words about her husband who was not invited there to have a share of this sacrifice. Consequently, she killed herself in the fire she created through her yogic power. As the different parts of her body fell on the various places of India, these places became sacred for the devotees of the Goddess. Accordingly, the devotees built temples in these places in order to worship the Goddess with proper ritual. Traditionally, the temple of the goddess *Kāmākhya* in the state of Assam in India is known to be the sacred place where *Satī*'s vulva (*yoni*) fell.

This temple of the goddess *Kāmākhya* is situated on the top of a hill near the city of Guwahati in Assam. This unusual temple does not possess any icon of the Goddess instead a natural rock fissure constantly filled with water from an underground spring is ritually worshipped in the inner sanctum. Every year around the month of June when monsoon season starts, three days are set aside in the Hindu ritual calendar in

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<sup>139</sup> Kartikeya C. Patel, "Women, Earth, and the Goddess: A Shākta-Hindu Interpretation of Embodied Religion." *Hypatia* 9, no. 4, Feminist Philosophy of Religion (Autumn, 1994): 69-87.

<sup>140</sup> Dineshchandra Sircar. 1948. "Pīthanirṇaya: The Shākta pīthas", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 14(1): 42-66.

acknowledging the annual menstruation of the goddess Earth. This is the time when the goddess *Kāmākhyā* is specially worshipped and a huge fair is held celebrating the annual menstruation of the goddess. Clearly, in the tradition of the *Shaktī* cult the Goddess, Earth, and women are connected. This inherent notion of connectedness in a religious context is pointedly visible in the agricultural community in the Indian state of Orissa.

This particular religious emotion of connectedness is easier to understand from the voices of the women and men of the farming community of Orissa during the festival of menstruation of the Goddess. This valuable information is available to the researchers due to the two essays<sup>141</sup> where Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Purna Chandra Misra have presented a critical report of their fieldwork on the menstruation festival of the Goddess in Orissa. This festival known as the *raja* (menstruation) *parba* (festival) takes place each year from June 14th-18<sup>th</sup> when Earth herself is supposed to be menstruating. Note that during this festival no one should plow or dig the earth, in other words, the goddess Earth should not be disturbed at this time of the year. Similarly, the male participants in their interview truly believe that women should not be disturbed during their menstruation. The Goddess of this festival is known by names like *Harachandī*, *Prithibī*, *Basudhā*, *Thākurānī*, and *Draupadī*. Both *Prithibī* and *Basudhā* mean earth while *Thākurānī* is the goddess who protects the farming community of Orissa.

It is worth noting that the goddess *Harachandī* is equated with *Draupadī* of *Mahābhārata*. The participants in the interview sincerely believe that the defeat of Duryodhana along with his allies happened for the very reason that they disturbed

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<sup>141</sup> Frédérique, Apffel-Marglin in collaboration with Purna Chandra Misra, "Woman's blood: Challenging the discourse of development", *The Ecologist* 22, no.1(1992):22-32.  
 ----, "Gender and unitary self: Locating the dominant when listening to the subaltern voice." Unpublished manuscript.

Draupadī during her menstruation. It seems that the tradition of *Mahābhārata* somewhat ignores the fact that Draupadī is the incarnation of Śrī on earth. But the farming community in Orissa has established a cosmic link between the destructive war and the assault of menstruating Draupadī by the brother of Duryodhana. Note that in Sanskrit and other Indic languages the same word *Ritu* is used for Season and menstruation as well. As the fertile Nature goes through a cycle of seasons, so does a fertile woman go through her cycle of menstruation. This is a little known cult of Earth goddess protecting the farming community in the state of Orissa in India. They consider Draupadī as the goddess Earth herself. As the violation of Krishnā-Draupadī during her menstruation led to a devastating war, this farming community of Orissa avoids cultivating the earth during the particular days in the religious calendar just to avoid crop failure. It seems that the local folk tradition has appropriated Draupadī as the earth goddess for its own religious purpose. Clearly, they have drawn this tradition in sympathy of the heroine of the *Mahābhārata*. Above all, Krishnā-Draupadī comes out of the earthen altar of the sacrificial rite and she is dark. Hildebeitel writes: “she is from birth dark like the goddess Earth and an embodiment of Shri, the goddess of Prosperity.”<sup>142</sup> In addition, Hildebeitel’s work<sup>143</sup> shows that certain village communities of Tamilnadu, South India worship Draupadī as one form of the Great Goddess. It is worth noting that the cult of Draupadī, unlike the cult of Helen of Sparta, is a post-epic reception of Draupadī’s assault and her strength in folk traditions of India.

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<sup>142</sup> Alf. Hildebeitel, “Draupadi’s question” in *Is the Goddess a Feminist?: The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*, ed. Alf Hildebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 112-122.

<sup>143</sup> Alf. Hildebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi: Mythologies: From Gingee to Kuruksetra*, vol.1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Sally Southerland proposes that the *Mahābhārata* battle turns into a political question over sovereignty<sup>144</sup>. I argue that in view of the comparison of Draupadī as Śrī personified with the Indo-European symbol of Sovereignty; this devastating battle happened over Draupadi/ Sovereignty/ Kingdom. With this in mind, the brutal act of the Kaurava princes in enslaving the menstruating Draupadī/ Śrī-incarnate in the dicing hall foreshadows the impending bloody war over the dominance of the Kuru kingdom/ Sovereignty. Further, Draupadī's physical appearance incurring violence continues in books third (Book of the Forest) and fourth (Book of Virata).

Book third narrates the episode where the attempted abduction of Draupadī occurs during the time when she spends the mandated twelve years of exile in wilderness with her five husbands. During their required stay in the great forest of Kamyaka, the Pāndavas used to go for hunting for food. One day they went off hunting in all directions leaving Draupadī at the hermitage with her maid and the house priest. The king Jayadratha of Sindhu accompanied with many princes happened to pass by the same forest and found Draupadī standing at the threshold of the hermitage. Jayadratha desirous of marriage was journeying to the kingdom of Salya and the sight of Krishnā-Draupadī's great beauty fascinated the king. He sent off his friend the king Koikasya to find out who was this exceedingly charming woman. Then Jayadratha himself along with six other kings came to the hermitage. Having introduced himself properly, the king urged her to mount his chariot and become his wife. When she refused, he forced her onto his chariot and took off. The house priest of the Pāndavas, however, did not reprimand the king for this violent act; he rather stated that Jayadratha should have followed the legal manner of abduction:

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<sup>144</sup> Sally J. Southerland, "Sīta and Draupadī: Aggressive Behaviour and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no.1 (Jan.-Mar., 1989):63-79.

This (woman) cannot be led/married by you, without having conquered great chariot (fighters).

Look to the ancient *dharma* of the warrior, o Jayadratha. (3.252.25)

neyaṃ śakyā tvayā netum avijitya mahārathān  
dharmaṃ kṣatrasya paurāṇam avekṣasva jayadratha

The priest Dhaumya meant that it would have been legal if Jayadratha had engaged in a combat with her husbands, “in other words if he gave a *virya* as a *śulka*”.<sup>145</sup> Jamison’s remark regarding Draupadī’s abduction recalls the fact that Arjuna had to pay a *virya śulka* (bride-price through feats of valour/ an act of heroism)<sup>146</sup> in order to win Draupadī’s hand at her *svayamvarā*. The five husbands of Draupadī came back and after having heard from their maid about the abduction of Draupadī by Jayadratha, they hurried to attack the abductor of Draupadī. Realizing that he was being chased by the Pāṇdavas, Jayadratha asked Draupadi to identify each of her five husbands as it is a necessary legal step to the process of counter abduction in the ksatriya marriage. Jamison compares this process of identifying the party of re-abductors by Draupadī with Helen at the *Teichoscopia*<sup>147</sup> (*Il.* 3). Draupadi goes on identifying her husbands in 19 long verses. According to Jamison, Draupadi’s act of identification in the middle of a serious chase ‘is *not* predictable in a universal script’. Jamison clarifies this scene further:

As the Pandavas close in on the abductor’s chariot, all action seems to cease, freeze-framed, as it were, for nineteen temporally suspended verses—Tristubh verses at that, each with four 11 –syllable lines—a remarkably lengthy interruption to this dramatic chase scene. It is important to note that these verses are so-called irregular Tristubhs and, as such, belongs to the oldest ksatriya core of our surviving *Mahābhārata*, as convincingly argued in the recent book of Mary Carroll Smith”.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Stephanie, Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer’s Wife*, 228

<sup>146</sup> Rāma also had to perform feats of valour in order to win Sitā at her *svayamvarā*.

<sup>147</sup> Jamison, ‘Draupadi on the Walls of Troy: “Iliad” 3 from an Indic Perspective’, *Classical Antiquity* 13, no. 1 (Apr. 1994): 5-16.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 232; Mary Carroll Smith, *The Warrior Code of India’s Sacred Song*, Harvard dissertations in folklore and oral tradition (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 129.



While Draupadī's re-abduction by the Pāṇdavas is an important factor in the list of marriages in ancient India, the motif of Draupadī's beauty creating violence repeats itself in this episode. The five Pāṇdavas defeated the great army of Jayadratha in a fierce battle. While trying to flee from the battle like a coward, Jayadratha got caught. The Pāṇdavas did not kill him despite Draupadī's urgings instead he was forced to proclaim himself as their slave. Thus Draupadī's beauty created another enemy who would join in the battle over sovereignty against the Pāṇdavas.

The theme of Draupadī as the *casus belli* is conspicuous from the very beginning of the epic yet it has been mentioned only once at the beginning of the epic. Her beauty creating violence repeats itself again, especially, in book four where her molestation in King Virāta's royal hall happens again. Book four narrates the last year of their exile spent incognito in the kingdom of king Virāta. Here Draupadī lives in the palace as a hairdresser of the queen whose brother the general of the king tries to seduce Draupadī. In fact the queen Sudesnā herself was awestruck by her beauty when she requested the queen for a job. After going through a detailed description of Draupadī's exquisite beauty, queen Sudesnā said:

See, the women of the royal household and those who live in my own house are gazing intently at you, so what man would you not captivate? And see the trees that grow here round my house; even they seem to be bowing before you, so what man would you not captivate? Lady of fine hips, once King Virāta sees your more—than—human beauty he will leave me and single—mindedly pursue you, for whichever man you gaze at intently with your long eyes will fall into love's clutches, lady of flawless limbs! And any man who sees you constantly, with your lovely smile and your utterly flawless limbs, will fall into the clutches of love! The female crab spawns only to die, and so I believe it will be for me if you dwell here, sweet-smiling girl! (4.8.20-26).<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Translated, John D. Smith

Here the words of queen regarding the gaze of Draupadi recalls the warning of Hecuba to Menelaus regarding Helen's gaze in Euripides' play *The Trojan women*. Here the poet clearly relates the problem of beauty to male desire through a female speaker. Nonetheless, Draupadi does not actively evoke desire in men, rather her beauty, that is, symbolically attached to her intrinsic value as Sovereignty carries the desire. Indeed this episode demonstrates that an enormous violence and multiple deaths occur due to the uncontrollable desire for Draupadī. Finally, it is important to remember that the symbol of Śrī (Sovereignty) in the form of a beautiful woman is noted to be a pre-Aryan goddess of fertility.<sup>150</sup>

Nevertheless, Draupadī keeps up her bellicose motivation for revenge through her provocative speech leading to war. With this in mind, one could always ponder about her seemingly bellicose motivation. Evidently, it is Draupadī who takes the responsibility in encouraging her husbands to fight so that the way of *dharma* is upheld. While referring to Krishna as the one who does not fight in the *Mahābhārata* war but protects Arjuna to win the battle for *dharma*, Madeleine Biarreau draws attention to a crucial point that is almost always overlooked:

Et Draupadī, l'épouse soumise, excite ses maris au combat alors qu'Arjuna y répugne profondément: oui, il fallait bien la Déesse pour endosser la responsabilité du *dharma* à la place de l'Homme, touché par la grâce du renoncement.<sup>151</sup>

Here Biarreau, as it seems, compares Draupadī with the Goddess of the Hindus whose origin most surely comes from the 'village-Hinduism' that essentially dates back to the

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<sup>150</sup> J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1993, 1969, reprint first edition: Leiden), see the brilliant chapter on Śrī in this book.

<sup>151</sup> Madeleine Biarreau, (ed) *Autour de la Déesse Hindoue*, (Purushartha Vol.5, 1981):15.

"And Draupadī, the submissive wife provokes her husbands into fighting a war that Arjuna detests profoundly. Yes, it had to be the goddess to assume the responsibility of the *dharma* instead of the man touched by the grace of renunciation (my translation)."

Indus Civilization in India. According to Asko Parpola a Finnish Indologist and Sindhologist (Indus Civilization), the essential components of ‘village Hinduism’ seem to originate ‘at least as early as the Early and Mature Harappan villages of the third millennium BCE’.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Hiltebeitel writes:

It is thus impossible to study the epic as a story frozen in its Sanskrit textual forms. For one thing, there are good grounds to suspect that certain features of the story descend from an Indo-Iranian and Indo-European past. But more than this, one must assume that the epic poets made selective use of oral traditions and popular cultural themes... It is thus worth investigating whether what they left untold but implicit, or what they alluded to through symbols, is not still echoed in the vast oral and vernacular epic and epic-related traditions that perpetuate the story to Indian culture to this day. I have come to suspect that living traditions of and about the *Mahābhārata* are often in close touch with traditional meanings that have escaped the classically based literary scholars.<sup>153</sup>

To sum up, both heroines, that is, Helen and Draupadī are meant to be divine instruments for belligerent purpose. In essence, they both are *casus belli*. Furthermore, as it has been shown, they both suffered due to their superhuman beauty. However, the poet of the *Mahābhārata* describes the beauty of Draupadī in physical detail whereas Homer’s description of Helen’s beauty is rather minimal. They both had to go through a marriage that required suitors’ contest; in other words, they were the prizes for their suitors. Nevertheless, their suitors behave differently in the respective wars: Helen’s suitors fought alongside her husband in the Trojan War whereas the suitors of Draupadī did not. Finally, they both represent the layers of two cultures: Helen’s characterization is a blend of Aegean and Indo-European civilizations and Draupadi of pre-Vedic and Indo-European. With this view in mind, it is important to remember that they both had to

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<sup>152</sup> Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 306.

<sup>153</sup> Hiltebeitel, “Śiva, the Goddess and the Disguises of the Pāndavas and Draupadī,” 152.

function in the Indo-European patrilineal form of society. In conclusion, Helen and Draupadī are *casus belli* with no agency of their own, yet they had to perform the role they had been given.

## Part Two: Power of Speech

### Introduction

In the preceding section I proposed that both Helen and Draupadī Helen are *casus belli* without any agency of their own. Unlike the poet of the *Mahābhārata*, Homer in the *Iliad* is silent about Helen's life before moving to Troy with Paris. First, the myth of Helen's birth is found in the tradition of the epic cycle. Second, the narrator did not render any voice to Helen regarding her marriage that required a selection of the best man from the many suitors who wanted to be Helen's husband. As the criterion for choosing the best man was arranged by her father and brothers, Helen's voice was not required in that matter. In a similar manner, Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* silently followed the rules that have been set up by her father and brother at her *Svayamvara* or 'self-choice' leading to her own wedding. Thus far Helen and Draupadī silently participated in the social law of marriage as the objects of exchange. Draupadī ended by marrying five brothers instead of one, in this sense, Draupadī has been objectified in the institution of marriage much more than Helen.

Yet, it is clear that both Helen and Draupadī subverted the tradition of women being silent participants. My intention in this part is to highlight the narrative ambiguities that exist in Homeric and Indic epics. Many voices of Helen start in the *Iliad* and continue in the *Odyssey*. Similarly, the silent bride Draupadī demonstrates unusual rhetorical skill in the *Mahābhārata*.

In order to resolve this narrative ambiguity of these two women from distinctly different cultures yet belonging to patrilineal/patriarchal Indo-European societies, I wish to take a cue from Claude Levi-Strass' brilliant observation. He associates linguistic structure with the system of patrilineal society where men create alliance with other men

by formally exchanging women as possession. Thus, women are object and at the same time they speak. According to Levi-Strauss, kinship systems and marriage rules can be clearly understood when they are treated “as a kind of language, a set of process permitting the establishment, between individuals and groups, of a certain type of communication.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, he explains that instead of “the words of the group” that are passed from one individual to individual, in the case of marriage, it is “the women of the group, who are circulated between clans, lineages, or families”<sup>155</sup>. Furthermore, he adds:

Of course, it may be disturbing to some to have women conceived as mere parts of a meaningful system. However, one should keep in mind that the process by which phonemes and words have lost—even though in an illusory manner—their character of value, to become reduced to pure signs, will never lead to the same results in matters concerning women. For words do not speak, while women do; as producers of signs, women can never be reduced to the status of symbols or tokens.<sup>156</sup>

Likewise, beautiful Helen divinely ordained to be *casus belli* does not remain silent in Homeric epics, nor does Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*.

In order to understand their speech-acts in a tangible fashion, I will focus on the way these two heroines present themselves in the epics. Their self-presentation is connected to their verbal delivery along with their personal physical deportment in relation to their dialogical partners. As Donald Lateiner in the glossary of *Sardonic Smile: Nonverbal behavior in Homeric Epic* defines the “Speech-act” as

The total Gestalt of a person communicating in words to another or a group. Thus, the verbal element is embedded in the context of a social interaction (status, gender, age, time, and place) as well as in nonverbal behaviors (dress, posture, distance, tone, and volume etc.).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, translated from the French by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 61

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> D. Lateiner, *Sardonic smile: non-verbal behavior in Homeric epic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), xx.

Similarly, the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu underscores the innate connection between word usage and physical deportment, as both are shaped and determined by class and gender. Bourdieu calls this interaction between verbal and nonverbal “bodily *hexis*”. *Hexis* is the ancient Greek word that means “a being in a certain state” (Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon). Bourdieu writes:

Bodily *hexis* is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking. The opposition between male and female is realized in posture, in the gestures and movements of the body, in the form of the opposition between the straight and the bent, between firmness, uprightness and directness (a man faces forward, looking and striking directly at his adversary), and restraint, reserve and flexibility.<sup>158</sup>

Likewise, Jean Pierre Vernant points out the importance of the body as a benchmark for evaluating one’s rank in ancient Greece.<sup>159</sup> However, Vernant ignores the depiction of values related to female bodies in archaic Greek society. While broad-shouldered Homeric heroes are endowed with winning speech (compare bow-legged, hunch shouldered Thersites with disorderly speech in *Il.* 2.217-219), female bodies in archaic society are highly prized objects (as seen in the preceding chapter). Contrary to the usual depiction of archaic women, Helen speaks with a great authority. As Nancy Worman writes:

The depictions of the epic poets indicate that women of high status do not necessarily command much verbal authority. Helen is relatively unusual in this regard, a status for which her semi divine genealogy may help to account.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69-70.

<sup>159</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>160</sup> Nancy Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek literature*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 86.

I argue that Helen's 'command of verbal authority' comes from her association on two planes: her semi divine/divine genealogy on the divine plane and her royal status as the queen of Sparta, not by marriage, but by matrilineal inheritance on a human plane.

Accordingly, as a queen of Sparta (ignoring the fact that Helen, being the daughter of Zeus, is the sister of Muses) her speech and deportment would show resourcefulness and authority. In the same vein, I read Draupadī's speech pattern in the light of her being on two planes: goddess incarnate and the chief queen of the Pāṇḍavas on the human plane.

Although Helen and Draupadī belong to patriarchal society, their speech patterns differ due to their different cultural tradition. On the other hand, perhaps more importantly, they exert their agency or their self-awareness through their rhetoric maneuver.



### Chapter Three: Helen

Much has been written on Helen's subjectivity. My intention in this chapter is to revisit Helen's speech in Homeric epics (*Iliad and Odyssey*) and what kind of image she offers through her verbal presentation (has been recognized as verbal mutability). Then I ask: what kind of verbal disguise does Homeric Helen possess? In addition, I examine Helen's dress and general appearance, in other words, the nonverbal elements associated with Helen's oral performance. I will examine Helen's oral speech in the background of her personal deportment and I shall follow the same model while analyzing Draupadī's speech-act. Nancy Worman writes:

The signature feature of Helen's figure is a beauty both dangerous and immortal, but she is also depicted as the embodiment of something equally threatening and attractive: an enchanting style of self-presentation (14).

It is Helen's 'enchanting style of self-presentation' along with her highly prized beautiful female body that embellishes the anxiety of a 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian dramatist like Euripides. Further, Helen's self-presentation changes in relation to her dialogical partner or situation she is encountering. I will start analyzing Helen's self-presentation in the *Iliad* first, through her distinctly creative way of weaving a tapestry.

#### 3.1 Helen's self-presentation through weaving

Helen appears for the first time in the book three of the *Iliad* as a silent weaver. A minor goddess Iris comes to Helen's chamber where Helen is weaving 'a great purple web of double fold'. Iris comes in order to fetch her to witness the duel between Menelaus and Paris. This duel is crucial in determining who will possess Helen. Iris comes in the guise of Laodike the full sister of Paris and Hector. Helen stops weaving and obediently follows her sister-in-law. Helen's gesture asserts that she knows the social decorum of the Trojan society. At the same time, this scene of the book three shows that Helen is weaving a

double folded purple mantle in which she has embroidered the sufferings that the Trojans and Achaeans “endured for her sake at the hands of Ares” (3.128):

She found Helen in the hall, where she was weaving a great purple web of double fold on which she was embroidering many battles of the horse-taming Trojans and the bronze-clad Achaeans, which for her sake they had endured at the hands of Ares.<sup>161</sup>

τὴν δ' εὔρ' ἐν μεγάρῳ· ἥ δὲ μέγαν ἱστὸν ὕφαινε  
δίπλακα πορφυρέην, πολέας δ' ἐνέπασσεν ἀέθλους  
Τρώων θ' ἵπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων,  
οὓς ἐθεν εἶνεκ' ἔπασχον ὑπ' Ἄρης παλαμάων· (Il. 3.125-128)

Here Helen does not speak but she weaves her own story on a fabric. Helen presents herself through a woven image of which she herself is the creator. This recalls the myth of Philomela in which Philomela was unable to tell her own story because Tereus the husband of her sister Procne cut her tongue after having raped Philomela. However, Philomela (according to Apollodorus, 3.194.5) wove her story on a fabric and sent it to her sister. Philomela's power of weaving replaced her lack of speaking. Likewise, the woven image that Helen has created, speaks on her behalf. Clearly, Helen is the author as well as the passive object of her woven story. It is important to note how the scholiast comments on the line (126-127) regarding Helen's weaving: “ the poet has fashioned a worthy archetype of his own poetic art or model of his own art”.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, the images of the Achaean and Trojan warriors represented in Helen's tapestry constitute a *grammata* like the poet's words. As Kathryn Sullivan Kruger remarks, ‘Helen's weaving connotes Homer's voice “telling” the poem’.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *Iliad*, trans., A.T. Murray.

<sup>162</sup> Harmut Erbse, ed. *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*. 7 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969).

<sup>163</sup> Kathryn Sullivan Kruger, *Weaving the Word: The Metaphoric of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2001).

Similarly, in Indo-European tradition, the term ‘weaving’ symbolizes a metaphorical representation for poetic composition<sup>164</sup>. Note that in the *Iliad* Andromache wife of Hector also weaves and so does Penelope the wife of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Most importantly, Penelope becomes the paradigm of weaving. In contrast to Helen’s weaving, Andromache’s weaving is dedicated to the well being of her husband.

Andromache,

was weaving a tapestry in the innermost part of the lofty house, a purple tapestry of double fold, and in it she was weaving flowers of varied hue.

ἀλλ' ἥ γ' ἰστὸν ὕφαινε μυχῶ δόμου ὑψηλοῖο  
δίπλακα πορφυρέην, ἐν δὲ θρόνα ποικίλ' ἔπασσε. (*Il.*22.440-441)

Unlike Helen, Andromache does not weave the image of the war that has been happening outside the peaceful interior of the palace. Her space is the domestic space of her husband and son; she does not want to transgress her wifely boundary as indicated by Hector:

But go to the house and busy yourself with your own tasks, the loom and the distaff, and tell your handmaids to ply their work: and war will be the concern for men, all of those who live in Ilios, but especially for me. (6.490-494)

ἀλλ' εἰς οἶκον ἰοῦσα τὰ σ' αὐτῆς ἔργα κόμιζε  
ἰστὸν τ' ἡλακάτην τε, καὶ ἀμφιπόλοισι κέλευε  
ἔργον ἐποίχεσθαι· πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει  
πᾶσι, μάλιστα δ' ἐμοί, τοῖ Ἰλίῳ ἐγγεγάασιν.

Like an obedient wife Andromache goes back in the palace and weaves a web of purple fabric with designs of roses, while Hector fights his last battle.

On the contrary, this dichotomy of masculine world of war and female world of weaving coalesce in the weaving of Helen. While Helen’s woven image expresses her communicative mastery, Andromache’s work at the loom shows her intense anguish for the safety of her husband who is out there fighting. Both Helen and Andromache weave a

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<sup>164</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 9; West, *Indo-European Poetry*, 36.

purple tapestry<sup>165</sup> of double fold but Andromache designs *throna* in it. It has been suggested that θρόνα (= ῥόδα) has special magical power of protecting those who wear them.<sup>166</sup> This belief system had been prevalent in the pre-epic times and the poet must have used this belief in portraying Andromache's weaving for protecting Hector.<sup>167</sup> However, Penelope the faithful queen of Ithaca also weaves to keep her suitors waiting till the return of Odysseus. She is weaving for her father-in-law a "shroud", a plain cloth that should not take months to complete. In short, Helen weaves the story of the war where she is the main cause and she wants to freeze the moments as her self-referential record for the future generation. Andromache weaves a magic spell to protect her husband and Penelope weaves to deceive her suitors. Thus these royal ladies in the Homeric epics weave, but each to different end. In fact, all evidence suggests that in antiquity weaving and spinning have been the work of women.<sup>168</sup>

Modern scholarship, on the other hand, recognizes appropriately metaphorical function of weaving particularly in Homer. It is Antenor who describes the speech of Menelaus and Odysseus in the Trojan assembly in terms of "weaving": (ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ μύθος καὶ μήδεα πᾶσιν ὕφαινον,) 'But when they began to weave the web of words and of devices in the presence of all'. Equally important is the connection between weaving and *mêtis* that is conspicuous in the goddess Athena. Athena, the goddess of weaving 'weaves

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<sup>165</sup> Purple is the most expensive dye, known to the ancient world. Only the royal ladies could afford to weave with wool coloured with purple dye. They obtained this expensive dye from sea snails like murex. "The Minoans and Greeks had their own banks of purple snails, off the east end of Crete, which they fished until none was left". See Elizabeth W. Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1994), 210.

<sup>166</sup> George Melville Bolling, "Poikilos and Qrona," *The American Journal of Philology* 79, no 3, (1958), 275-282.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> See E. Barber, *Women's Work*, 207-231; Herodotus (2.35) mentions that in Egyptian culture men rather than women weave.

a *mêtis*’ (μητιν ὑφαίνειν, *Odyssey* xiii 303,386) for her favorite Odysseus who himself is well known as πολύμητις ‘he of much mêtis’ in epic tradition.<sup>169</sup> Thus Athena weaves *metis*, Menelaus and Odysseus weave words; Helen weaves ‘a web of double folded mantle in which she embroiders the ‘struggles’ of Achaeans and Trojan warriors. In the like manner, both Andromache and Penelope loyal to their husband weave for their own purpose. Elizabeth Barber aptly comments: “If human skill and cunning are personified by Athena, and the womanly skill is weaving, then weaving can itself become a metaphor for human resourcefulness”.<sup>170</sup>

Homer uses the term ἀέθλους in the description of Helen’s weaving. Here it means ‘struggle’ but the same term is used in the context of a “contest “ among the suitors of Penelope while referring to Penelope as the prize for it in the *Odyssey* (21.106, 180) as Linda Clader points out.<sup>171</sup> Furthermore, Clader adds that Helen’s web shows a direct reference to the duel that is about to begin outside the walls. Helen is the prize of the contest about to be enacted. However, Helen does not know about the duel before Iris informs her about it. It would not be wrong to imagine that Helen the queen of Sparta had considered this war as a “contest “ between her two sets of suitors and obviously, she would be the winning prize. However, she did not know that the contest would be narrowed down to her two husbands. The very moment she had been informed by Iris about the impending duel between Menelaus and Paris, she stopped weaving and followed her to the viewing walls. The poet does not show Helen weaving again in the *Iliad* but her voice is heard for the first time at the *Teichoscopia*.

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<sup>169</sup> See Ann Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thoughts*, 81.

<sup>170</sup> Barber, *Women’s work*, 242.

<sup>171</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 7.

### 3.2 Helen Communicates with Priam (3.161-242)

I have mentioned that Helen's weaving has a communicative ability like the poet himself. Although her weaving is metaphorically eloquent, she is silent. As Hanna Roisman remarks regarding Helen's weaving: 'like poetry, it is a one-way form of communication in which the maker stands apart from the persons addressed'.<sup>172</sup> When Laodike comes to Helen's chamber to announce the impending duel that is to be enacted to possess Helen, her words arouse 'a sweet longing for her former husband and her city and her parents' (3.139-140). Immediately, Helen veiled with shining linen (ἀργεννῇσι καλυψαμένη ὀθόνησιν) and tears rolling down her cheeks rushes out of her chamber accompanied with her two maids. It has been mentioned before that Helen's physical appearance at the rampart of the Scaean gates is veiled with gleaming fabrics. Worman suggests this corporeal style of veiling Helen with shining fabric indicates the visual presentation of Helen's speaking style:

The Homeric poet's emphasis on the richness, delicacy, and sheen of the materials used by Helen connects her figure to the manner of composition, the play of fabrics paralleling her use of soft and flattering speech.<sup>173</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to note that Homer's description of Helen's beauty veiled in shining material also present her resembling 'immortal goddesses' to the elders at the rampart. While the elders are not against the idea of Helen as the cause of the Trojan War, Priam does not blame Helen as the *casus belli*:

you are in no way to blame in my eyes; It is the gods, surely, who are to blame, who roused against me the tearful war of the Achaeans.(3.164-165).

οὐ τί μοι αἰτὶν ἔσσι, θεοὶ νύ μοι αἴτιοι εἰσιν

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<sup>172</sup> Hanna Roisman, "Helen in the "Iliad" "Causa Belli" and Victim of War: From Silent Weaver to Public Speaker", *The American Journal of Philology* 127, no. 1 (Spring, 2006), 1-36.

<sup>173</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Character*, 90.

οἱ μοι ἐφόρμησαν πόλεμον πολύδακρυν Ἀχαιῶν·

Priam's reference to "gods" may suggest that like the elders, he might have been mesmerized by Helen's elusive beauty or he could have the knowledge of Aphrodite's influence on Paris (judgement of Paris).<sup>174</sup> In this scene Priam treats Helen as a dear guest and invites her to sit beside him. He requests her to sit next to him so that Helen could see her former husband, her kinspeople and her dear friends. Then he asks her to identify the regal looking Achaean warrior in the battlefield.

In answer to Priam, Helen delivers a long speech (3.172-180):

Respected are you in my eyes, dear father of my husband, and dread. I wish that evil death had been pleasing to me when I followed your son here, and left my bridal chamber and my kinspeople and my daughter, well-beloved, and the lovely companions of my girlhood. But that was not to be; So I pine away with weeping. But this will I tell you, about which you ask and inquire. That man is the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon, who is both a noble king and a mighty spearman. And he was husband's brother to shameless me, if ever there was such a one.

αἰδοῖός τέ μοι ἔσσι φίλε ἑκυρὲ δεινός τε·  
ὥς ὄφελεν θάνατός μοι ἀδεῖν κακὸς ὅππότε δεῦρο  
υἱεῖ σῶ ἐπόμην θάλαμον γνωτοῦς τε λιποῦσα  
παῖδά τε τηλυγέτην καὶ ὀμηλικὴν ἐρατεινὴν.  
ἀλλὰ τὰ γ' οὐκ ἐγένοντο· τὸ καὶ κλαίουσα τέτηκα.  
τοῦτο δέ τοι ἔρέω ὃ μ' ἀνείρεαι ἡδὲ μεταλλᾶς·  
οὗτός γ' Ἀτρεΐδης εὐρὺ κρείων Ἀγαμέμνων,  
ἀμφοτέρων βασιλεύς τ' ἀγαθὸς κρατερός τ' αἰχμητής·  
δαῖρ' αὖτ' ἐμὸς ἔσκε κυνώπιδος, εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε.

Helen begins with a tone of reverence and intimacy; she expresses a great respect for her 'dear father-in-law' (φίλε ἑκυρέ) and thus reinforces her position as one of the family

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<sup>174</sup> Ruby Blondell writes: "Priam's vague reference to 'the gods' displace divine causation away from this specific goddess and toward the larger divine plan in a way that saves face not just for Helen but for himself, his sons, and the Trojans collectively." *Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 60.

members of Priam. Christos Tsagalis<sup>175</sup> comments that the insertion of φίλε ἔκυρέ in between αἰδοῖός τέ...δεινός τέ implies more than respect and awe; this expression creates an emotive term of intimacy “emphasizing the integral part that Helen plays in Priam’s family”. Thus she addresses Priam with personal touch and secures herself as a needy family member who deserves his compassion.

In the next line Helen begins with a death wish for herself suggesting an extreme disgust in her present life. In fact, Helen uses the words of death wish also in her other speeches (3.173, 6.345-347, 24.764) in the *Iliad*. Here Helen first praises Priam and immediately afterward blames her self for leaving her nuptial bedroom, her growing child, her kinsmen and her lovely mates of her own age. Her speaking style is perfectly chiastic recalling the Indo-European way of poetic method of praise and blame. Following the example of Dumézil in his work on Indo-European studies and of Detienne in the area of Greek culture, Nagy has shown that juxtaposition of praise and blame is equally evident in Homer’s work.<sup>176</sup> Helen oscillates between her pleasant memory of her past and the painful consequence of her past deeds in her present existence. Her wishful death did not happen, so, now she is lamenting. She is lamenting but she is not denying her responsibility in her elopement with Paris. She uses active verb in accepting that she ‘followed’ (I followed your son νίει σφ’ ἐπόμεν) Paris who is the son of Priam. Although her language does not necessarily implies that she ‘followed’ Paris willingly yet it announces her own agency in the act of her elopement with Paris. After expressing her

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<sup>175</sup> Christos Tsagalis, *The Oral Palimpsest: Exploring Intertextuality in the Homeric Epics*, Hellenic Studies Series, 29, Washington, D.C. Center for Hellenic Studies, 2008, ch.6.

<sup>176</sup> Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, rev.ed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 222.



personal emotion in relation to leaving her own home, Helen begins to answer Priam's question in identifying the warrior.

While identifying Agamemnon for Priam, Helen continues to express her attachment to her past. She relates that Agamemnon 'was' her husband's brother (δαῖρ).<sup>177</sup> In fact, everything seems so far off to Helen that she has doubt whether she was ever married to Menelaus who is the brother of Agamemnon: "if there was such a one" (εἴ ποτ' ἔην γε). G.S. Kirk writes in his commentary that this "phrase expresses nostalgia and regret at how things have changed."<sup>178</sup> It is obvious that once she was related to Agamemnon through her marriage to Menelaus. This is the second time Helen alludes to her marriage. First she mentions her 'nuptial chamber' (θάλαμος) that she left by following Priam's son and now she identifies Agamemnon in relation to Menelaus.

Viewing Agamemnon brings back her pleasant memory of married life in Lacedaemon and now Helen begins to address herself as κυνώπιδος. It is important to note the chiasmic usage of θάλαμος and θάνατός; One evokes the sweet symbol of bridal joy and another of lamentation negating life.<sup>179</sup> Likewise, Helen δῖα γυναικῶν becomes Helen κυνώπιδος at the end of her speech identifying Agamemnon. Helen's extreme self-abuse by using dog epithet makes her "the only character in the Homeric poems to engage in self-abuse; no one else turns such barbs against themselves."<sup>180</sup>

It is equally important to note that dog epithets are often used for the purpose of verbal dueling among the male heroes in the Homeric epics. Achilles, for example, insults

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<sup>177</sup> See Emile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, translated by Elizabeth Palmer, summaries, table and index by Jean Lallot (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1973), 203.

<sup>178</sup> Kirk, *The Iliad: a commentary*, 290.

<sup>179</sup> Tsagalis, 2008, writes extensively on these two terms.

<sup>180</sup> Worman, "This Voice which is Not One: Helen's Verbal Guises in Homeric Epic," 21.

Agamemnon by calling him κυνῶπα (dog-face) as Achilles had been forced to participate in the Trojan War under the leadership of Agamemnon (1.158). Then, after a few verses (1. 225) Achilles verbally abuses Agamemnon by shouting at him as οἶνοβαρές, κυνὸς ὄμματ' ἔχον (heavy with wine, having the eyes of a dog). Verbal dueling or “flyting” as Ward Parks terms it, has been a tradition among the male warriors within a male dominated society.<sup>181</sup> I argue that by employing the language of blaming with such vituperation Helen mirrors the language of male warriors. Thus she oscillates between male world and female world in the same way as she weaves the male world of battlefield into the female world of tapestry. Scholars have written extensively on the dog epithets in the Homeric epics. Clader in her book (1976) cites Manfred Faust’s article in which he has catalogued every instance of “literal and metaphorical uses of κύων in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. “<sup>182</sup> Helen has used the dog epithet for reproaching herself also two more times in the *Iliad* (6.344, 356) and once in the *Odyssey* (4.145). With her crafty manipulation with words, Helen turns the process of identifying Agamemnon into her own story. Thus Helen’s verbal skill acts as the counterpart of her modest yet elusive veil.

After Agamemnon, it is Odysseus whom Priam wants Helen to identify. This time Helen’s answer is very precise. She introduces Odysseus as the man of “many wiles” (πολύμητις) who grew up in rugged Ithaca and he is the son of Laertes. Helen’s verbal economy in identifying Odysseus is juxtaposed by Antenor’s elaborate speech narrating his meeting with Odysseus and Menelaus at the embassy (*Il.* 3. 203-224).

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<sup>181</sup> Ward Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Homeric Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3-16.

<sup>182</sup> Manfred Faust, “Die kunstlerische von κύων ‘Hund’ in den homerischen Epen,” *Glotta* 48 (1970), 8-31.

Next, Helen takes the central role again in answering to Priam when he asks her to identify Ajax. Helen identifies “huge” Ajax quickly through his epithets “bulwark of the Achaeans” (ἔρκος Ἀχαιῶν). Although this first verse is good enough answer to Priam’s question, Helen immediately shifts to identify Idomeneus the Cretan leader who was a guest-friend of Menelaus and thus he reminds Helen of her own past story again. At this point, she notices the absence of her twin brothers from the battlefield:

Now I see all the rest of the bright-eyed Achaeans, whom I could well recognize and tell their names; but two marshalers of armies can I not see, Castor, tamer of horses, and Polydeuces, good at boxing, my own brothers, whom the same mother bore. Either they did not follow with the army from lovely Lacedaemon or, though they followed here in their seafaring ships, they are now not minded to enter into the battle of warriors for fear of the reproachful words and the many revilings that are mine.

νῦν δ' ἄλλους μὲν πάντας ὄρῳ ἐλίκωπας Ἀχαιοὺς,  
οὓς κεν ἐν γνοίην καὶ τ' οὔνομα μυθησαίμην·  
δοιῶ δ' οὐ δύναμαι ἰδέειν κοσμήτορε λαῶν  
Κάστορά θ' ἱππόδαμον καὶ πύξ ἀγαθὸν Πολυδεύκεα  
αὐτοκασιγνήτω, τῷ μοι μία γείνατο μήτηρ.  
ἢ οὐχ ἐσπέσθην Λακεδαιμόνος ἐξ ἐρατεινῆς,  
ἢ δεύρω μὲν ἔποντο νέεσσ' ἐνι ποντοπόροισι,  
νῦν αὖτ' οὐκ ἐθέλουσι μάχην καταδύμεναι ἀνδρῶν  
αἵσχεα δειδιότες καὶ ὀνείδεα πόλλ' ἅ μοι ἐστίν.

Helen assumes that the absence of her brothers can be explained by their fears of shame and reproach caused by her own shameful act. Helen, however, is the one who has her own negative assessment regarding her past deeds. The elders do not condemn her and Priam rather thinks gods are to be blamed. Furthermore, in the battlefield Menelaus prays to Zeus in order to succeed in avenging Paris in the battlefield. In contrast, on the Trojan side we hear from Hector how Trojan warriors are reacting towards Paris when he leaves

the battlefield (6.524-525)<sup>183</sup>. In reality, the poet tells us right after Helen's speech of self-blame that her brothers are no longer alive (3.243-44). It is not difficult to imagine how Helen seeks the heroic world of glory by viewing the world in relation to her.

It is also the poet who portrays Helen with an aspiration of κλέος that is mainly the concern of the warrior. Helen does not want to be a mere prize of the warriors. Although she knows that she is the cause of the Trojan War that will be the song of the poet yet she wants to be included in the song not as a plundered object but as a responsible agent who caused this war by leaving her lawfully wedded husband. Thus she speaks in the public space where the Trojan elders have gathered to watch the duel between Menelaus and Paris. She speaks to Priam with due respect; she introduces the Achaean heroes in relation to her interaction with them and she expresses her frustration over leaving her wedded husband using most vituperative words just like the warriors' taunts in the battlefield. The interplay of Helen's words that are reverential towards her father-in-law, abusive words recognizing her past deeds leaving her 'marriage bed' and auto-referential words while identifying the Achaean heroes, is carefully constructed. Worman aptly remarks:

Thus in keeping with her masculine concern with κλέος, Helen tends to speak *muthoi*, an authoritative speech type that commonly marks public or formal utterances delivered by males of high status.<sup>184</sup>

Then she writes again: "Thus Helen's authoritative *hexis*, which is itself unusual for female characters, possesses a unique versatility in her usage".<sup>185</sup> Here I like to emphasize the identity of Helen on human plane that is, Helen the queen of Sparta by matrilineal

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<sup>183</sup> See Mary Ebbott, The Wrath of Helen: Self-Blame and Nemesis in the *Iliad*, in *Nine Essays on Homer*, ed. Miriam Carlisle and Olga Levaniouk (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 3-20.

<sup>184</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Character*, 48-49.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

inheritance and thus Helen is a female of high status. It is my reading of Helen, then, that being a queen not by marriage and being the daughter of Zeus Helen must possess authoritative linguistic *habitus* along with bodily *hexis*. Eventually, Helen's speech stops after having realized that her brothers are not included in the Achaean army. The unforeseen absence of her brothers increases Helen's grief, loneliness and shamelessness in a country where she is a moral outcast.<sup>186</sup>

At this point, Aphrodite in the guise of an old woman came to fetch Helen who was standing among the Trojan women at the Wall. She plucked at Helen's "fragrant robe" (νεκταρέου ἑανοῦ) and said that Alexander (Paris) called her to go home. Note that Helen's shining bright robe that she wrapped herself for coming to the Wall is depicted here as the "fragrant robe". Compare the "ambrosial veil" (ἀμβρόσιον ἑανόν, *Il.* 14.178) worn by Hera and by Artemis (ἀμβρόσιον ἑανὸς, *Il.* 21.507). The goddess, in the meantime, removed Paris from combat with Menelaus and restored Paris to his fragrant bedchamber. Now, the goddess wished Helen to join Paris in his bed. Aphrodite attempted to lure Helen by presenting Paris in sensuous terms: "gleaming in beauty and garments" (3.392), as if he was going to a dance or has just returned from a dance, not from a duel (3. 391-394). Helen recognized the goddess through her disguise: "... when she caught sight of the beauteous neck of the goddess, her lovely bosom, and her flashing eyes, she was struck with wonder..." (3.396-398).

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<sup>186</sup> Hannah Roisman, "Helen in the *Iliad*" "Causa Belli" and Victim of War: From Silent Weaver to Public Speaker", *The American Journal of Philology* 127, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 1-36.

### 3.3 Helen and Aphrodite

Helen's sense of self-awareness turns into a fearless opposition at the proposition of Aphrodite even though she must submit to the will of this goddess. K.J. Reckford's<sup>187</sup>

(Helen in the *Iliad*, p.17) observation on this scene is noteworthy:

But Helen is not just used by Homer to demonstrate the power of the gods, as shown in the fulfillment of the Trojan War. Homer also asks (and perhaps this is new in his poem), what would a person feel who is being used as a pawn of the gods.

Thus Helen confronts the goddess with challenging question of deception and with acrimonious resistance to her command:

Strange goddess, why is your heart set on deceiving me in this way? Will you lead me still further on to one of the well-peopled cities of Phrygia or lovely Maeonia, if there too there is some one of mortal men who is dear to you, because now Menelaus has defeated noble Alexander and is minded to lead hateful me to his home? It is for this reason that you have now come here with guileful thought. Go, sit by his side, and abandon the way of gods, and turn not your feet back to Olympus; but ever be anxious for him, and guard him, until he makes you his wife, or maybe even his slave. There I will not go—it would be shameful—that man's bed; all the women of Troy will blame me afterwards; and I have measureless griefs at heart.

δαιμονίη, τί με ταῦτα λιλαίεαι ἡπεροπεύειν;  
ἢ πῇ με προτέρω πολίων εὖ ναιομενάων  
ἄξεις, ἢ Φρυγίης ἢ Μηονίης ἐρατεινῆς,  
εἴ τίς τοι καὶ κεῖθι φίλος μερόπων ἀνθρώπων·  
οὐνεκα δὴ νῦν δῖον Ἀλέξανδρον Μενέλαος  
νικήσας ἐθέλει στυγερὴν ἐμὲ οἴκαδ' ἄγεσθαι,  
τοῦνεκα δὴ νῦν δεῦρο δολοφρονέουσα παρέστης;  
ἦ σο παρ' αὐτὸν ἰοῦσα, θεῶν δ' ἀπόεικε κελεύθου,  
μηδ' ἔτι σοῖσι πόδεσσιν ὑποστρέψειας Ὀλυμπον,  
ἀλλ' αἰεὶ περὶ κεῖνον ὄϊζυε καὶ ἐφύλασσε,  
εἰς ὃ κέ σ' ἢ ἄλοχον ποιήσεται ἢ ὃ γε δούλην.  
κεῖσε δ' ἐγὼν οὐκ εἶμι· νεμεσσητὸν δέ κεν εἶη·  
κεῖνου πορσανέουσα λέχος· Τρῳαὶ δέ μ' ὀπίσσω  
παῖσαι μωμήσονται· ἔχω δ' ἄχε' ἄκριτα θυμῷ.

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<sup>187</sup> K.J. Reckford, "Helen in the *Iliad*" in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 5, no.1 (1964), 5-20.

Although the episode of the Judgment of Paris is absent from the *Iliad*, the manipulation of Aphrodite in bringing Helen to Troy is conspicuous in the first few lines of Helen's passionate speech as a form of reply to Aphrodite's deceptive attempt of luring Helen to Paris' bed<sup>188</sup>. Helen claims that Aphrodite is using her to satisfy the goddess' own desire for Paris. The most importantly, Helen's speech implies that this scene is the reenactment of the previous seduction for which Helen followed Paris to Troy.

Here I draw attention to the question of *matriliny* of Helen and her *uxorilocal* residence after her marriage to Menelaus. Viewed from the patriarchal system of marriage, it seems by following Paris to his residence Helen followed a more conventional pattern of marriage in which the wife lives with her husband at his residence. Now Helen refuses to execute Aphrodite's command by going into the bedchamber of Paris. Helen also realizes that Aphrodite wants to stop Menelaus (whom she believes to have won the duel against Paris) from taking her back to Sparta and hence: "the guileful thought" of Aphrodite. Homeric Helen is painfully aware of her own moral failure against the desire that Aphrodite aroused in her for Paris. Moreover, it seems, she is singularly haunted by the loss of her own status as queen of Sparta. Accordingly, this time her better judgment resists Aphrodite's coercion. It is Helen who blames herself the most and yet she fears that the Trojan women will blame her for going to Paris's bed (3.411-412). Boedeker remarks that Helen's reluctance to join Paris in bed "recalls the motif of shame which in epic poetry is frequently attributed to characters under the influence of sexual desire."<sup>189</sup> Therefore, it seems significant at this point that Helen is

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<sup>188</sup> See, Blondel 2013, Roisman 2006, Worman 2002, and Clader 1976.

<sup>189</sup> Deborah D. Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic*, 34. Also see Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 28-63.

seeking to be included among the Trojan women, not to be reproached by them. Note that in book 6 of the *Iliad* when Hecuba and the other women of Troy dedicated an offering for Athena and asked for her protection; they did not include Helen in their community of prayer (6.296). Ironically, they chose the most beautiful robe that was brought by Paris on his journey back to Troy with Helen. Furthermore, the robe that has been selected for Athena “shone like a star” (ἄσπερ δ’ ὥς ἀπέλαμπεν 6.295). This episode of offering robe to Athena does allude to Paris’ journey back to Troy with Helen and significantly, to the shining material fit for goddess.

Unfortunately, Helen’s acerbic words seemed to be of no use as the goddess of love threatened to intensify the hatred that the Greeks and the Trojans already feel toward Helen (3.414-41). Now Helen being frightened by the words of the goddess of love followed her to Paris’s chamber:

So she spoke, and Helen sprung from Zeus, was seized with fear; and she went, wrapping herself in her bright shining mantle, in silence; and she escaped the notice of the Trojan women; and the goddess led the way (3.148-420).

Ὦς ἔφατ', ἔδεισεν δ' Ἑλένη Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,  
βῆ δὲ κατασχομένη ἐανῶ ἀργῆτι φαεινῶ  
σιγῇ, πᾶσας δὲ Τρῳᾶς λάθεν· ἦρχε δὲ δαίμων.

Significantly, Helen covers herself with gleaming *heanos* and somehow it renders her invisible to the Trojan women. It is not clear whether Aphrodite causes the invisibility<sup>190</sup> or the extreme brightness of the robe itself causes visual blindness. Markedly, Helen is associated with luminous surroundings and with the goddess Artemis also in the *Odyssey*. In book 4 of the *Odyssey*, Helen is compared to Artemis “of the golden distaff” (Ἀρτέμιδι

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<sup>190</sup> Clader (1976, 58) does not find any “indication that Aphrodite has effected the invisibility, and certainly no mention of a cloud in which she hides the lady.”



χρυσηλακάτῳ ἐικυῖα). Thus Helen's body in epic tradition is repeatedly surrounded by brilliant radiance that gives her immortal look (*Il.* 3.158) and at the same time she is invisible due to the blinding shimmer of her robe. Thus Helen is elusive, indefinable. However, Helen covered by her bright robe went to Paris's bedchamber unnoticed by the Trojan women. She did go silently and Aphrodite led the way.

### 3.4 Helen and Paris

Aphrodite made sure that Helen would encounter Paris in his bedchamber and she herself placed a seat for Helen opposing Paris. Even so Helen's conversation with Paris in his bedchamber turned more acerbic than that with Aphrodite. Helen is known to be more verbally abusive to those who are closest to her<sup>191</sup> and she is also mentioned as the "faded Aphrodite"<sup>192</sup>. With her eyes turned away Helen uttered an apparently simple statement: "you have come back from the war" (ἦλυθες ἐκ πολέμου). But this statement of Helen expresses rather an acute sarcasm. She could not believe that a warrior returning from a battle could relax on a perfumed bed, dressed in fine cloths looking as if he had just come from a dance (compare Aphrodite's depiction of Paris, 3. 393-4). Furthermore, she wished that he "had died there, vanquished by a mighty man who was my former husband". She made sure to remind that Menelaus was her former husband, lest Paris forget. She debunked Paris's masculinity by calling "Menelaus, dear to Ares". Yet she asked Paris to go back to the battlefield and challenge Menelaus who is dear to Ares. Compare Hector's words to Paris: "Will you then not face Menelaus, dear to Ares?" (3.52). Then Helen changed her mind and asked Paris not to go back lest he died in the battle.

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<sup>191</sup> Clader (1976,13) writes: "Nevertheless, no other Homeric character rebukes a divinity in such strong language, and the implication must be that Helen and the goddess are uncommonly close."

<sup>192</sup> Paul Friedrich, *The Meaning of Aphrodite* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 46-47. See Deborah Boedeker, *Aphrodite's Entry into Greek Epic* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 48, 54-55, and 61.

In return to Helen's reproach Paris urged her not to be angry with him, as he claimed that desire had "encompassed" (ἀμφεκάλυψεν) his mind (3.442)<sup>193</sup>. It is not clear whether Helen was able to feel the same passion towards Paris in this seduction scene. With attention to the word ἄκριτα (3.412) that generally means "confused, disorderly", one may assume the emphasis of Helen's painful feelings in this seduction scene.<sup>194</sup> Thus Helen's desire is as ambiguous as her veiled body. She continues her veiled speeches in the book six when Hector finds Helen in Paris's home that he had built especially for himself.

### 3.5 Helen, Paris, and Hector

When Hector enters the bedroom of Paris to incite him to return to the battlefield, he finds Helen supervising the works of her maids. Helen tries to persuade Hector to stay a while in "honey-sweet words" (μύθοισι...μειλιχίοισι, 6.343). Compare the same gentle tone of respect with which Helen started to speak with Priam (3.173). Then she starts by blaming herself in the same fashion as she spoke to Hector's father. Thus addressing Hector as her brother-in-law (δῶερ) in a "soft" tone Helen calls herself as dog (κυνὸς). However, here in the encounter with Hector, Helen's speech is divided in three segments.

The very first one is her usual death wish but this time Helen paints a grand vision of her death wish through a cosmic force of nature. She wishes that she should have been blown away by an "evil blast of wind" on the very day she was born. The wind should have carried her to a mountain or to the sea where the waves would have swept her away (6.344-48).

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<sup>193</sup> Many scholars have pointed out the same phrase ἀμφεκάλυψεν in the description of Zeus' desire for Hera in *Il.* 14. 294.

<sup>194</sup> Worman, "This Voice which is not One: Helen's Verbal Guises in Homeric Epic," 25.

Second, while blaming the gods for her situation Helen wishes for a better husband who could feel public indignation (νέμεσις) and shame (αἴσχος). Ironically, Helen is the offspring of Zeus and Nemesis as I have noted in the previous chapter. However Helen is painfully aware of her own shameless act that has caused this devastating war and she does regret for her behavior to Hector as she did to Priam. By blaming herself she avoids others blaming her.

The third segment of her speech possesses her own unique style of a poet. First she asks Hector to come and sit on a chair and addresses him as her brother-in-law (δᾶερ). Helen must express her awareness that her shameless act and the folly of Paris have caused this war for which Trojans and Achaeans have to suffer. Above all, she singles out Zeus as the cause of this war. Then she utters a “metapoetic” statement underscoring how she and Paris will be the subjects of songs of future generation:

...my brother, since above all others has trouble encompassed your mind  
because shameless me, and the folly of Alexander; on us Zeus has brought an  
evil doom, so that even in days to come we may be a song for men that are  
yet to be.

δᾶερ, ἐπεὶ σε μάλιστα πόνος φρένας ἀμφιβέβηκεν  
εἵνεκ' ἐμεῖο κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης,  
οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, ὥς καὶ ὀπίσσω  
ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι ἐσσομένοισι. (6.355-58)

The commentators<sup>195</sup> of book six point out that the words πελώμεθ' ἀοίδιμοι intend to imply “so that we become worthy of song.” Moreover, it must be clear that they are not, “the subject of song.” Furthermore, the word οἷσιν (on us) in verse 357 includes Helen, Paris and Hector. Since this is Helen’s last speech in book six, therefore, according to these commentators, by virtue of being an addressee, Hector becomes included in “us”. It

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<sup>195</sup> Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold eds. , *Homer: Iliad, Book VI*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180.

also shows the importance of Helen's persuasive words by means of which she constructs a new triangle between Helen, Paris, and Hector<sup>196</sup> at the end of her speech. Moreover, regarding Helen's inclusion of Hector in her song, Linda Clader<sup>197</sup> already remarked: "This is the only use of ἀοιδίμος in epic, and the implication would be that as figures of song Helen and those connected with her are especially singled out".

We have already observed in book three the poetic awareness of Helen and again here in Book six Homer highlights Helen's poetic ability. In book three Helen weaves a robe depicting the war of which she is the cause and here in book six, she reveals her proleptic vision in which Helen visualizes their sufferings due to the war will be the subject of future audiences. Mihoko Suzuki<sup>198</sup> remarks: "Unique among the *Iliad*'s characters, Helen shares with the poet this proleptic vision." Moreover, it is important to note Helen's understanding of the ambiguous gift of Zeus. Since Zeus has given them tragic destiny, they will gain immortality in poetry. Note that Achilles also accepts the gifts of Zeus from his two urns (24. 527-28). After setting up a triangle bond between Paris, Helen and Hector the narrator presents Helen at the funeral of Hector in the last (24) book of the *Iliad*.

### **3.6 Helen's lamentation at the funeral ritual of Hector**

In book twenty- four Helen was designated as the last mourner at the funeral ritual of Hector. It is well known that from the perspective of a mourner, being the last singer at a funeral ritual conveys the most prominent position of the mourner. A part of book twenty-two also narrates the lamentation of Hector. However, a significant difference between

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 8.

<sup>198</sup> Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 54.

these two books regarding the sequence of the mourners as established in the convention of ritual laments<sup>199</sup> in the ancient Greek society is witnessed. Traditionally, the mourning of the dead is primarily the duty of women, especially, the closest female relatives. In book 22 Hector's death is mourned first by his father and mother, then by the people of Troy, and finally by Andromache, Hector's dear wife. Maria Pantelia<sup>200</sup> finds a similar sequence in Hector's last visit to Troy in which he keeps his final visit to Andromache, his dearest wife and son Astyanax (6.394-502) after he had met with Trojan women (6.238), his mother Hecuba (6.251-85), and his brother Paris and Helen (6.321-68). As a result, Pantelia writes: "These scenes illustrate a pattern of progression whereby the last speaker, in any given scene, is the dearest to the hero<sup>201</sup>." However, in the last book of the *Iliad*, the sequence of this pattern of speakers is changed.

In the last book of the *Iliad* not only the narrator allows Helen to sing the lamentation of Hector, but also grants her the prominent position of being the last singer. Why should Helen be given such a great honour? Clader<sup>202</sup> offers a germane reason that is thematically suitable:

Helen is clearly included for a special purpose, for her position as the last mourner also places her within thirty lines of the end of the end of the epic, and in fact she does have the last long speech in the *Iliad*. One reason for her prominent position must be that just as Homer begins the epic with the Cause of Wrath (A 8), it is appropriate that he end it with a statement by the Cause of the War.

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<sup>199</sup> See M. Alexiou, Richard Martin, Gregory Nagy, and Reyes Bertolin Cebrian.

<sup>200</sup> Maria C. Pantelia, "Helen and the Last Song for Hector," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 132, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 2002): 21-27.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>202</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 11.

If Helen is the cause of the War then she must be the cause of the heroic quest for κλέος. It is Helen's understanding of κλέος that makes her the most suitable person to sing the dirge at Hector's lamentation.

In book six we have seen that Helen does not persuade Hector or Paris for avoiding the battlefield whereas Andromache tries her best to keep her husband Hector to stay within the Wall of Troy. While Hector visits Helen and Paris, Helen shows her poetic vision that goes beyond the present struggle and includes Hector in the future song of Paris and Helen. In contrast, when Hector visited Andromache for the last time, she begged him not to return to the battlefield. She did not realize that Hector's primary concern was to win glory through this war (6.446). Nor did she understand that her husband Hector did not want to destroy his reputation by not fighting and thereby blamed as coward by the Trojan people. Comparatively, not only did Helen understand Hector's heroic suffering caused by her, she also comforted that Hector would be remembered in their song for future audience. I argue that Helen's understanding originates from her innate realization of ambiguous gifts of Zeus for humankind as it is already noted before (6.357-58). Clader<sup>203</sup> aptly depicts this poetic awareness of Helen as her essential nature: "Wherever she appears she is accompanied by poetry or even creates it herself." As a result, only Helen can confer glory on Hector's life and death by singing the final song in the triadic mourning ritual of Hector.

Thus Helen spoke wailing:

Hector far dearest to my heart of all my husband's brothers! In truth my husband is godlike Alexander, who brought me to the land of Troy—I wish I had died before then! For this is now the twentieth year from the time when I went from there and I have gone from my native land, but never yet have I

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<sup>203</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 11.

heard evil or spiteful word from you; but if any other spoke reproachfully of me in the halls, a brother of yours or a sister, or brother's fair-robed wife, or your mother—but your father was ever gentle as if he had been my own—yet you would turn them with speech and restrain them by your gentleness and your gentle words. So I wail alike for you and for my unlucky self with grief at heart; for no longer have I anyone else in broad Troy who is gentle to me or kind; but all men shudder at me. (24. 762-775)

Ἕκτορ ἐμῷ θυμῷ δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων,  
 ἧ μὲν μοι πόσις ἐστὶν Ἀλέξανδρος θεοειδής,  
 ὅς μ' ἄγαγε Τροίηνδ'· ὥς πρὶν ὄφελλον ὀλέσθαι.  
 ἦδη γὰρ νῦν μοι τόδε εἰκοστὸν ἔτος ἐστὶν  
 ἐξ οὗ κεῖθεν ἔβην καὶ ἐμῆς ἀπελήλυθα πάτρης·  
 ἀλλ' οὐ πω σεῦ ἄκουσα κακὸν ἔπος οὐδ' ἀσύφηλον·  
 ἀλλ' εἴ τίς με καὶ ἄλλος ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἐνίπτοι  
 δαέρων ἢ γαλόων ἢ εἰνατέρων εὐπέπλων,  
 ἢ ἐκυρή, ἐκυρὸς δὲ πατὴρ ὥς ἦπιος αἰεὶ,  
 ἀλλὰ σὺ τὸν ἐπέεσσι παραιφάμενος κατέρυκες  
 σῆ τ' ἀγανοφροσύνη καὶ σοῖς ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσσι.  
 τῷ σέ θ' ἅμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχνυμένη κῆρ·  
 οὐ γάρ τίς μοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ  
 ἦπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν.

This is the only time in the *Iliad* when Helen is included among the community of Trojan women.

Helen begins by emphasizing that Hector is her husband's brother. It is ironic that this very relationship highlighted by Helen has created a bitter resentment among the Trojan women towards Helen. In the next line she voices her wish that it would have been better for her to die<sup>204</sup> before she went off with Paris. Her main concern is her own public image as there will be no one else to defend her public reputation. In fact, the very first time the audience hears Helen's voice she begins with her death wish (3.173) and her wish takes even a violent form of death wish in her encounter with Hector in Paris's chamber (6. 345-48). Thus she carries out a tradition of lamenting her past deed. In like manner, she also mourns her 'ill luck' while mourning the death of Hector (24. 773).

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<sup>204</sup> Alexieu (1974,178) notes that Death wish among mourners is common.

It is important to note that Helen's lamentation for Hector sets her apart from the keening of Andromache or of Hecuba. While Andromache and Hecuba fear for their own enslavement and also the enslavement or death of their sons, Helen only worries about her own public image. Accordingly, Helen highlights the gentleness of Hector who used to protect her verbally against the criticism from her sisters-in-law or from her brothers-in-law's wives. In contrast to the existential crisis of Andromache and Hecuba, her concern is merely social. The difference of their keening can be attributed to the destiny that awaits them at the end of this war. Helen being the queen of Sparta has no anxiety of enslavement by the Achaeans and furthermore, Menelaus is not expected to kill her for fear of losing his kingdom that he inherited by marriage. Viewed from Helen's status as the queen of Sparta, it becomes clear why Helen has the privilege of appreciating Hector's gentle qualities shown towards her. Instead of worrying about her own future that is secured in any case, Helen worries about her own situation in her Trojan husband's family, especially, how the royal women will treat her without Hector's presence in the palace. In fact, Helen stresses Hector's gentle qualities only in relation to herself recalling how she gave herself a central role in describing the Achaean heroes (3.230-233).

Thus I read Helen of the *Iliad* as an ambiguous female who being veiled in shining/ambrosial robe can elude the notice of Trojan women; who is endowed with poetic awareness and who can weave like Athena. She is the queen of Sparta who conferred the sovereignty on Menelaus through marriage. Yet, Helen cares about her *kleos* like the warriors in a virilocal society at war.



### 3.7 Helen in the *Odyssey*

If the epic of the *Iliad* is a story in wartime in which Helen is the *casus belli*, the *Odyssey* is the story in peacetime in which Helen is back as the queen of Sparta in her original uxori-local environment. Helen appears with her husband Menelaus in the books four and fifteen of the *Odyssey* comprising a mini odyssey of Telemachus, the *Telemachia*.

In the book four of the *Odyssey*, Helen is depicted in her usual luminous terms as in the *Iliad* but now her situation is changed. Here instead of being a stranger or an uninvited guest in a foreign country, Helen along with her husband Menelaus are the hosts entertaining Telemachus and Peisistratus in their shiny palace in the midst of the joyous feast of the double weddings of Hermione and Megapenthes. While the glorious king Menelaus reminisces about Odysseus, the young Telemachus although dazzled by the gleaming palace (4.45) starts to weep for his father Odysseus.

At this point, Helen appears looking like “Artemis of the golden distaff” (Ἀρτέμιδι χρυσηλακάτῳ ἐκυῖα). Not only she is likened to the goddess Artemis, narrator also depicts her descending from a “fragrant and high roofed chamber” while being accompanied by two handmaidens. Worman<sup>205</sup> suggests that the setting of Helen’s descent evokes the appearance of a goddess. Furthermore, one of her handmaidens is named Adraste and Clader<sup>206</sup> remarks that this very name recalls Adrestia who is “reminiscent of Adrasteia, a title of Nemesis”. Note that in some version, as mentioned before, Nemesis is the mother of Helen. One of Helen’s handmaidens Phylo brings her a golden distaff “laden with violet-dark wool” and a silver basket that has wheels and an edge of gold. Helen in the *Odyssey* does not weave but she does spinning. According to

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<sup>205</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Character*, 105.

<sup>206</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 62.

Whitman<sup>207</sup> the image of Helen spinning “signalizes Helen’s return to domestic propriety”. Furthermore, the narrator points out that these golden spinning implements were the gifts to Helen from the wife of Polybus of Egypt (4.130-33). In the Homeric world gift exchange through the network of guest friends are limited to men who travel. But Helen’s mobility through different geographical locations and receiving personal gifts indicate her uniqueness.<sup>208</sup> In the same fashion, Homer depicts Helen disbursing gifts from Menelaus’s storage to Telemachus in book 15. In fact Book four of the *Odyssey* sets the tone that delineates Helen’s distinct characteristic of uniqueness and authority. Thus Helen of Sparta surrounded by glittering spinning implements sits down on a chair with a footstool under her feet and begins to speak. This entire scene highlighting her semi-divine status and highborn lady<sup>209</sup> signals a different kind of speaking style.

### 3.8 Helen’s first encounter with Telemachus

While enquiring about their guests Helen recognizes Telemachus, son of Odysseus and yet she asks: “Shall I disguise my thought, or speak the truth (ψεύσομαι ἢ ἔτυμον ἐρέω; 4.140)?” In her first appearance not only does she demonstrate her keen perception but, her very question recalls Helen’s speaking ability like the Muses in the *Theogony* (27-28) of Hesiod in which they claim that they know “how to say many false things similar to genuine ones, but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things”(ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, ἴδμεν δ’ εὖτ’ ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι). In like manner, Homer in the *Iliad*, invokes the Muses who “know all things”(Il. 2.485). In other

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<sup>207</sup> Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 118.

<sup>208</sup> Blondell, *Helen of Troy*, 76.

<sup>209</sup> Elizabeth W. Barber writes: “The silver and gold spindles of the Early Bronze Age suggest that a tradition of noblewomen weaving may have sprung up quite early in Anatolia, fourteen hundred years before the Trojan War of around 1250 B.C.” Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women’s Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994), 211.

words, the very first sentence of Helen demonstrates her power of speech that can control the situation. Worman writes: “Helen’s first words to her audience seem to draw purposeful attention to her perspicuity and narrative control<sup>210</sup>”. This way, right from the beginning, Helen wants to be the primary speaker on the heroic deeds of Odysseus and thereby, directs the conversation according to her own style. Clader<sup>211</sup> remarks that Helen’s ability to recognize Telemachus is “uncanny” resembling her ability in naming the heroes in the *Iliad* and furthermore in mimicking the voices of Achaeans’ wives in the tale of Menelaus (*Od.* 4.277-279). In the same vein, Suzuki<sup>212</sup> points out that Helen’s ability to recognize Telemachus “reveals an intuitive ability, superior to her husband’s, to read outward signs”. Furthermore, Suzuki connects Helen’s superior intuitive ability to her power of prophecy that is demonstrated in reading the omen of the eagle preying on a goose as a forecast of the return of Odysseus (*Od.* 15. 172-178). Helen, therefore, possesses a distinctive ability of narrative control, intuitive faculty to recognize, and to prophesy.

Yet, it will not be unfair to claim that she cannot restrain her desire and lacks the knowledge of the consequence that her desire will bring her. However, it seems, she is aware of her lack of self-restraint and that is the reason she refers back to her self-imposed image of κυνώπιδος (literally means “dog-faced”) in the *Odyssey* again (for the sake of shameless me you Achaeans came up under the walls of Troy, pondering in your hearts fierce war.). Note that it is the usual epithet she consistently held on to herself in the *Iliad*. Redfield notes that this epithet generally translated as “shameless” is mainly used for

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<sup>210</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek Literature*, 56.

<sup>211</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 30.

<sup>212</sup> Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 65.

adulterous women. “In Homeric language” writes Redfield “we would say that the dog lacks *aidōs*.”<sup>213</sup> Although Helen’s self-blaming epithet may be true in the *Iliad*, her intuitive ability of recognition of Telemachus in the *Odyssey* connects her with Odysseus’s dog Argus who recognizes his master disguised as beggar (*Od.* 17.300-304)<sup>214</sup>. Thus Helen’s first appearance in the *Odyssey* sets the tone of her uncanny ability of recognition and a narrative authority like the Muses.

### 3.9 Helen the Weaver of Tales

As the identity of Telemachus is revealed, this private dinner for two young guests turns into a tearful reminiscence for Telemachus’ father Odysseus. While recalling their sufferings and losses in the Trojan War, all those who are present in the hall start weeping. At this point, Menelaus orders dinner for all of them and Helen throws a drug (φάρμακον) into the wine they are drinking. The narrator informs that the drug that Helen pours into the wine is “griefless and anger-less, (causing) forgetfulness of all evils”: νηπενθές τ’ ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων (4.221). Furthermore, this wonderful drug is described as (μητιόεντα) “possessing *metis*” (4.227). It is important to note that in Hesiod’s works Zeus is known by various names related to *metis*, μητίετα (*Theog.* 56, 520, 904, 914), Διὶ μητιόεντι, and μητιόεντα, for example (*Theog.* 286 and 457). Surprisingly, this mind-numbing drug that is a gift to her by Polydamna a woman of Egypt, shares a similar epithet with Zeus. Reyes Bertolin points out regarding this particular epithet of this drug:

This is an unusual epithet for the drug, since it is usually an epithet of Zeus. The transferring of qualities must be significant. It makes us think that the

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<sup>213</sup> James Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 195.

<sup>214</sup> Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 65.

drug is in fact full of uncertainty and perhaps even deceit. Helen, through the drug, wants to assume the role of Zeus in determining what is to be remembered and what not<sup>215</sup>.

Here I argue that by assuming the role of Zeus Helen reminds the power of Zeus to their dinner guests. Thus before starting her speech Helen highlights two things: First, she specifies that “though now to one and now to another Zeus gives good and ill, (ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε διδοῖ) for he can do all things”(δύναται γὰρ ἅπαντα). (4.236-37) Second, she adds that she will say something εὐκότα (4.239), that is, something “appropriate” or “fitting” or even something “plausible”. What kind of tale is “fitting” or “plausible” in this particular situation? According to Emlyn-Jones, Helen’s tale reminiscing the *kleos* of Odysseus is “fitting” from the perspective that it is effective in rescuing her dinner guests from their melancholic thoughts regarding the lost Odysseus. However, it can be understood as “plausible”, when one recalls the encounter of Odysseus with Penelope:

ἵσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα (19.203) ‘he knew how to say many lies which resembled truth’. For Homer both senses of the word are operative at 4.239; plausibility and appropriateness are designed to meet the artistic and social expectations of the listeners.<sup>216</sup>

Clearly, Helen’s authoritative style in articulating “plausible” things like Odysseus, underscores their similarity.

Note that after having decided to relate “plausible” things, Helen declares: “All (πάντα) the labors of steadfast Odysseus I cannot tell or recount...” (4.240). Andrew

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<sup>215</sup> Reyes Bertolin, “The Search for Truth in *Odyssey* 3 and 4” in *Splendid Mendax: Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature*, ed. Edmund P. Cueva and Javier Martinez, (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2016).

<sup>216</sup> Chris Emlyn-Jones, “True and Lying Tales in the *Odyssey*”, *Greece and Rome* 33, no. 1 (Apr., 1986): 1-10.

Ford<sup>217</sup> remarks that Helen's prologue before starting her tale recalls the poet's invocation to Muses in the *Iliad*:

Tell me now, you Muses who have dwellings on Olympus—for you are goddesses and are present and know all things, but we hear only a rumor and know nothing—who were the leaders and lords of the Danaans. But the multitude (πληθὺν) I could not tell or name, not even if ten tongues were mine and ten mouths and a voice unwearying, and the heart within me were of bronze, unless the Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus who bears the aegis, call to my mind all those who came beneath Ilios. Now I will tell the leaders of the ships and all the ships. (2.484-493)

Similarly, like the poet, Helen is selective about what to relate because, she cannot tell “all” the stories of Odysseus's accomplishments.

Helen relates that when Odysseus disguised as a beggar showed up within the city walls, she alone recognized him and interrogated him. At first, Odysseus tried to avoid her but after being bathed and anointed by Helen, who took an oath of not divulging his identity to the Trojans; he confided in her the “whole plot”(πάντα νόον, 4.256) of the Achaeans. Helen rejoiced (establishing her loyalty to the Achaeans?) when Odysseus left the city killing many Trojans and carrying back valuable information to the Achaeans (4.242-264). She ends her story by blaming her own act caused by the “blindness” inflicted on her by Aphrodite and by complimenting Menelaus who lacked “neither brains nor beauty” (4.264). Thus Helen appropriately narrates the tale of Odysseus's fame while gratifying her dinner-guests.

Apparently, Helen's story recounts the remarkable deeds of the father of Telemachus. Nevertheless, Helen's tale displays a great deal about herself a tradition that is not inconsistent with her image in the *Iliad* 3.121-242, 383-447. In addition, Helen's tale raises questions. How did a beggar secure an entry into the palace? Why should a

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<sup>217</sup> Andrew Ford, *Homer: The Poetry of the Past* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 72-74.

beggar be given the luxury of bath and anointment? Why did Odysseus allow himself to be bathed and anointed by Helen? It is difficult to accept that Helen bathed and anointed Odysseus when we have the examples how the maids at the palace of Menelaus bathed, anointed and dressed Telemachus and Peisistratus (4.45-48). After the carefully calibrated story of the exploit of Odysseus by Helen, Menelaus tells another story about Odysseus where Helen does not appear to be a loyal Greek woman as portrayed in her own story.

### **3.10 Menelaus's story casting doubt on Helen's loyalty as an Argive woman**

Menelaus applauds his wife's tale by remarking that she has related her tale "in a fitting fashion" (κατὰ μοῖραν, 4.266)<sup>218</sup>. Menelaus also starts, like Helen, with the glorifying the remarkable abilities of Odysseus (compare 4.242 with 4. 271). Menelaus depicts a Helen who acted against the Achaeans on the last night of Troy. According to Menelaus's story she paraded around the horse three times, and called out the names of the chiefs of the Argives who were sitting inside the horse. Then Helen mimicked the voice of their wives. Even though Menelaus is under the effect of the "painless" drug, he claims that "it must be that you were bidden by some god who wished to grant glory to the Trojans» (4.275-76). Note the sarcasm of Menelaus recalling Helen's blame of Aphrodite for her own action (4.261). Right after this statement, Menelaus reminds Helen how her third husband Deiphobus followed her around (4.276). Helen and Menelaus both use the exploit of Odysseus as a springboard for their own purpose: Helen for her self-portrait of loyal Argive woman and Menelaus for accusing Helen's treachery<sup>219</sup>. Although

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<sup>218</sup> Gregory Nagy, 1979, 40.

<sup>219</sup> S. Douglas Olson, "The Stories of Helen and Menelaus (*Odyssey* 4.240-89) and the return of Odysseus," *The American Journal of Philology* 110, no. 3 (Autumn, 1989), 387-394; Anne Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2008), 120-122.

Menelaus's story seems to establish Helen's infidelity as an Argive woman, it also raises questions about the story itself.

How was it possible for Helen to immitate the voices of the wives of the Achean heroes? Was she familiar with the voices of these women? How did she know which Achaeans' wives to mimic? Furthermore, how did she know which Achaean heroes were inside the wooden horse? Worman<sup>220</sup> suggests that when Odysseus confided in her about the whole plan of the Achaeans, he might have told her about the wooden horse as the device for ending the Trojan War. Worman also<sup>221</sup> observes that the mimetic ability of Helen recalls the female chorus who also possess the mimetic ability in the *Hymn to Delian Apollo* (162-164)<sup>222</sup>. Clader claims that the available answer regarding Helen's portrayal in the tale of Menelaus is that "Helen has special powers of insight and expression"<sup>223</sup>. The fact remains from the two different versions of exploit of Odysseus that Helen's tale is κατὰ μοῖραν and she is endowed with special power that appears again in the form of her ability to prophesy in 15.170-178.

### 3.11 Helen's ability to Prophecy

In book 15 when Telemachus and Peisistratus are ready to depart from the palace of Menelaus, an eagle swoops down and carries off a tame goose (15.160-165). Then Peisistratus asks Menelaus to interpret this omen. While Menelaus stops to think how to respond, Helen immediately speaks: "Hear me, and I will prophesy as the immortals put it into my heart, and as I think it will be brought to pass" (15.172-73). She continues

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<sup>220</sup> Worman, *This Voice which is Not One*, 21.

<sup>221</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek Literature*, 62.

<sup>222</sup> M.L. West, ed. and trans., *Homeric Hymns: Homeric Apocrypha Lives of Homer*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 83.

<sup>223</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution from Divine to Heroic Greek*, 34.



prophesying with perfect accuracy the return of Odysseus and his retribution on the suitors who keep preying on his wife Penelope (ὥς Ὀδυσσεὺς κακὰ πολλὰ παθὼν καὶ πόλλ' ἐπαληθεῖς οἴκαδε νοστήσει καὶ τίσεται (15.176-177). Thus like a good seer Helen foretells what really happens in the end. Helen's prophetic skill impresses Telemachus. He promises if Helen is right, then, he will glorify Helen as a divinity (15.180-81).

### 3.12 Helen's gift to Telemachus

Furthermore, the book 15 depicts how Telemachus receives a gift from Helen at his departure. She gives him a robe that she herself has woven and this finely woven robe is given to Telemachus as a token of guest-friendship. She declares that this gift is meant to be “a remembrance of the hands of Helen, against the day of your longed-for marriage” (μνημ' Ἑλένης χειρῶν, πολυηράτου ἐς γάμου 15.126). The narrator describes that Helen herself went to the royal storage and found the robe that “shone like a star, and lay beneath the rest” (ἀστὴρ δ' ὥς ἀπέλαμπεν ἔκειτο δὲ νεῖατος ἄλλων (15. 108). Comparatively, the scene recalls the event where Hecuba chooses a gown that “shines like a star” for offering to Athena (*Il.* 6.295). While in the *Iliad*, the shining gown represents a negative association, recalling Helen's transgression; the gown that Helen offers to Telemachus is a reminder of Helen's authority. It is a μνημα a “remembrance” to commemorate Helen.<sup>224</sup> While Helen's weaving in the *Iliad* is the marker of her being the cause of the Trojan War, her weaving in the *Odyssey* is the reminder of her being the authoritative queen of Sparta.

To sum up, Helen, at the beginning of the *Iliad*, expresses her verbal skill in her highly imaginative tapestry that she weaves silently. Then, she presents herself to Priam

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<sup>224</sup> See Blondell, 2013, 77. See also on the significance of μνημα in Worman, 2002, footnote: 64, 221.

as a woman who blames herself for leaving her home with Paris, calls herself “dog-faced”, and even wishes to die. At the same time, Helen’s speech of self-blaming in the *Iliad* emerges as singularly authoritative speech of a queen that finds its equal in the world of heroes. By contrast, in the *Odyssey*, she presents herself as an authoritative speaker of “fitting” tales and prophetic utterance.

## Chapter Four: Draupadī

### Introduction

Unlike Helen of Homeric epics, Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* remains in the boundary of *dharma* as prescribed by *Manusmṛiti*. It is crucial to note that Draupadī uses her powerful verbal skill for her own defence, especially, at the assembly hall of the Kuru king while remaining in the boundary of *dharma*. The *dharma* of a married woman commands selfless devotion to her husband. Yet, this same *dharma* empowers Draupadī in questioning her husband's action at the assembly hall. In order to analyze her paradoxical personality expressed through her rhetorical manoeuvre, I will use books two, three, four, and five of the *Mahābhārata*. Then what is *dharma*?

### 4.1 The concept of *dharma*

The term *dharma* is multifaceted and it cannot be equated with only one term like law, morality or religion, for example. However, for classicists, the Sanskrit term *dharma* can be partly rendered as the Greek term *eusebeia*.<sup>225</sup> In fact, the edict of Aśoka, the Indian emperor from the 258 BCE used Greek word *eusebeia* for rendering the term *dharma*.<sup>226</sup> This is one of the several rock edicts found in Kandahar in 1958. Kandahar in Afghanistan is the modern day name for Alexandria in Archosia. This particular rock edict contains Aramaic and Greek inscriptions.

The concept of *dharma* is one of the most challenging concepts as it functions on multiple levels in Indian literature and society. The word *dharma* originates from the Sanskrit word *dhr* and literally it means “to uphold, support, maintain”. Sometimes it

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<sup>225</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), 272-275.

<sup>226</sup> Paul Hacker. “Dharma in Hinduism”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 34 (2006): 479-496.

indicates the essential property of an element, the *dharma* of fire is to burn, for example. On the human plane, *dharma* works from a normative dimension. The discourse of *dharma* is elaborated in two branches of *dharma* literature: *Dharmasūtras* (third to first century BCE) and the *Dharmaśāstras* (first to second century CE). While the *Dharmasūtras* belong to the various Vedic schools, the *Dharmaśāstras* elucidate *dharma* even further on the basis of the Vedic principles. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* or *Manusmṛti* (first to second century CE) is known to be the most prominent among others. According to *Manusmṛti*, the normative dimension of *dharma* on the human level follows the Brāhmanical tradition of sociocultural norms. As a result,<sup>227</sup> each individual should follow his duty following his birth status (*varna*) and stage of life (*āśrama*). In other words, each individual must lead his life according to his *varnāśramadharmā*. However, the discourse of *dharma* is applicable only to the Aryan men who belong to the three higher *varnas*: *Brāhmanas*, *Ksatriyas* and *Vaiśyas*. The first stage (*āśrama*) of the male members of the upper *Varna* is the student life (*brahmacārin*) when he will study the Vedas and learn the skill of proper way of living. Note that before entering into the life of a student, he must go through the rite of initiation (*upanayana*) that confers the twice-born status before commencing the Vedic study. The second stage is the life of householder (*grhastha*) followed by the stages of forest-dweller (*vānaprastha*) and of renunciation (*samnyāsa*). *Manusmṛti* highlights the obligation of householder consisting of paying three debts: “to the *ṛsis*, ancestors and gods”. The text explains how these three debts will be paid: first, the debt to the *ṛsis* is paid by studying the Vedas; second, the debt to the ancestors is paid by having sons. Because only sons are fit to perform the *śrāddha* rites in

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<sup>227</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege. “Dharma”, in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York, N.Y: Routledge, 2004), 213-248.

order to sustain the well being of the ancestors. Finally, the debt to the gods should be paid by performing sacrifices (*Manusmṛti* 4.257, 6.35-37).

What happens when an unusual situation arises and it is not addressed in any literature on *dharma*? In that case, *Manusmṛti* recommends that one should consult those people who are virtuous, Brāhmins by lineage and learned by studying the Vedas. In fact, the social hierarchy of human beings in ancient India is directly connected with Rigvedic *Purusasūkta* (10.90) where it establishes the homologies between the corporeal parts of the *purusa* the primordial divine being and the social classes (*varna*) of people. Thus *Brāhmins* (priests) originate from the mouth of *Purusa*, *Kṣatriyas* (kings and warriors) from His arms, *Vaiśyas* (merchants and farmers) from His thighs, and *Sūdras* (servants) come from *Purusa*'s feet. This primordial being *Purusa* was “both the victim that the gods sacrificed and the divinity to whom the sacrifice was dedicated; that is, he was both the subject and the object of the sacrifice.”<sup>228</sup> The final verse of the *Purusasūkta* recognizes this sacrifice as the model for future sacrificial rituals. In other words, this was the first sacrificial ritual performed by the gods (*dharmāni prathamānayāsan*). The word *dharmāni* is the plural form of *dharma* in Sanskrit. Here also we find the usage of this “protean word” *dharma*.

Then, what is the *dharma* of women in the *Manusmṛti*? *Manusmṛti* devotes two sections on the *dharma* of women (*Strīdharmā*). The guiding principle of the entire *Dharmaśāstra* literature is to affirm that a woman is not fit to be independent: “Her father guards her in girlhood; her husband guards in youth; her sons guard her in old age. A

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<sup>228</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 29-32.

woman does not deserve independence”. (*Manusmṛti*, 9.3)<sup>229</sup> On the other hand,

*Manusmṛti* signals a glorifying attitude towards women:

There is no difference whatsoever between wives (*striyah*)—whose purpose is procreation, who embody good fortune, and who are worthy of worship and the splendor of their houses—and the goddesses of good fortune (*śriyah*) who are [worshipped] in houses.... Offspring, religious rites, service, the highest conjugal happiness, and heaven for oneself and one’s ancestors depend on one’s wife (9.26,9.28).<sup>230</sup>

Clearly, women are valued because they are needed to accompany their husband in their daily sacrificial rituals and moreover, to produce sons for preserving their lineage.

Moreover, pivotal *dharma* of a woman, according to *Manusmṛti*, is to serve her husband as a god and remain faithful to him even after his death (5.151-66). Thus women exist only in relation to their men and they are valued through their selfless devotion to their men.

It must be noted that the *Mahābhārata* explores the meaning of *dharma* in various situations while books twelve and thirteen are similar in style to a *dharmaśāstra*. Among many of its social laws, two ideals that often recur in the *Mahābhārata* are, to be *Pativrata* (a wife who is totally devoted to her husband) for a married woman and the ideal characteristic of the married householder (male) to provide protection (*raksana*) to his wife and family. Correspondingly, this concept of *raksana* or protection becomes more important for a king as he must extend his protection to his law-abiding citizens in all corners of his kingdom. It is well known that in ancient India the ruling class or the royalty belonging to the *kṣatriya*<sup>231</sup> caste was supposed to be engaged in battle and in

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<sup>229</sup> Translated by Stephanie Jamison. *Sacrificed Wife/ Sacrificer’s Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16.

<sup>230</sup> Barbara A. Holdridge, “Dharma”, *Hindu World*, 235.

<sup>231</sup> *The Mahābhārata* One: 194.18, 2.15.10, 5.186.11, 6.117.32, 13. 36. 13.

protection of his subjects. The prominent *Mahābhārata* women, for example, keep reminding their husbands/sons to fight thereby to reinforce their masculinity.<sup>232</sup>

Nevertheless, it is Krishnā-Draupadī who fiercely follows the *Pativrātā* ideals and yet, does not restrain herself from reminding her husbands about their duty. It is not possible to be an ideal *Pativrātā* while being critical of one's husband. The institution of marriage in India has always been patrilineal and it necessitates the *Pativrātā* ideal for women. Accordingly, women must propitiate their husbands as their deities who possess religious and intellectual superiority over their wives.<sup>233</sup> In the context of this background I shall examine Draupadī's self-presentation through her speeches in the various situations she must confront. I argue that her mostly vitriolic words in self-defence are significant towards the development of the *Mahābhārata* war. The narrators of the *Mahābhārata* depict Draupadī as extremely vocal and consequently, she repeats her speech as the same situation arises often.

#### 4.2 Draupadī at the assembly hall

When the Pāndava king Yudhisthira received an invitation from his uncle the king Dhritarastra to a friendly game of dice it was impossible for Yudhisthira to ignore this invitation. Although the king knew the game of dicing would bring destruction, he consented to this challenge<sup>234</sup>. He gave two<sup>235</sup> reasons for his acceptance: First, he must not refuse the invitation of his uncle; for, he has a filial obligation towards Dhritarastra.

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<sup>232</sup> Minoru Hara, "A Note on the Rāksasa form of Marriage," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no.3 (Jul.-Sep., 1974), 296-306.

<sup>233</sup> Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 166, 190-204.

<sup>234</sup> According to Van Buitenen, the dice game was a ritual part of the Vedic *Rājasūya* in the epic. Thus, it puts Yudhisthira in a ritual obligation to accept the challenge. "On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata", in *India Major: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, ed. J. Ensink and P. Gaeffke (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), 68-84.

<sup>235</sup> Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, II, 2. 52. 15.

Second, he must accept the challenge for that is his vow for eternity. The next day Yudhisthira and his brothers including the queen Draupadī and other women journeyed towards Hāstinapur, the kingdom of Dhritarastra. Before starting their journey, the king said:

Fate takes away our reason<sup>236</sup>  
As glare blinds the eye.  
Man bound as with nooses  
Obeys the Placer's sway.

Yudhisthira understands the irreproachable mystery of "Fate"(Daiva) as decided by the Placer (Dhātri) yet he is obliged to join in the dicing game with the Kauravas.

The rule of the game is that it continues on in two sessions and each session lasts for ten throws. The king Yudhisthira plays against the challenging party Duryodhana who puts up the stake his uncle Śakuni <sup>237</sup>plays on his behalf. During the first half of the stakes Yudhisthira gambles away his huge wealth, myriads of chariots, bullock carts, horses, bull elephants, many thousand male servants, and a hundred thousand of female maids decked with precious gold. In the second half of his stake, he loses all his cattle, his land, his brothers and himself. Then at the tenth throw he stakes his wife Draupadī and it is well documented how he describes Draupadī as a beautiful and perfect wife while carefully listing her physical beauty and her daily performances for the welfare of her husbands and the royal household. Perhaps in his frenzy, Yudhisthira forgets that Draupadī is already a desirable woman by many so she does not need this commodification to increase her value. Yudhisthira loses the final wager and Duryodhana overjoyed with the outcome says: "Let her sweep the chambers...and let the unfortunate one stay where our serving-

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 2.52.18.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 2. 52. 14 ("Most dangerous gamblers have been collected, who are sure to play with wizard tricks").



women are”.<sup>238</sup> Then he orders his usher that Draupadī who has now become their slave (dāsi) should be brought to the assembly.

### 4.3 Draupadī’s Queries

When the usher goes in the inner chamber and informs Draupadī that she must come with him to the dicing hall as a slave; Draupadi asks a three- part question:

How dare you speak so, an usher, to me?  
 What son of a king would hazard his wife?  
 The king is befooled and crazed by the game—  
 Was there nothing left for him to stake?<sup>239</sup>

katham tv evaṃ vadasi prātikāmin; ko vai dīvyed bhāryayayā rājaputraḥ  
 mūḍho rājā dyūtamadena matta; āho nānyat kaitavam asya kiṃ cit  
 katham tv evaṃ vadasi prātikāmin; ko vai dīvyed bhāryayayā rājaputraḥ  
 mūḍho rājā dyūtamadena matta; āho nānyat kaitavam asya kiṃ cit

In answering her questions the usher explains what has happened during the betting sequence that includes the wagering of Yudhisthira himself before he wagered her.

Having been fully informed by the usher about the entire situation Draupadī frames this question and orders the usher to announce her question in the assembly: “Whom did you loose first, yourself or me (kim nu pūrvam parājaisir ā atmānam mām nu)?” Furthermore, she orders the usher that after having learned the answer then he should come to fetch her.

The usher comes back to the assembly and adds another question to Draupadī’s original question: “ As the owner of whom did you lose us (kasyeśo nah parājaisir)?” In fact, the usher<sup>240</sup> being sympathetic to Draupadī’s cause agrees with Vidura’s<sup>241</sup> observation that Yudhisthira lost himself and then bet Draupadī. Thus he adds this

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 2. 59.1

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 2. 60. 5

<sup>240</sup> Hildebeitel, *Rethinking Mahabharata*, 243.

<sup>241</sup> 2.59.1. Vidura is the step-brother (whose mother was a maid servant at the royal household) of the Kuru king

question before repeating Draupadī's original question: "What did you loose first, yourself or me?" In fact, Draupadī cleverly formulates this question directed towards Yudhisthira and the people present at the assembly. Clearly, Draupadī is asking about the legality of Yudhisthira's rights of staking her. This is the first time the audience hears Draupadī's voice; from silent *Pativrata* (entirely devoted to her husband) she turns into a *Panditā* (female scholar).

Upon hearing this question of Draupadī, Yudhisthira becomes motionless and the text describes the situation "as though he had lost consciousness",<sup>242</sup>. Draupadī's question seems to have surprised everyone in the assembly. According to Mehendale when Duryodhana ordered Draupadī to be brought in the assembly, they probably thought: "that Draupadī had lost her status as a free woman. But now for the first time, he realizes that Draupadī does not agree to this position...He tacitly admits that her question is justified."<sup>243</sup> Yet Duryodhana summons her to the hall and let her raise the question about her status to the elders.

The usher goes back to the inner chamber to fetch Draupadī. He tells her that she must appear at the assembly and he surmises that this means the destruction of the Kuru dynasty is near. Significantly, Draupadī's answer to the usher reveals her strong belief in righteousness or inner moral nature of an individual. In her reply to the usher she declares:

This for sure what the ordainer ordained. The wise and the foolish are both touched alike by good and ill, but a single *dharma* has been declared paramount in this world which will, if protected, maintain us in peace.  
(2.60.13)

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<sup>242</sup> Buitenen, 2.60.5

<sup>243</sup> M.A. Mehendale, "Draupadi's Question" in *Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda* 35, 3-4(1985): 179-94.

evaṃ nūnaṃ vyadadhāt saṃvidhātā; sparśāv ubhau sprśato vīra bālau  
dharmaṃ tv ekaṃ paramaṃ prāha loke; sa naḥ śamaṃ dhāsyati gopyamān

I have cited the translation of John D. Smith<sup>244</sup> because he leaves the word “*dharma*” as it is. Nonetheless, the question remains about this “single *dharma*” that prevails above all. K.M. Ganguli translates: “Morality, however, it hath been said, is the one highest object in the world.” J.A.B. van Buitenen on the other hand, translates: “In this world only Law is supreme”. Considering the difficulty of interpreting the word “*dharma*” in English, it is worth noting the definition of *dharma* from *Mānava-dharmaśāstra* that is often cited by scholars<sup>245</sup>:

Listen [my pupils], I shall describe *dharma* – it is always honoured by the honest and the wise [of the learned]; it is followed by those who are above attachment [greed] and aversion [hatred]; and it is approved by their hearts.  
(2.1)

In other words, it is possible to understand *dharma* as morality because it needs the approval of honest and wise. In addition, it is generally accepted, explains Matilal that in those days, only the people with competence in Vedic studies would have been considered as “wise” or “learned”. However, Motilal emphasizes that in later commentary tradition the “*dharma*-ethics” does not play any role in “personal greed or hatred.”<sup>246</sup> Although “*dharma*-ethics” is not conducive to “personal greed or hatred”, evidently, the ethical understanding of Draupadī’s situation at the assembly hall raises question.

Despite Draupadī’s resistance, Duhśāsana (the brother of Duryodhana) already calls her “slave”(*dāsī*) and forcibly brings her to the dicing hall. She begs not to be brought in the hall as she is menstruating. In despair, she runs to the royal women who are

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<sup>244</sup> John D. Smith, *The Mahābhārata* (Toronto: Penguin Classics, 2009), 142.

<sup>245</sup> Bimal Krishna Matilal “Dharma and Rationality” in *The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal: Ethics and Epics*, ed. Jonardon Ganeri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54-55.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 55-62.

present there. However he grabs her by her hair and pulls her to the hall. While pulling her hair he says to her: “To Kṛṣṇa and Jisnu, to Hari and Nara, cry out for help! I shall take you yet”<sup>247</sup> (2.60.26). The Bard paints a pitiable picture of Draupadī’s entrance into the Hall: “In her one garment, knotted below,<sup>248</sup> weeping and in her courses, she went to the hall, the Pāñcāla princess, and stood before her father-in-law”.

Enraged in her humiliation, Draupadī scolds Duṣśāsana and as a *Pativrata* praises her husband the king who is wise and understands the subtleness of “*dharma*” (moral law). Even in this most despicable situation, Draupadī adheres to her own “*dharma*” (a wife’s prescribed duty to her husband). It may be possible to argue that she seems to think that her understanding of “*dharma*” or moral law in general should be applicable to all. She dares to imagine, it seems, that the king who has an obligation to ensure the welfare of his people and the elders who are knowledgeable about the subtlety of “*dharma*” should follow the law as prescribed. Although the royal (Kuru) women are present in the assembly, Draupadī’s implied audiences are the kings and the elders. Note that female audiences in the assembly are absolutely silent.

Therefore, she addresses the eminent kings and elders who are well read in the treatise of “*dharma*” gathered in the hall and dares to question their understanding of the law of the kṣatriya king that prescribes the protection of women. She firmly believes that the kings and elders should know that Draupadī in her current physical condition should not have been brought in this hall. Yet they let it happen and thus they silently allow the

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<sup>247</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata* II, 142.

<sup>248</sup> Since Draupadī was menstruating, she had to wear one piece of cloth (ekavastra) and in a style of “*adhonivi*” in which she wrapped the lower part of her body in a different style and she covered her upper body with the same cloth. See Sulochana Ayyar, *Costumes and Ornaments as Depicted in the Early Sculptures of Gwalior Museum* (New Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1987), 36; Govind Sadashiv Ghurye, *Indian Costume* (New Delhi: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Limited, 1995), 66.

transgression of the law. It is important to note that while Yudhisthira is known as the “Dharma-king” in the *Mahābhārata*. Draupadī, his chief queen at this point demonstrates her rigid commitment to her *dharma*.

Then she condemns the Kuru family for forgetting their *dharma*:

King (Yudhisthira) abides by *dharma*, and *dharma* is subtle, to be understood by experts. But even at my husband’s word, I do not wish to transgress in the slightest by abandoning what’s proper to me. ... Shame! The *dharma* of the [Kauravas] is lost as is the practice of those who know how the noble behave, when all the Kurus in the assembly look on while the Kuru-*dharma* is transgressed.<sup>249</sup>

dharme sthito dharmasutaś ca rājā; dharmas ca sūkṣmo nipuṇopalabhyah  
vācāpi bhartuḥ paramāṇu mātram; necchasi doṣaṃ svaguṇān viṣṛjya (2.60.31)

The key point here is to understand what does Draupadī mean by her words “by abandoning what is proper to me.” In the Sanskrit version it writes: “*svaguṇān visṛjya*”, literally, *svaguṇān* means “my qualities”. Buitenen translates these particular words uttered by Draupadī as “abandon my virtue”. In other words, her virtue is automatically built in her own qualities. Regarding the meaning of the same expression, Julius Lipner writes in the footnote of his book (*Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*):

The expression ‘svaguṇān’ indicates that *dharma* in both its moral and naturalistic senses is intended here. Draupadī does not wish to abandon virtuous behavior, nor ‘her qualities’, namely, the role of kshatriya wife and mother to which she has been born. She does not wish to transgress by promiscuity or infidelity (to virtue or her natural calling) in any way. This is *strī-dharma*, the *dharma* of a woman/wife.<sup>250</sup>

Clearly, Draupadī argues from the perspective of her rigid adherence to her own *dharma*. This is the main difference between Draupadī and Helen of Sparta. Even though they both speak from their own perspective, compare Helen’s speech at the Trojan wall, for

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<sup>249</sup> I have cited the translation of Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their religious beliefs and practices* (London: Rutledge, 1994), 205.

<sup>250</sup> Lipner, 1994, footnote: 6, 344.

instance, Draupadī never deviates from the prescribed rule of the society where as Helen does. Thus her bold question regarding her status at this point mortifies the elders in the assembly. Draupadī does not accept her status as proclaimed by Duryodhana and his party. She rather doubts the legality of the dicing game arranged by the Kuru prince.

After having raised this question regarding her status, she throws a “scornful glance” at her husbands who are furious yet unable to act upon her humiliation. The poet describes the effect of her glance over her husbands:

As she piteously spoke the slim-waisted queen  
Threw a scornful glance at her furious husbands  
And inflamed with the fall of her sidelong glances  
The Pāṇdavas, wrapped with wrath in their limbs.

Not the kingdom lost, nor the riches looted,  
Nor the precious jewels plundered did hurt  
As hurt that sidelong glance of Krisnā  
That glance of Krisnā sent in fury.

tathā bruvantī karuṇaṃ sumadhyamā; kākṣeṇa bhartṛṇ kupitān apaśyat  
sā pāṇḍavān kopaparīta dehān; saṃdīpayām āsa kaṭākṣa pātaiḥ  
hṛtena rājyena tathā dhanena; ratnaiś ca mukhyair na tathā babhūva  
yathārtayā kopasamīritena; kṛṣṇā kaṭākṣeṇa babhūva duḥkham (2.60.35-36)

Unlike Helen’s veiled body with gleaming fabrics and her eyes like the immortal goddesses that produce awe to the elders at the rampart of the Trojan wall, Draupadī’s blood- stained garment and sidelong glance impart a different effect on the people in the hall. Her semiotic complexity matches her furious speech. She challenges the elders who are well read in the law of “*dharma*”, with her question. Ironically, none of the elders in the assembly, although appalled by what is happening, is able to speak.

Eventually Bhīshma, the grandfather and the most learned person on these matters, speaks on their behalf. He begins by saying that because “*dharma* is subtle” he cannot answer her question properly. Then he presents the problem regarding her question. He

gives a three part answers. On the one hand, a man who has lost himself in the game of dice cannot stake what does not belong to him; on the other hand “wives are the husband’s chattels”(2.60.40-42).

*Bhīshma* said:

As the Law is subtle, my dear, I fail  
To resolve your riddle the proper way:  
A man without property cannot stake another’s—  
But given that wives are the husband’s chattels?

na dharmasaukṣmyāt subhage vivaktuṃ; śaknōmi te praśnam imaṃ yathāvat  
asvo hy aśaktaḥ paṇituṃ parasvaṃ; striyaś ca bhartur vaśatām samīkṣya

Secondly, Yudhisthira always speaks the truth but if he himself says that he ‘has been won’, then it is not possible for him to solve the problem.

Yudhisthira may give up all earth  
With her riches, before he’d give up the truth.  
The Pāṇḍava said, “I have been won”,  
Therefore I cannot resolve doubt.

tyajeta sarvām pṛthivīm samṛddhām; yudhiṣṭhiraḥ satyam atho na jahyāt  
uktaṃ jito 'smīti ca pāṇḍavena; tasmān na śaknōmi vivektum etat

Finally, Śakuni, the uncle of Duryodhana is a champion dice player, but he did not force Yudhisthira to play the game of dice with him. In other words, Yudhisthira had a choice in this matter, at least in theory.

No man is Śakuni’s peer at the dice,  
And he left Yudhisthira his own choice.  
The great-spirited man does not think he was cheating,  
Therefore I cannot speak to the riddle.

dyūte 'dvitīyaḥ śakunir nareṣu; kuntīsutas tena niṣṛṣṭakāmaḥ  
na manyate tām nikṛtiṃ mahātmā; tasmān na te praśnam imaṃ bravīmi

To put it another way, Bhīshma the grand uncle of the royal family is ambiguous in answering the legality of the whole procedure of wagering Draupadī. He frames the question from the perspective of male status be that male a free agent or not. First, he is

not sure whether anything wrong has been done when it is an accepted fact that woman exists only in relation to her father/husband/son. In other words, women are counted as male possessions even if that male is a slave. Secondly, When Yudhisthira himself admits that he has not been cheated, then how can Bhīshma answer to her unsolvable question? He simply avoids answering Draupadī's question. Draupadī, for sure, was not expecting such an equivocal answer from a person who is known for his wisdom and knowledge of the Vedas.

It is rather ambiguous when Yudhisthira has lost his position, as a legal opponent, then how is it possible for him to continue the game? Does a king retain his rights even after being reduced to the position of a slave? It could be that he had been ordered as a slave to wager his wife and naturally, he had no choice but to follow the order. However, the epic is very casual about slavery. Although the examples of enslavement as a result of debt are found in the epic text (1.14 and 1.73-78), but information on slave labour for production in agriculture, manufacture or mining is not found.<sup>251</sup> Nonetheless, we have seen earlier that Yudhisthira staked a large number of male and female slaves. These slaves seem to be mainly domestic servants while female slaves may have been used for sexual pleasure.<sup>252</sup> Draupadī might have hoped for a decisive answer from Bhīshma but now being disappointed, she puts her question to the others in the assembly. No one in the assembly dares to answer her question.

At this point Vikarna a stepbrother (born from a female servant) of Duryodhana speaks up on behalf of Draupdī and asks for answer from the eminent elders, his father the great Kuru king, and also from the other kings who are present in the assembly. Not a

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<sup>251</sup> John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 205-206.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.



single male audience from the gathered assembly answers him and he declares arguably that Draupadī has not been won. Then the king Karna (first son of Kunti by the Sun god and this fact is unknown to him as well as to the Pāṇḍavas) scolds the young Vikarna, insults Draupadī for being married to five men, and points out that her marriage is against the established law. He concludes that Draupadī has been won legally and he orders Duḥśāsa to “strip the cloths from Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī” (2.61.38).

The Pāṇḍavas do not say a word in protest and remove their upper garments. However Draupadī stands there firm. Duḥśāsa tries to strip Draupadī by force in front of the onlookers. But a miracle happens: “ But whenever one of Draupadī’s garments was removed, O king, another garment like it repeatedly appeared” (2.61.40). The critical edition does not give any explanation for this miraculous event. Nevertheless, there are two traditions<sup>253</sup> regarding the scene of disrobing Draupadī. According to the popular version Draupadī invokes god Krishna at this moment of her need and the garments keep appearing to cover her. The second explanation is that *Dharma*<sup>254</sup> supplies her the coverings to protect her modesty. Considering Draupadī’s rigid adherence to *dharma*, it seems reasonable to accept the second version regarding the unending supply of garments to cover her and thus protecting her modesty<sup>255</sup>. Literally, her garment has a metonymic usage for her modesty. Note that Helen also wraps her body with a shining garment. When approached by Aphrodite at the Trojan wall, Helen feels ashamed to follow her to

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<sup>253</sup> M.A. Mehendale, “Once Again Draupadī’s Garments”, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*. Vol. 50. (1990), 285-290.

<sup>254</sup> Hiltebeitel (2001) cites a verse from the northern recension: “Yājñasenī cried out for salvation (*trāṇāya vikrośati*) to Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, and Nara. Then Dharma, concealed, the magnanimous, having a multitude of garments, covered her (*tatasu dharmo ‘ntario mahatma/ samāvrñottām vividhavastrapūgaḥ*). Note Duḥśāsa’s sarcasm to Draupadī while pulling her by her hair.

<sup>255</sup> Lipner, 1994, 207: “Be that as it may, in the final analysis *dharma* has vindicated Draupadī. Her faith in *dharma* has not been void, although it has cost her dear.”

Paris's room in daylight for fear of being called as shameless by the Trojan women. Nonetheless, she goes "wrapping herself in her bright shining mantle,...and the goddess led the way"(3.419-20). This is the way she avoids the notice of the Trojan women. But what does make her invisible? Is it the goddess Aphrodite or her shining garment? In both cases, the poets use a concrete example of garment as metonymic or metaphorical expression of social and moral emotion<sup>256</sup>. As Helen goes in the bedroom of Paris and chastises her for leaving the battle, Draupadī also remains unnerved while going through her horrendous situation and addresses the assembly again.

Draupadī relates how she, the princess of Pāñcāla, a virtuous woman, a daughter-in-law of the Kaurava family, protected by her five husbands in the past, has been put through this offensive humiliation in the assembly. All the onlookers remain silent, none, not even her husbands attempts to defend her. She continues for a long time with her aggressive speech:

I on whom the assembled kings set eye in the arena at my Bridegroom Choice, but never before or after, I am now brought into the hall! I whom neither wind nor sun have seen before in my house, I am now seen in the middle of the hall in the assembly of the Kurus. I whom the Pāndavas did not suffer to be touched by the wind in my house before, they now allow to be touched by this miscreant. The Kurus allow—and methinks that Time is out of joint—their innocent daughter and daughter-in-law to be molested! What greater humiliation than that I, a woman of virtue and beauty, now must invade the men's hall? What is left of the Law of the kings? From of old, we have heard, they do not bring law-minded women into their hall...Is the wife of the king Dharma whose birth matches his a slave or free? Speak Kauravas. I shall abide by your answer. For this foul man, disgrace of the Kauravas, is molesting me, and I cannot bear it any longer, Kauravas! Whatever the kings think, whether I have been won or not, I want it answered, and I shall abide by the answer, Kauravas.

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<sup>256</sup> On the metaphor of Garments, see Douglas Cairns, "Mind, Body, and Metaphor in Ancient Greek Concepts of Emotion", *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques*, 16 (2016), Histoire intellectuelle des émotions, de l' Antiquité à nos jours.

[drau]

svayaṃvare yāsmi nṛpair dṛṣṭā raṅge samāgataiḥ  
na dṛṣṭapūrvā cānyatra sāham adya sabhāṃ gatā  
yāṃ na vāyur na cādityo dṛṣṭavantau purā gr̥he  
sāham adya sabhāmadhye dṛśyāmi kurusaṃsadi  
yāṃ na mṛṣyanti vātena spr̥śyamānāṃ purā gr̥he  
spr̥śyamānāṃ sahante 'dya pāṇḍavās tām durātmanā  
mṛṣyante kuravaś ceme manye kālasya paryayam  
snuṣāṃ duhitaraṃ caiva kliśyamānāṃ anarhatīm  
kiṃ tv ataḥ kṛpaṇaṃ bhūyo yad ahaṃ strī satī śubhā  
sabhāmadhyaṃ vigāhe 'dya kva nu dharmo mahīkṣitām  
dharmyāḥ striyaḥ sabhāṃ pūrvam na nayantīti naḥ śrutam  
sa naṣṭaḥ kauraveyeṣu pūrvo dharmāḥ sanātanaḥ  
kathaṃ hi bhāryā pāṇḍūnāṃ pārśatasya svasā satī  
vāsudevasya ca sakhī pārthivānāṃ sabhāṃ iyām  
tām imāṃ dharmarājasya bhāryāṃ sadṛśavarṇajām  
brūta dāsīm adāsīm vā tat kariṣyāmi kauravāḥ  
ayaṃ hi mām dṛdhaṃ kṣudraḥ kauravāṇāṃ yaśoharaḥ  
kliśnāti nāhaṃ tat soḍhuṃ ciraṃ śakṣyāmi kauravāḥ  
jitām vāpy ajitām vāpi manyadhvaṃ vā yathā nṛpāḥ  
tathā pratyuktam icchāmi tat kariṣyāmi kauravāḥ (2.62.4-13)

Here I like to draw attention to the style and oral performance of Draupadī. Even after being molested in the presence of the elders, she stands there unnerved and delivers authoritative speech. She reminds the elders how they are not following the eternal *dharma* of the Kuru dynasty. Because they all know that a noble woman who is righteous should not be brought before the assembly and yet it is happening right now<sup>257</sup>.

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<sup>257</sup> Irawati Karve (*Yuganta: The end of an epoch*, 1974, 87-90) reads Draupadī's question as her "greatest mistake": Draupadī "tried to show off her learning;" "by putting on airs in front of the whole assembly, she had put Dharma (Yudhisthira) into a dilemma and unwittingly insulted him"; "Draupadī was standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pundit when what was happening to her was so hideous that she should only have cried out for decency and pity in the name of the Ksatriya code. Had she done so perhaps things would not have gone so far." Clearly, here Karve compares Draupadī to Sītā (Hiltebeitel, 2001, fn.54, 259). Purnima Mankekar relates of an interview where a woman from Delhi presents a similar view after watching the portrayals of both heroines on Indian National television: "Indeed, another young woman with whom I spoke went so far as to claim that Draupadi seemed "less Indian" than Sita: when I tried to probe her meaning, I discovered that she felt Draupadi was "westernized" because the heroine questioned and challenged her elders on the propriety of their actions. (552)" National Texts and Gendered Lives: An Ethnography of Television Viewers in a North Indian City, *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 3 (Aug. 1993), 543-563.

Nevertheless, the onlookers remain silent. It is possible that they are equally stunned by the miracle that just happened.

Nevertheless, Bhīṣma again replies to Draupadī's demanding question. He remarks that he is not sure about answering on the subtle matter about *dharma*. However he asserts:

What a powerful man views as Law in the world, that do others call the Law at a time when Law is in question. I cannot answer the question decisively, because the matter is subtle and mysterious as well as grave.

balavāṃs tu yathā dharmam loke paśyati pūruṣaḥ  
sa dharmo dharmavelāyāṃ bhavaty abhihitaḥ paraiḥ  
na vivektaṃ ca te praśnam etaṃ śaknomi niścayāt  
sūkṣmatvād gahanatvāc ca kāryasyāśya ca gauravāt(2.62.15-16).

It is possible that he does not want to express his disloyalty to the Kuru king due to economic reason as he himself says to the king Yudhishthira just before the beginning of the battle<sup>258</sup>. But he realizes that nefarious activities are happening in the assembly and the doom of the Kuru lineage is approaching soon. Thus, he praises Draupadī for her righteousness and says:

Surely the end of this lineage is in sight, for all the kurus have become so enslaved by greed and folly. Those born in high lineages, do not, good woman, stray from the path of the Law, however beset by disaster, just as you who stand here as our bride. Such is the conduct that you yourself practice, princess of the Pancalas, for though you have come to grief, you will look to the Law. Drona and the other elders who are wise in the Law sit bent over as though spiritless with empty bodies. But Yudhishthira, I think, is the authority on this question: let he himself speak out and say whether you have been won or not. (2.62.17-21)<sup>259</sup>

nūnam antaḥ kulasyāśya bhavitā nacirād iva  
tathā hi kuravaḥ sarve lobhamohaparāyaṇāḥ

<sup>258</sup> *The Mahābhārata*, 6.43.36: “Bound I am by the Kauravas with wealth (baddho'smy arthena Kauravaiḥ)”. K.M. Ganguli explains further on the above translation in his footnote: “I am bound by the Kauravas, and therefore, I am not a free agent.”

<sup>259</sup> Van Buitenen, he translates *dharma* as “Law”.

kuleṣu jātāḥ kalyāṇi vyasanābhyāhatā bhṛśam  
 dharmyān mārḡān na cyavante yathā nas tvaṃ vadhūḥ sthitā  
 upapannaṃ ca pāñcālī tavedaṃ vṛttam īdṛśam  
 yat kṛcchram api saṃprāptā dharmam evānvavekṣase  
 ete droṇādayaś caiva vṛddhā dharmavido janāḥ  
 śūnyaiḥ śarīrais tiṣṭhanti gatāsava ivānatāḥ  
 yudhiṣṭhiraḥ tu praśne 'smin pramāṇam iti me matiḥ  
 ajitāṃ vā jitāṃ vāpi svayaṃ vyāhartum arhati

It must be noted that although Bhīṣma does not or cannot answer Draupadī's question with certainty, he certainly makes hierarchized distinctions regarding her lineage. It is quite possible that her righteous conduct (acting in accord with *dharma* in this case) underscores her lineage. I argue that her power of social status endows her with speech that shapes the discourse. Bhīṣma's value-laden remark regarding the high lineage accords with Bourdieu's idea of "socially categorized verbal and visual habits". Note that she is addressed as the "princess of the Pāñcālas" and her epithet gives away her royal upbringing. Nevertheless, Draupadī's question remains unanswered and he passes her question to husband Yudhisthira whose epithet is *Dharmarāja* or king *Dharma*.

At this point, Duryodhana takes advantage of the situation and adds another villainous act by announcing that if the four brothers accept that Yudhisthira had no right to wager Draupadī then she may get freedom from her slavery. Ironically, Draupadī herself does not think she is a slave woman (*dāsī*) to the Kauravas. This is a horrible dilemma for the brothers. Bhīma submits to the authority to his elder brother. Yudhisthira sits there silently as before in the middle of the uproar in the assembly. Now Duryodhana makes obscene gesture by exposing his bare left thigh to Draupadī and seeing this obscenity Bhīma takes an oath that he will smash his thigh in a great war. Finally, Arjuna comes up with an answer suggesting that Draupadī has not been lost when wagered by his chief husband in the dice game:

The king was formerly our master in betting (*īśo raja pūrvam āsīd glahe nah*), Kunti's son, the great-souled king Dharma. But whose master is he whose self is vanquished (*īśas tvayam parājitātmā*)? Realize this (*taj jānīdhvam*), all you Kurus (2.63.21)<sup>260</sup>.

In spite of Arjuna's attempt of providing an answer, his statement ends up into a question. At this very moment, a jackal howls during the sacrificial ritual being conducted on behalf of the household of the blind Kuru king Dhritarāstra and there were also other inauspicious signs outside the Kaurava court. Informed of these portends, the blind king becomes alert and reprimands Duryodhana and Karna for insulting Draupadī-Krishnā. Then he offers her boons. Thus Draupadī kept the elders bewildered in the assembly by her enigmatic question till the arrival of these portends.

It is not by her mere obstinacy, as it may seem, that she kept asking the same question. I read her as "the male poet's representation of woman as a figure that questions."<sup>261</sup> Hiltebeitel points out that like Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*, Draupadī deploys a "delaying tactics" which is her "strategy for survival" (transposing Suzuki's phrases for describing Penelope's situation). In other words, as Penelope delays her answer to her suitors through weaving, Draupadī impedes the change of her social status through her repeated question. Every time she puts the question to the elders who are supposed to be the scholars on *dharma*, she is met with stupefied silence excepting Bhīshma who offers an enigmatic answer by saying that *dharma* is subtle. Their haunting silence in the assembly hall encourages Duryodhana to continue the most heinous abuse of Draupadī in the presence of the elders, kings and the family members in the hall. Only

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<sup>260</sup> Hiltebeitel 2001, 258. For the translation of *jānīdhvam* Hiltebeitel follows Mehendale's translation "take note", rather than Ganguli's "judge" or Van Buitenen's "decide".

<sup>261</sup> Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 3. Hiltebeitel (2001) also cites from Suzuki's book for delineating a parallel between Helen and Draupadi regarding questioning the authority (footnotes, ch.7: 2, 66).

the protesting voices of the wise Vidura the half-brother of the Kuru King and of the king's son by a maid can be heard in the hall. But note that they do not belong to the class of the warriors nor of the priests. Then the text urges us to ponder if her husbands, kings, the elders who claim to know about *dharma* become the passive witnesses to her harrowing abuse in the hall then how suddenly the howling of a jackal comes to her rescue? Is it again the miracle of *Dharma*? Does it mean that it is only Draupadī who truly knows the significance of *dharma*?

While her husbands fail to perform their *dharma* (husband's duty in this case) that is to protect their wife, she stays firm in her own wifely *dharma*. It may very well be possible that she is the only one who knows considering that she is the *Śrī*-incarnate, a fact that the characters in the epic seem to have forgotten. I argue that she goes through her horrendous abuse to show that there is a gap in the meaning of *dharma* as practiced in the assembly hall. However, the fact remains that having been frightened by supernatural portends, the Kuru king decides to reprimand his son and to offer boons to Draupadī.

#### **4.4 Draupadī receives boons from the Kuru king**

When offered a boon by the Kuru king, she requests the freedom of her most senior husband Yudhisthira the Pāndava king. In reality she asks for this boon not for her husband's sake, nor for her own sake; she is rather concerned about Prativindhya the son of Krishnā -Draupadī and the king Yudhisthira. She does not want the prince Prativindhya to be called by little children as the son of a slave (2.63.29-30). Having granted the first boon, the king offers her another boon. This time she seeks the freedom of her other four husbands. The king happily grants her a third boon and she refuses. She does not deviate from her *dharma* and replies: "Greed makes for the destruction of *dharma*. I am not worthy to receive a third boon...they say that... a Kṣatriya woman can have two boons

(2.63.34-35).” As Krishnā-Draupadī has already had two boons, she will not ask for more. She could have asked the Kuru King for a punishment for Duryodhana and his brother for her sexual harassment in the assembly but she did not. Perhaps as the *Śrī* incarnate she knew that the Great War was inevitable where Duryodhana and his brothers would be killed. However, having been granted their freedom, the Pāndavas with all their wealth return to their own kingdom. Ironically, the queen who has been wagered by Yudhisthira as the possessor of great beauty and devotion to her husbands proves to be the possessor of quick wit and a great power of speech. It is worth mentioning that surprisingly, it is Karna the archenemy of the Pāndavas identifies Draupadī’s unparalleled ability to debate and he remarks:

Of all the women of mankind, famous for their beauty, of whom we have heard, no one have we heard accomplished such a deed! While the Pārthas and the Dhārtarāstras are raging beyond measure, Kṛsnā Draupadī has become the salvation of the Pāndavas! When they were sinking, boatless and drowning, in the plumbless ocean, Pāñcālī became the Pāndavas’ boat, to set them ashore (van Buitenen: 2.64.1-3).

yā naḥ śrutā manuṣyeṣu striyo rūpeṇa saṃmatāḥ  
tāsām etādṛśaṃ karma na kasyāṃ cana śuśrumaḥ  
krodhāviṣṭeṣu pārtheṣu dhārtarāṣṭreṣu cāpy ati  
draupadī pāṇḍuputrāṇām kṛṣṇā śāntir ihābhavat  
aplave 'mbhasi magnānām apratiṣṭhe nimajjatām  
pāñcālī pāṇḍuputrāṇām naur eṣā pāragābhavat

It may seem that this is the end of the dicing match at this point but curiously it starts all over again. Once again Yudhisthira is challenged in the dice match and he loses. This time the stake is an exile for twelve years in the forest and one year in hiding. Thus Pāndavas are exiled for thirteen years and Krishnā-Draupadī accompanies them. During the exile in the forest Draupadī becomes the victim of attempted abduction (mentioned in the preceding chapter) and as we have noted that she must defend herself against a sexual assault as her husbands are away at this time. She suffers sexual assault one more time at



the court of the Virāta king. This happens in the book four where Draupadī along with her husbands spend their final year of exile. The episode of dicing match repeats itself in the court and Yudhisthira though, present in the court, passively accepts his wife's sexual assault by the general of the king only because they have to keep their disguise. It is a common trend that the significant female characters in the epic traditions of India become the victims of their husbands' faulty behavior<sup>262</sup>. But the narrators of the *Mahābhārata* portray Draupadī through a singularly different approach. She recognizes that she is victimized and she does not suffer silently. She has a strong sense of her own royal status and a keen understanding of her wifely duty. Consequently, she gets enraged and speaks up aggressively when her husbands do not follow their duty of protecting her. Hence: she complains to Krishna when he visits them in the forest.

#### 4.5 Draupadī in the Forest

Following the stipulation of Duryodhana, Krishnā-Draupadī and her five husbands clad in deerskins start their journey to the forest. Van Buitenen<sup>263</sup> points out that this is the great example of their family solidarity. Subhadrā the other wife of Arjuna did not accompany them. Draupadī's parents looked after her own sons. Besides being an astonishing example of family solidarity, I add, that the presence of Draupadī, *Srī*/Sovereignty incarnate suggests a symbolic expression of the Pāndava's future victory in the impending war. Although their family and friends come to visit them in the forest, Draupadī resents her life in the forest. Thus with her strong desire for revenge she complains to Krishna when he with his followers visit them in the forest. But multifaceted Krishnā-Draupadī does not begin with her angry tirade at the beginning, she rather starts

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<sup>262</sup> Sutherland, *Sītā and Draupadī*, 72.

<sup>263</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Book of the Forest*, 177.

with a tone of extreme reverence to Lord Krishna (Krishna's divine attributes were not established as yet) as the absolute divinity and that continues for ten lines (3.13.42-52). Then she points out that it is only as his friend she wants to inform her situation. She articulates her acute recognition of her insult at the assembly and her desire for revenge in sixty-five verses (3.13. 43-108).

Draupadī's verbal exchange with Krishna shows acute awareness of her high status that makes her unable to imagine that this kind of assault could happen to her. Thus, she asks: "Then how was it that a woman like me, wife to the Pārthas, friend to you, Lord Krishna, sister of Dhrishtadyumna came to be dragged in the hall?" Next she describes her abuse at the assembly in vivid terms. Her acerbic tongue does not cease to remind that she a daughter-in-law of the old Kuru king was forcibly reduced to a slave. She despises her strong husbands:

I detest the Pāṇḍavas, those grand strongmen in war, who looked on while  
their glorious consort in Law was molested! A plague on the strength on  
Bhimsena! A plague on the bowmanship of the Pārtha!<sup>264</sup>

She continues with her carefully crafted speech juxtaposing the history of the famous exploits of her two strong husbands and their inability to protect her against the insult at the hands of Duryodhana. Then she refers to the eternal way of *dharma* of husband that claims, "even the weak ones (husbands), protect a wife (3.13.60)." Yet, being the strongest husbands like Arjuna and Bhimsena did not protect Krishnā- Draupadī. She makes sure that they remember her great lineage: "I was born in a grand lineage and by divine fate! (3.13.104)" Having emphasized her husbands' indifference regarding their

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<sup>264</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Book of the Forest*, 249. Although the first three brothers among the five are known as Pārthas (sons of Prithā, that is, Kuntī ) but in this case Pārtha means Arjuna.

wife's protection (rakshanā), Draupadi breaks down in tears and speaks with extreme wrath<sup>265</sup>:

I have got no husbands, no sons, Madhusūdana, not a brother, nor a father,  
nor you, nor friends (3.13.112).  
naiva me patayaḥ santi na putrā madhusūdana  
na bhrātaro na ca pitā naiva tvaṃ na ca bāndhavāḥ

This passage presents Draupadī's rhetorical skill and her rage.<sup>266</sup> Then Krishna promises revenge on her behalf, while her husbands are silent at this point.

Draupadī expresses her extreme disappointment in her senior husband who passively agreed to participate in the ill-fated dice match twice as his uncle the old king had asked him to play. The king Yudhisthira's younger brothers had to obey their elder brother's decision, as it was perceived as the tradition. It was the king Yudhisthira who silently witnessed his beloved wife's assault in the assembly and consequently, his younger brothers had to assent to their elder brother's behaviour. However, from time to time Bhīma the physically strongest and the most passionate one among the Pāndavas did not hesitate to express his anger as he took an oath to kill Duryodhana in the assembly. I read Draupadī's anger towards her senior husband from the perspective of a queen. She is the queen of a legitimate king and a king's duty is to protect his queen who is the symbol of Śrī/Sovereignty. Considering the mythology of Śrī in the Indic tradition (mentioned in the first chapter) it is difficult to fathom the life of Draupadī in the forest with a husband

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<sup>265</sup> The narrator describes: *kruddhā vacanam abravīt*. Although this part has been translated (Van Buitenen and others): "she spoke angrily"; but the word "kruddhā" conveys much more than mere anger. I believe that Kevin McGrath (2009) provides a fitting rendition of this term as 'fierce'. In addition, he explains that this is "a word indicating a quality of wrath that is extreme: it is a heroic term often used on the battlefield. (130)" Compare Helen's usage of "dog-face" used by the heroes on the battlefield.

<sup>266</sup> Mankekar 1999 discusses the effect of televised version of the Mahābhārata on women in Delhi: "Several women appropriated the example of the public disrobing of Draupadī to reflect on their own subordinated positions, and in the process formulated powerful critiques of gender inequalities in their families and communities." p.40

who has lost his status of kingship. With this view in mind, I argue that she initiates a debate with her husband who being deprived of his royalty leads his household in a forest.

#### 4.6 Draupadī's debate with Yudhishthira

This debate is said to have taken place after one year of their exile in the forest. In book three (The Book of the Forest) it is written that after a year of exile in the forest Draupadī sitting among her five husbands engages in a discussion with Yudhishthira. The dialogue between Draupadī and Yudhishthira begins at the chapter twenty- eight and continues till thirty- three. Here (3.28.2) the narrator introduces Draupadī as “dear and beautiful, a scholar and a faithful wife” (*priyā ca darśanīyā ca paṇḍitā ca pativrata*). Surely, she is “dear” to her husbands and she has to be “beautiful” in order to be queen. As it has been mentioned before a queen is *Śrī* incorporate and thereby, must be beautiful. Her debate with her husband Yudhishthira suggests two of her attributes: “*darśanīyā*” (beautiful) and “*paṇḍitā*” (learned). First, in this discourse the “beautiful” Draupadī argues with Yudhishthira from the standpoint of *Śrī*/Sovereignty. She is no longer the wife/*Śrī* of a royal husband. Then how can she be *Śrī* without being his queen? If a married woman exists only in relation to her husband then, how is it possible to define her status when her husband has lost his royal status? Angelika Malinar<sup>267</sup> points out that Draupadī's discussion with her husband is a “negotiation of a crisis in their relationship”. Accordingly, Malinar proposes that basically their discourse is built around the question<sup>268</sup>: “How can one be Yudhishthira's wife without being a queen, and, conversely, how can one be Draupadī's husband and not be a king?”

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<sup>267</sup> Angelika Malinar, “Arguments of a Queen: Draupadī's view on kingship” in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 79-96.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

The aforementioned discourse starts in a casual situation on an evening when Draupadī and her five husbands afflicted with grief are sitting together in their humble home in the forest. In order to set up the background of her argument, first she begins with her complaints about Duryodhana’s cruelty and his lack of remorse. Then she laments about their matrimonial bed; reminds him of his throne, former grandeur, and the prowess of his brothers. Next her lament turns into an angry question: “ Why doesn’t your anger (*manyu*) flare up?”<sup>269</sup> She repeats her question eight times (3.28.20, 21, 25, 27, 29-32) like a refrain. It must be noted that the English word ‘anger’ or even ‘wrath’ does not justify the meaning of the Sanskrit word ‘*manyu*’ in the proper sense of the term. Charles Malamoud in his study of Vedic texts explains that ‘*manyu* is a permanent quality, rather, an essential trait’ (my translation:182)<sup>270</sup> (‘*manyu* est une qualité permanente, mieux, une faculté essentielle). In other words, it is not a transitory state of emotion rather it is the essential feature of the royal gods like Indra or Varuna. Furthermore, Malamoud explains (‘le *manyu* d’un dieu est l’élan qui le porte à accomplir des actes par quoi sa divinité s’affirme’) the *manyu* of a god is the *élan* (robust energy) that brings him to achieve the deeds through which his divinity is affirmed’ (1989: 186, my translation)<sup>271</sup>. Thus the refrain uttered by Draupadī-Sovereignty to her husband the king is not a mere complaint but a reminder to an exiled king about the necessity of *manyu*. Thus she tells him:

There is no *ksatriya* without *manyu*-this saying is well known in the world. In you, however, I now see a *ksatriya* who is (acts) like the opposite.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata*, II, 275.

<sup>270</sup> Charles Malamoud, “ Un dieu védique: le Courroux “ in *Cuire le Monde: rite et pensée dans l’Inde ancienne*, (Paris:Éditions la Decouverte, 1989), 182.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>272</sup> Angelika Malinar, “Arguments of a Queen: Draupadī’s views on Kingship” in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 79-96.

na nirmanyuḥ kṣatriyo 'sti loke nirvacanaṃ smṛtaṃ  
tad adya tvayi paśyāmi kṣatriye viparītavat (3.28.34)

Malinar points out that Draupadī's positive view on the necessity of *manyu* not only dovetails with two Rigvedic hymns on "Manyu" (10.83 and 84) also with "other passages in the epic, in which it is attributed to or demanded from a hero (e.g. 5.131.2, 5)".<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, Draupadī follows the typical style of the Indic epic by digressing from the main speech and recounting a short story to illustrate her main point. Thus she relates the ancient tale of the famous conversation between the virtuous Prahlaḍa the demon king and his grandson, Bali Vairochana. This is a narrative of the difference between "forgiveness" and "might" (*kṣmā* and *tejas*).

At this point, Draupadī's discourse with her senior husband affirms her attribute as "*panditā*" or learned. She recounts this educational tale (136 verses) of the wise king with charged tone of voice. However, the wise king begins with a significant point:

Revenge (*tejas*) is not always better, but neither is forgiveness; learn to know them both, son, so that there be no problem.<sup>274</sup>

na śreyaḥ satataṃ tejo na nityaṃ śreyasī kṣamā  
iti tāta vijānīhi dvayam etad asaṃśayam (3.29.6-7).

After going through various explanations the demon king concludes that the decision to use "forgiveness" or "might" is situational. Consequently, Draupadī draws the conclusion that the present situation calls for "might" or "revenge" (*tejas*). In addition, drawing from the tale of the demon king she declares:

The meek are despised, but people shrink from the severe: he is a king who knows both, when there time has come.

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>274</sup> Van Buitenen, *The Mahābhārata* II, 276.

mṛdur bhavaty avajñātas tīkṣṇād udvijate janah  
kāle prāpte dvayaṃ hy etad yo veda sa mahīpatiḥ

In contrast, Yudhisthira ignores Draupadī's issue with anger that inspires a warrior or king instead, he reframes Draupadī's issue of anger from a general term (*Krodha*) that conveys a negative emotion. He asserts that anger must be restrained and 'forgiveness' is always better. Stating that the wise always avoid anger, he asks: "Why should a man like me indulge an anger that the wise avoid?"<sup>275</sup> His question becomes the key point for answering Draupadī's interrogative refrain: "It is by reflecting on this, that my anger does not rise."<sup>276</sup> Thus Yudhisthira, as a strong believer of forgiveness (*Ksamā*), thinks of himself far superior than Duryodhana. Draupadī, however, thinks differently. Although Draupadī, the dedicated wife (*Pativrata*) should not argue any more but she also, as Malinar points out, "has to take care that her man does not go astray or fail to live up to social standards."<sup>277</sup> Draupadī, on the contrary, believes that Yudhisthira is going through delusion.

Consequently, Draupadī states that she bows down to the "placer" and the "ordainer" (*dhātre* and *vidhātre*)<sup>278</sup> who have deluded his mind. "While you should carry on", she continues, "in the way of your father and grandfather, your mind has gone another way" (Van Buitenen, 3.31.1). Next she enumerates the daily *dharmic* (following *dharma*<sup>279</sup>) duties that Yudhisthira observes and yet she does not see the proper outcome of his *dharmic* acts. Here she understands *dharma* specifically equating with the law of

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<sup>275</sup> Van Buitenen.30.3.7.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 30.3.8.

<sup>277</sup> Malinar, 2007, p. 85.

<sup>278</sup> *dhatré* is also rendered as creator and *vidhatré* as disposer or distributor, M. Monier Williams.

<sup>279</sup> *Dharma* is "the continuous *maintaining* of the social and cosmic order and norm which is achieved by the Aryan through the performance of his Vedic rites and traditional duties". Willhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York, 1988), 315-16).

Karma that distributes justice according to individual's deeds.<sup>280</sup> Accordingly, she speaks to Yudhisthira: "The Law, when well protected, protects the king who guards the Law, so I hear from the noble ones, but I find it does not protect *you*" (3.31.7, tr. van Buitenen). At this point, Draupadī enquires about the Lord's decisions over the happiness or sufferings of living beings. In her usual way of validating her logic she cites ancient lore (*itihāsa puratanā*) and says:

It is the Lord Placer alone who sets down everything for the creatures, happiness, pleasure and sorrow, before even ejaculating the seed. These creatures, hero among men, are like wooden puppets that are manipulated; he makes body and limbs move. Pervading like ether all these creatures, Bharata, the Lord disposes here whatever is good or evil. Man, restrained like a bird that is tied to a string, is not master of himself; remaining in the Lord's power, he is a master of neither himself nor others. Like a pearl strung on a string, like a bull held by the nose rope, man follows the command of the Placer, consisting in him, entrusted to him. (Van Buitenen :3.31.21-25)

dhātaiva khalu bhūtānāṃ sukhaduḥkhe priyāpriye  
 dadhāti sarvaṃ īśānaḥ purastāt chukram uccaran  
 yathā dārumayī yoṣā naravīra samāhitā  
 īrayaty aṅgam aṅgāni tathā rājann imāḥ prajāḥ  
 ākāśa iva bhūtāni vyāpya sarvāṇi bhārata  
 īśvaro vidadhātīha kalyāṇaṃ yac ca pāpakam  
 śakunis tantu baddhovā niyato 'yam anīśvaraḥ  
 īśvarasya vaśe tiṣṭhan nānyeṣāṃ nātmanaḥ prabhuḥ  
 maṇiḥ sūtra iva proto nasyota iva govṛṣaḥ  
 dhātur ādeśam anveti tanmayo hi tad arpaṇaḥ

In other words, the living beings do not have freedom to act according to their own wish.

Draupadī continues with her speech highlighting more on how this Lord the puppet player acts:

As straw tops fall under the force of a strong wind, so all creatures fall under the power of the Placer, Bhārata. Yoking himself to deeds noble and evil, God roams through the creatures and is not identified. This body they call "field" is merely the Placer's tool by which the ubiquitous Lord impels us to action that ends in either good or evil (Tr. Van Buitenen: 3.31. 28-30).

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<sup>280</sup> See Barbara A. Holdredge, "Dharma" in *Hindu World*, 236-37. See also, Malinar, 2007, 87.



yathā vāyos tṛṇāgrāṇi vaśaṃ yānti balīyasaḥ  
 dhātur evaṃ vaśaṃ yānti sarvabhūtāni bhārata  
 ārya karmaṇi yuñjānaḥ pāpe vā punar īśvaraḥ  
 vyāpya bhūtāni carate na cāyam iti lakṣyate  
 hetumātram idaṃ dhāttuḥ śarīraṃ kṣetrasaṃjñitam  
 yena kārayate karma śubhāśubhaphalaṃ vibhuḥ

Thus expressing her doubts in the law of just rewards, Draupadī ends her speech by questioning the Placer's act and thereby grieving over the people who are powerless:

What does the Placer gain by giving the fortune to the Dhārtarāstra (i.e. Duryodhana the first son of Dhritarāstra the old king) who offends against the noble scriptures, a cruel, avaricious diminisher of the Law? If an act that has been done pursues its doer and no one else, then surely God is tainted by the evil he has done! If the evil that has been done does not pursue its doer, then mere power is the cause of everything, and I bemoan powerless folk!

ārya śāstrātige krūre lubdhe dharmāpacāyini  
 dhārtarāṣṭre śriyaṃ dattvā dhātā kiṃ phalam aśnute  
 karma cet kṛtaṃ anveti kartāraṃ nānyam ṛcchati  
 karmaṇā tena pāpena lipyate nūnam īśvaraḥ  
 atha karmakṛtaṃ pāpaṃ na cet kartāraṃ ṛcchati  
 kāraṇaṃ balam eveha janāñ śocāmi durbalān

I read this as a cogent observation regarding the supremacy of power. It is important to note that her observation is a piercing reminder of Bhisma's answer to Draupadī's question at the assembly that the powerful man decides what is lawful. (2.62.14-16).

Yudhishtira, however, does not agree with Draupadī's view about the Lord Placer; he, therefore, accuses her of heresy. Nevertheless, he does appreciate her argument for being "well phrased and polished" (3.32.1) recalling her attribute being "learned". Throughout his reply, he condemns her view as a transgression of norms. Malinar points out that his usage of words denoting Draupadī's argumentative excessiveness is worth noting. According to Malinar, the Sanskrit prefix 'ati' added to the main verb signifies the excessive performance of Draupadī:

Thus, Draupadī is said to ‘doubt too much’ (*ati+śank*, 3.32.6- twice; 32.7, 9, 15, 17, 21), to “argue too much” (*ati+vad*, 3.32.6), to ‘transgress’ (*ati+gam*, 3.32.9, 20), and to ‘violate’ (*ati+vrt*, 3.32.18) norms.<sup>281</sup>

Yudhisthira, on the contrary, does not look for the fruits of the Law (*dharma*) furthermore he states that the results of one’s deeds, both good and bad, ‘are the mysteries of the Gods’ (*devaguhya*, 3.32.33). While yielding to her husband’s admonition she reframes her argument about the Law (*dharma*) of the Lord and urges Yudhisthira to act. Her argument takes a different form, for example, she accepts that the Great Lord makes all creatures act whether they want to act or not, albeit she underscores the great achievement of man. Consequently, She offers a concrete example of man’s achievement: “the success of houses and towns is caused by man” (*agāra nagarānām hi siddhi purusahaitukī*, 3.33.25). It is no surprise that Draupadī as a *kśatriya* woman urges her husband to act as a *Kśatriya* that is, to regain his kingdom through active war. Furthermore, it is significant to note that Draupadī affirms that her view had been nurtured at her father’s house. Her father invited a very learned teacher who used to live in their palace in order to teach her brothers. When he used to give same discourse to her father, she stresses, she listened to him eagerly while sitting next to her father (3.33.56-58). Evidently, Draupadī’s scholarly argument and rhetorical skill endorse her aristocratic upbringing.<sup>282</sup>

The narrator remains silent about Yudhisthira’s new dilemma in dealing with her view with materialistic bent that had been taught by a Brāhmin teacher<sup>283</sup> at her father’s

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<sup>281</sup> Malinar, “Arguments of a queen,” 89.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., fn.8.

<sup>283</sup> This teacher “taught this same policy, which was first propounded by Brhaspati, to my brothers at the time; and I listened to their conversations at home” (3.33.55-60). Traditionally, Brhaspati was the founder of the materialistic philosophy in India.

palace. Instead, Bhīma takes over on Draupadī's behalf and argues with his brother Yudhishtira from his own understanding of the situation. However, their argument does not continue as Bhīma finds out from his elder brother that they lack weapons. At that moment, the epic's first narrator Vyāsa appears and advises them to secure weapons. He, therefore, offers Yudhishtira a magical means that enables them to procure superior weapons. However, Draupadī does not refrain from reminding her senior husband the duty of a king.

#### 4.7 Draupadī argues for the Bhārata War

Whenever Yudhishtira's mind deviates from the mighty spirit of a *kṣatriya* king, Draupadī reminds him of his responsibility under *kṣatriya* law in book five, for example. Book five reveals the rhetorical skill and bellicose yet rational argument of the common wife of the Pāndava brothers. Having fulfilled their requirement of dwelling in the forest including spending a year incognito the Pāndavas send an embassy to the court of the king Dhritarāshtra. But Duryodhana does not honour their claim of returning their share of the kingdom. Now the coming of war is obvious and even at this point Yudhishtira is leaning towards peace. They request Krishna to negotiate with the Kauravas for peace just by giving them only five villages instead of his city where he reigned (5.54.29). Hearing even Bhīma in favour of peace, Draupadī responds in a long tirade:

A curse on Bhīmasena's strength, a curse on the Pārtha's bowmanship, if  
Duryodhana stays alive for another hour Krishna! (5.80.31)

dhig balaṃ bhīmasenasya dhik pārthasya dhanuṣmatām  
yatra duryodhanaḥ kṛṣṇa muhūrtam api jīvati

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See Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Also see, Debiprasad Chattopadhyay, *Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1959).

If Bhīma and Arjuna pitifully hanker after peace, my ancient father will fight, and his warrior sons, Krishna! My five valiant sons will, led by Abhimanyu<sup>284</sup>, fight with the Kurus, Madhusūdana<sup>285</sup>! What peace will my heart know unless I see Duḥśāsana's swarthy arm cut off and covered with dust! Thirteen years have gone by while I waited, hiding my rage in my heart like a blazing fire. Pierced by the thorn of Bhīma's words, my heart is rent asunder, for now that strong-armed man has eyes for the Law only! (5.80. 37-41)

yadi bhīmārjunau kṛṣṇa kṛpaṇau saṁdhikāmukau  
pitā me yotsyate vṛddhaḥ saha putrair mahārathaiḥ  
pañca caiva mahāvīryāḥ putrā me madhusūdana  
abhimanyuṁ puraskṛtya yotsyanti kurubhiḥ saha  
duḥśāsana bhujam śyāmaṁ saṁchinnaṁ pāmsugunṭhitam  
yady ahaṁ taṁ na paśyāmi kā śāntir hṛdayasya me  
trayodaśa hi varṣāṇi pratīkṣantyā gatāni me  
nidhāya hṛdaye manyuṁ pradīptam iva pāvakaṁ  
vidīryate me hṛdayaṁ bhīma vākśalya pīḍitam  
yo 'yam adya mahābāhur dharmam samanupaśyati

However, the Bhārata War between the Pāṇdavas and the Kauravas (sons of the Kuru king, i.e. Duryodhana and others) begins and continues for eighteen days. The Pāṇdavas along with Draupadī's brothers in the leading role win the War. The success of the Pāṇdavas is obvious on two levels: First, narration of divinely planned purging of the overburdened Earth from demonic warrior class (the sons of the Kuru king and their followers); second, Draupadī, the incarnation of Śrī is ordained to lead the evil *Kṣatriyas* to destruction. As a result, Yudhishtira, the good king with Śrī as her queen must win the battle.

Yudhishtira and his brothers win the devastating battle and as the rule dictates, Yudhishtira becomes the king of the Kuru dynasty. But being greieved by horrific violence of battle, Yudhishtira wishes to renounce the kingdom and to lead a life of contemplation like an ascetic. Thus he says to his brother Arjuna:

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<sup>284</sup> Son of Arjuna and his other wife Subhadṛā who is the sister of Krishna

<sup>285</sup> An epithet of Krishna as the slayer of the demon Madhu

Holy Learning says, ‘ It is possible to reach the underlying cause of birth and death’. So I am discarding my possessions and the entire kingdom, and I am leaving—completely free, free of grief and free of bother too. You rule this wide earth which is now at rest; the thorn has been removed from it. The kingdom and the enjoyment of it are no affair of mine, O best of Kurus. (12.7.34-42)<sup>286</sup>.

mayā nirṣṭaṃ pāpaṃ hi parigrahaṃ abhīpsatā  
 janma kṣayanimittaṃ ca śakyaṃ prāptum iti śrutiḥ  
 sa parigrahaṃ utsṛjya kṛtsnaṃ rājyaṃ tathaiḥ ca  
 gamiṣyāmi vinirmukto viśoko vi jvaras tathā  
 praśādhi tvam imāṃ urvīm kṣemāṃ nihatakaṇṭakāṃ  
 na mamārtho 'sti rājyena na bhogair vā kurūttama

Arjuna does not wish to rule the kingdom of which Yudhishtira is the rightful king. His brothers try to persuade him to stay as the ruler of the kingdom that they have won. Once again Draupadī has to strongly remind her husband of his royal duty as a king.

#### 4.8 Draupadī's speech to Yudhishtira

Most excellent of kings, friendliness toward all creatures, generous giving, study, asceticism—all this may be Law for a Brahmin, but is not for a king. Restraining the wicked and protecting the pious, and not fleeing in war—this is the highest Law of kings (12.14.15-16).

mitratā sarvabhūteṣu dānam adhyayanaṃ tapaḥ  
 brāhmaṇasyaiṣa dharmah syān na rājño rājasattama  
 asatāṃ pratiṣedhaś ca satāṃ ca paripālayan  
 eṣa rājñāṃ paro dharmah samare cāpalāyanam

Draupadī's speech to her husband accentuates the *dharma* of a king that requires not only the possession of a great military strength but also the performance of protecting his kingdom.<sup>287</sup> Simon Brodbeck aptly points out that “*kṣatriya* renunciation highlights the

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<sup>286</sup> James Fitzgerald, trans., *The Mahābhārata*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>287</sup> Note the advice of Kuntī the mother of the Pāṇdavas to Yudhishtira at the time of Krishna's embassy to Duryodhana:

“Your Law has greatly declined; do not go wrong, my son. Since you have mere rote learning of the Veda without understanding or insight, your mind is possessed by mere recitation and looks but to a single Law. Come, heed the Law that was created by the Self-existent: the baron was created from his chest, to live by the strength of his arms, to act always mercilessly for the protection of his subjects.” (5.130.5).

failure to protect and please females (kingdom and citizens being symbolically female)”.<sup>288</sup> In light of this symbolism, the following speech of Draupadī to Yudhishtira seems fitting:

O best of the Bharatas, I am the lowest of all women in the world! After being abused like that by our enemies, I want to live now!  
They have striven hard, and success has come to them, but now that you’ve got the entire earth, you are turning success into disaster all by yourself.

sāhaṃ sarvādhamaṃ loke strīṇāṃ bharatasattama  
tathā vinikṛtāmitrair yāhaṃ icchāmi jīvitum  
eteṣāṃ yatamānānām utpadyante tu saṃpadaḥ  
tvam tu sarvāṃ mahīm labdhvā kuruṣe svayam āpadam (12.14.35-36).

The voice of Krishnā-Draupadī changes its tone in the above passage. She is not speaking in a belligerent manner nor in her usual preaching way; here she is, as if, begging to live her newly found life. In addition, she is asking the king to consider her other husbands’ mental state as well. The aforementioned speech of Draupadī shows how she can modify her rhetoriques according to the situation. In the same vein, I read the conversation she has during their exile in the forest with Satyabhāmā, the wife of Krishna. She divulges to her the hard life of a *Pativrata* queen who contrary to her husbands is remarkably knowledgeable about the financial situation of the royal household.

#### 4.9 Draupadī’s conversation with the wife of Krishna

When Satyabhāmā the wife of Krishna visits the Pāṇdavas in the forest, she asks Draupadī how does she make her five husbands so amenable and how is it possible that they are never angry with her (3.222.4)? It seems that her question concerns more about the particular method that she uses to keep her husbands happy. Thus she asks: “Have you

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See also, Minoru Hara, “A Note on the Rāksasa Form of Marriage”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 3(Jul.-Sep., 1974), 296-306.

<sup>288</sup> Simon Brodbeck. “Gendered Soteriology: Marriage and the *karmayoga*” in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 144-175.

followed a vow, done austerities? Is there a special ablution, spells herbs? A powerful knowledge of roots? Some prayer, or fire oblation or drug (Tr. van Buitenen, 3.222.6-7)?” In reply, Draupadī the “*Pativratā*” (final attribute from her description) provides a long answer consisting of three parts.

First Draupadī says that Satyabhāmā is asking about the use of deceitful means in a marital relationship. How can that be considered as praiseworthy? When a husband, Draupadī continues, finds out that his wife is using some drugs or spells on him, the husband gets frightened of her as “of a snake that has got into the house” (3.222.11). Furthermore, she adds that a frightened husband will not have peace and without peacefulness in a relationship there is no happiness (3.222. 13-16).

Second, Draupadī decides to tell about her own *pativratā* behaviour with her husbands. She begins to describe her daily chore:

I serve the Pāndavas and their wives always religiously without selfishness, likes, and dislikes (3.222.18).

ahamkāraṃ viḥāyāhaṃ kāmakrodhau ca sarvadā  
sadārān pāṇḍavān nityaṃ prayatopacarāmy aham

This verse sets the mood of the concept of *pativratā* through Draupadī’s understanding. It must be noted that her understanding comes from her indirect education while accompanying Yudhishtira in the forest. During their exile in the Pāndavas and Draupadī spend their time listening to edifying tales from various sages. The ancient sage Mārkindya visits their abode. At the request of Yudhishtira, the sage recounts them the tales of the famous women acquiring power through their unwavering devotion to their husbands. In fact, the book of forest (Āranyakaparvan) dedicates an entire chapter (3.197) to “devoted wives”. Although Yudhishtir’s is the primary audience, Draupadī is in the proximity listening to these stories. They hear many stories of eminent *pativratās* like

Sītā, Sāvitrī, Damayantī, for example. It must be noted that *Rāmāyana* in some form is told in this book of forest just to exemplify the *pativratā* character of Sītā. Notably, the sage highlights the much esteemed tale of how Sāvitrī's resourceful act that saves her husband from the grip of death itself only through unwavering devotion to her husband.

Then he ends with the following statement:

Thus Sāvitrī by her toils saved them all—herself, her father and mother, her mother-in-law and father-in-law, and her husband's entire dynasty. Likewise the well-augured Draupadī, esteemed for her character, shall rescue you all, just as nobly-descended Sāvitrī! (3.283.14-15)

evam ātmā pitā mātā śvaśrūḥ śvaśura eva ca  
bhartuḥ kulam ca sāvitrī sarvaṁ kṛcchrāt samuddhṛtam  
tathaivaiṣāpi kalyāṇī draupadī śīlasammatā  
tārayiṣyati vaḥ sarvān sāvitrīva kulāṅganā

It is discernible that the above stories of formidably devoted wives told in her presence have shaped Draupadī's understanding of model wife. Scholars<sup>289</sup> have noted how her answer to Krishna's wife recalls the *pativratā* tales she heard along with Yudhishtira (3.222.18-31). I read this as carefully crafted speech by Draupadi to underscore her power in a subtle manner. Compare how Helen speaks of Achaean heroes only in relation to her at the *teichscopia* and especially in the book 4 of the *Odyssey*. Nonetheless, it could be an indication of her understanding of power dynamics in a virilocal society.

Consequently, she follows the norm of the society that asks for renouncing what her husbands renounce. Draupadī states the socially approved definition of a husband:

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<sup>289</sup> Brian Black, "Eavesdropping on the Epic: Female listeners in the *Mahābhārata*" in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata* (London: Routledge, 2007), 53-78; Arti Dhand, *Woman as Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State University of New York, 2008), 160-180.



My Law rests on my husband, as I think, it eternally does with women. He is the God, he is the path, nothing else: what woman could displease him?  
(3.222.35)

patyāśrayo hi me dharmo mataḥ strīṇāṃ sanātanaḥ  
sa devaḥ sāgatir nānyā tasya kā vipriyaṃ caret

Although, it may seem that in the above verse Draupadī is voicing the norm of the *pativratā* but, considering her intelligence and knowledge she may be articulating that a woman has no other option but to follow her husband's path for her own interest.<sup>290</sup> Furthermore, she acknowledges the norm of respecting the mother of one's husband. In order to validate her household chore she carefully recognises the instruction of her mother-in-law. Thus she claims that she never speaks ill of her mother-in-law, nor does she contradict her in matters of food, cloth, or in her choice of jewelry. Moreover, she diligently waits on her mother-in-law at all times. Clearly, she knows how to earn the obedient behaviour from her husbands and she declares to Satyabhāmā :

And by this constant attention, my lovely, by this daily up-and-about, and by obedience to my elders I got the upper hand of my husbands (3.222.37).

avadhānena subhage nityotthānatayaiva ca  
bhartāro vaśagā mahyaṃ guruśuśrūṣaṇena ca

Draupadī's recognition of her ability in running a royal household becomes more discernible in the third part of her speech. Here she gives a detailed account of her daily chore at the royal palace before the exile of the king Yudhisthira to the forest. She enumerates the number of people who used to eat at the palace on a daily basis:

At one time eight thousand Brahmins ate daily from golden dishes in Yudhisthira's mansion. Yudhisthira supported eighty-eight thousand *Snātaka*

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<sup>290</sup> Laurie L. Patton, "How do you conduct yourself? Gender and the construction of a dialogical self in the *Mahābhārata*" in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata*, ed. Brodbeck and Black (London: Routledge, 2007), 97-109.

householders with thirty slave girls each. There were another ten thousand highly continent ascetics who took their well-cooked food on golden plates. (Tr. Van Buitenen, 3. 222.40-44)

aṣṭāv agre brāhmaṇānāṃ sahasrāṇi sma nityadā  
bhuñjate rukmapātrīṣu yudhiṣṭhira niveśane  
aṣṭāśīti sahasrāṇi snātakā gṛhamedhinaḥ  
triṃśad dāsīka ekaiko yān bibharti yudhiṣṭhiraḥ  
daśānyāni sahasrāṇi yeṣāṃ annaṃ susaṃskṛtaṃ  
hriyate rukmapātrībhir yatīnāṃ ūrdhvaretasāṃ

Furthermore, Draupadī reminds Satyabhāmā:

The great-spirited Kaunteya<sup>291</sup> had a hundred thousand slave girls, with shell necklaces and bracelets, coins around their necks, much jewelry, precious garlands and ornaments and gold pieces, sprinkled with sandalwood, parading their beads and gold, all clever at dancing and singing- and I knew (*vedāham*) the name, and the figure, and the meals, and the dresses of every one of them, as well as their work, what they did and did not do.

śataṃ dāsī sahasrāṇi kaunteyasya mahātmanah  
kambukeyūra dhāriṇyo niṣkakaṇṭhyo svalaṃkṛtāḥ  
mahārhamālyābharaṇāḥ suvarṇāś candanokṣitāḥ  
maṇīn hemaca bibhratyo nṛtyagītaviśāradaḥ  
tāsāṃ nāma ca rūpaṃ ca bhojanāc chādanāni ca  
sarvāsāṃ eva vedāhaṃ karma caiva kṛtākṛtaṃ (3.222.44-46).

In addition to these serving-maids, Draupadī continues that the king also had a hundred thousand serving maids who used to feed the guests with golden plates in their hands. The king Yudhisthira possessed one hundred thousand horses and elephants in the royal stable. Not only is she sharply aware of the number of the service people, she is also responsible for them:

It was I however, O lady, who regulated their number and framed the rules to be observed in respect of them; and it was I who had to listen to all complaints about them.

etad āsīt tadā rājño yan mahīm paryapālayat  
yeṣāṃ saṃkhyā vidhiṃ caiva pradīśāmi śṛṇomi ca

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<sup>291</sup> The word “Kaunteya” means son of Kuntī, the mother of Yudhishtira, Bhīma, and Arjuna, although here she means only Yudhishtira.

In the next verse (3.222.50) Draupadī informs that she alone knew the activities of all the maids of the royal household down to the cowherds and the shepherds of the royal establishment. Finally, the verse 51 illustrates her financial efficiency that outshines the ability of the king. She declares that “all the income of the king’s revenues and the outgo, I alone knew it, pretty woman, of all the glorious Pāndavas (*sarvam rājñah samudayam āyam ca vyam ca / ekāham vedmi kalyāni pāndavānām yaśasvinām //*)”. Moreover, she alone knew how immense was the ocean like royal treasury of her “virtuous husbands”. Considering the gifts that Yudhisthira received at his royal consecration, her statement does not seem to be a hyperbole. In order to achieve her gargantuan task she had to compromise her ease; she had to endure her “hunger and thirst” day and night and also usually she “is the first to wake up and last to bed” (reminiscent of the *pativratā* behaviour of beautiful Draupadī announced by her husband before gambling her away at the assembly in the book second). Thus, this long conversation of Draupadī with Satyabhāmā markedly shows her various voices (recalling Helen) that “alternate between fierceness and meekness, savvy and servitude, authority and submission.”<sup>292</sup> More importantly, it is worth noting Southerland’s relevant observation: “she subtly chides her husbands once again for their lack of understanding of household matters and their inability to control the treasury”.<sup>293</sup>

However, in the first place, I read Draupadī’s conversation with the wife of Krishna as a veiled criticism of the concept of *pativratā* in a patrilineal society where the wives have to worship their husbands in order to get a comfortable life (“you get children

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<sup>292</sup> Laurie Patton, “How do you conduct yourself? Gender and the construction of a dialogical self in the *Mahābhārata*” in *Gender and Narrative in the Mahābhārata* (London: Routledge, 2007), 97-110.

<sup>293</sup> Southerland, 1989, 68, fn. 26.

and all kinds of comforts” 3.223.5). Although Draupadī’s description of her daily chore shows her devotion to her husbands, it is worth noting that she particularly juxtaposes her knowledge of the royal income, expenditure and of the treasury against the Pāṇdavas who have no clue about their royal wealth. Yet, we know that Yudhisthira had a definite idea about his wealth for gambling away at the dice game. How is it possible for a king to be ignorant of his royal treasury? Note that in the book 12 Yudhisthira gets instruction from Bhīṣma about the importance of a king’s treasury (*kośa*) that is the basis of a king’s strength (*rājñah kośabalam mūlam kośamūlam punar balam*, 12.128.35) because, a diminished treasury is indicative of the diminished strength of a king (*rājñah kośaksayād eva jāyate balasamksayah*, 12.128.11). On the contrary, it could be assumed that Yudhisthira did not know the importance of the treasury hence: the instruction.<sup>294</sup> Secondly, it is possible that Draupadī might be showing off her unparalleled education regarding royal household management and financial mastery that she had received at her father’s household. In other words, Draupadī’s self-presentation demonstrates her upbringing in a royal household where education is encouraged.

To sum up, I have examined Draupadī in light of her power of speech in major events of her life. Considering that she speaks mostly at the moments of crisis, a typical pattern of ambiguity emerges. In other words, she follows the social norm of a *pativratā* (devoted to husband) wife, especially, a kshatriya wife and yet does not refrain from challenging her husband’s/husbands’s socially normative attitude. During her scholarly argument with her senior husband, she suddenly informs him in a surreptitious manner about her education at her father’s house. Clearly, her education at her father’s household

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<sup>294</sup> See Brockington, 1988, 162.

must explain her speaking style that enables her to cite (not suitable for a woman) the ancient authoritative tale and probably her remarkable usage of numbers. In the final analysis, the two queens in the epics from two different countries do not follow the normative pattern of their society while continuing to act in their allotted role.

Unlike Helen, however, Draupadī does not come from a different society. Yet, she does not hesitate to question her senior husband's decision of wagering her at the assembly hall. I have highlighted her authoritative speech defending her status after being gambled away by her senior husband. I have discussed how she relentlessly tries to remind Yudhishtira to follow the path of a warrior. Clearly, the ambiguous nature of Draupadī comes from her being the goddess Śrī. Moreover, she is a goddess whose origin is found in the pre-Vedic India as noted before. Likewise, the ambiguous behavior of Helen can be clarified from the perspective that she was an immortal goddess before being integrated in Homer's epics. With this view in mind, I ask whether the epic temporality and spatiality have any impact in the shaping of these two queens. The next chapter will attempt to elucidate the triangular relationship of the epic queens with the epic time and the epic space.

### Part Three: Viewing Space and Time

#### Introduction:

In the previous chapter I have elaborated on the “self-presentation” of the two princes from the two different parts of the world. At the end of the chapter I raised a question about the function of time and space in shaping their characters. Irene J. F. De Jong writes two insightful articles on “Homer” regarding the importance of time and of space in ancient Greek literature. In the first article (2007) she explains how awareness of time is important for the “Homeric characters and narrator alike.” In the second one (2012) she explains how space is important as a symbolic function and also as a tool for characterization in the Homeric epics. In addition, it is worth mentioning the concept of interconnectedness between time and space for which Bakhtin has coined a term

*chronotope*:

We will give the name chronotope (lit. ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature... In the literary chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time, as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.<sup>295</sup>

Bakhtin’s theory is drawing attention from scholars with renewed interest. Tsagalidis writes:

Specific *chronotopes* are spatiotemporal concepts corresponding to particular viewpoints or sets of ideological tenets. That said, the whole of the *Iliad* may be seen as a huge chronotope, where the pair “Troy- present time” means war and suffering, whereas “Greece- past time” stands for peace and happiness. This does not mean there are no smaller chronotopic building blocks within the Iliadic narrative, but this large dichotomy is of profound significance for the poetics of the *Iliad*, since it is against this background that the entire

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<sup>295</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”, in M. Holquist (ed), *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin TX, 1981) 84-258 (original from 1938-1973), 81.

horizon of false expectations, credible and impossible scenarios, hopes and promises, disappointments and grief—that is, what Iliadic tragedy is all about—emerges.<sup>296</sup>

Furthermore, Norman Austin's understanding of time and space from Homer's perspective is worth noting:

The Homeric notations of time and space exemplify the visual imagination and that subjective quality with which the imagination invests them. Time is not an abstract, homogenous continuum but subjective experience... Homer's temporal notations carry a wealth of associations related to communal life, to daily human activity, and to the changing aspects of nature.<sup>297</sup>

His understanding of the concept of space in Homer's poetry dovetails with time:

As with time, so with space. Space is not a linear continuum divisible into miles and furlongs, or stadia and parasangs, but a nexus of visual activities. Distance is measured by its relation to human experience.<sup>298</sup>

Thus it appears:

1. The Homeric characters show an awareness of time.
2. Space in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* functions in relation to the subjective experience of a character.
3. Time and space are interconnected.
4. Time and space are viewed through visual images.

With this in mind, I like to view Helen of the *Iliad* and of the *Odyssey* and her counterpart Krishnā- Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* in their spatiotemporal context. In other words, how their narration of time “becomes artistically visible” and how space and time are embedded in the actions of these two princes. This section comprises two

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<sup>296</sup> Tsagalis 2012, 8.

<sup>297</sup> Austin 1975, 85.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 89.

chapters on mapping out the “movements of time” in a “charged space” by the verbal/non-verbal acts of first, Helen and second, Draupadī.



## Chapter Five: Helen

How is it possible to delineate Helen's character in relation to time and space depicted in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*? First, I wish to perceive Helen as narrated by the bard at the Time of War that is continuing in Troy. Second, I shall observe how the storyteller has narrated Helen in the Time of Peace back in her own palace in Sparta. Finally, I would argue that Helen epitomizes radical ambiguity in both spatiotemporal contexts.

### 5.1 Helen of Sparta at the Time of War in Troy

I read the time of war in Troy in reference to the "generation of heroes" described in Hesiod's *Work and Days*.<sup>299</sup> Hesiod's "generation of heroes"<sup>300</sup> is not associated with metal like the preceding three generations/races before this fourth generation/ race. This fourth generation is inserted between generations of Bronze and Iron the final one<sup>301</sup> to which Hesiod himself belongs. Hesiod writes about this fourth generation/ race:

When the earth covered up this race too, Zeus, Cronus' son, made another one in turn upon the bounteous earth, a fourth one, more just and superior, the godly race of men-heroes, who are called demigods, the generation before our own upon the boundless earth. Evil war and dread destroyed these, some under seven-gated Thebes in the land of Cadmus while they fought for the sake of Oedipus' sheep, others brought in boats over the great gulf of the sea to Troy for the sake of fair-haired Helen. There the end of death shrouded some of them, but upon others Zeus the father, Cronus' son bestowed life and habitations far from human beings and settled them at the limits of the earth; and these dwell with a spirit free of care on the Islands of the Blessed beside deep eddying Ocean—happy heroes, for whom the grain-giving field bears honey-sweet fruit flourishing three times a year.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Edited and translated by Glen Most. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>301</sup> See Jean- Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*. Translated by Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort. (Brooklyn, NY.: Zone Press, 2006). First published in French as *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs*. (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1965). Vernant explains Hesiod's myth of five generations/ races within the tripartite framework. See also, Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

<sup>302</sup> *Works and Days*, 2006, 101.

It is clear that Hesiod does not provide the chronological time when the Trojan War was fought for the sake of Helen rather he informs that the “godly race of men-heroes who are called demigods” (*Works and Days*: 159-60) fought in the Trojan War. Although this fourth race is the race of warriors just like the bronze race, yet, unlike the previous one this race is “more just and superior” (*Works and Days*: 158). Then it seems that the sense of justice sets the fourth generation apart from the previous one. Moreover, it is important to note that when Hesiod identifies the race of gold as “the first”, the temporality in this case is not to be understood in a chronological manner. Vernant aptly elucidates this meaning of temporality from the perspective of Hesiod:

If the race of gold is called “the first”, this is not because it arose one fine day, before the others, in the course of linear and irreversible time. On the contrary, Hesiod describes at the beginning of his account because it embodies virtues—symbolized by gold—that are at the top of a scale of nontemporal values.<sup>303</sup>

It seems then that the succession of the races is set up in relation to virtue. Although it shows a progressive decline because silver is inferior to gold as bronze to silver. But the insertion of the race of heroes between the races of bronze and iron seems to be puzzling. Vernant organizes the function of the myth of five races with a structural system of binary opposites: “*dikē* and *hubris*”. In other words, the first four races according to Hesiod seem to follow a binary set of contradictory values. It has been noted that Hesiod furnishes the race/generation of Heroes with positive values (“the godly race of men-heroes, who are called demi-gods”, *Work and Days*, 159). Thus in the context of war in Troy the Achaean heroes are fighting courageously for rescuing Helen who is known to be the *casus belli*.

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<sup>303</sup> Vernant, 2006, 28.

Then the question remains how does Helen react in this time of war when she the *casus belli* lives among the foreigners in this foreign land of Troy infested with war for her sake? This chapter aims to analyze the narration of time and space in Homer's epics through the "subjective experience" of Helen of Sparta. Her presence in the narrative space of the *Iliad* is limited within the books three, six and twenty four; yet, she as the cause of the Trojan War reverberates throughout the text. She appears along with her husband Menelaos in book four of the *Odyssey* and again in book fifteen at the endpoint of *Telemachia*.

It is worth noting that almost at the beginning of the book three in the *Iliad* when Hector reprimands Paris for not fighting well with Menelaus, the audience can perceive the cause of the present war that happened in the past in a remote land:

Was it in such strength as this that you sailed over the deep in your sea-faring ships, having gathered your trusty comrades and, mingling with foreigners, brought back a fair woman from a distant land, a daughter of warriors who wield the spear, but to your father and city and and all the people a great misery-- to your foes a joy, but to yourself a cause of shame? Will you then not face Menelaus, dear to Ares? (3.46-52)<sup>304</sup>

Clearly, Hector's rebuke to Paris not only states the cause of the present war, it also set the war in relation to time and space.<sup>305</sup> The very cause of the war happened in a distant space and time. Against this background, I begin to survey time and space in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey* in relation to Helen's subjective experience.

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<sup>304</sup> Murray, *The Iliad*, 132-133.

<sup>305</sup> Michael Lynn-George, *Epos Word, Narrative and the Iliad* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1988), 1-49.

## 5.2 Belligerent Time and Woven Space

It has been noted how the narrator depicts in book three Helen's first appearance as the silent weaver at the loom. The audience notices Helen through the eyes of Iris the messenger goddess who found Helen alone in her own chamber weaving a purple web of double fold and she was working into it numerous battles (ἀέθλους) of the "horse-taming Trojans and the bronze-clad Achaeans, which for her sake they had endured at the hands of Ares" (3.125-128). Bergren's<sup>306</sup> exact English translation of the Greek verbs in the original passage underscores Helen's ongoing process in her weaving. Helen was weaving (ὑφαίνε) a robe and the verb is in imperfect tense. The usage of imperfect continues in the verb "embroidering", that is, ἐνέπασσεν in an imperfect form of ἐμπάσσω. She was embroidering in the robe "the many contests" (ἀέθλους) of Trojans and Achaeans which they "were enduring" (ἔπασχον) at the "hands of Ares." Here Helen captures the "famous deeds of men" (κλέα ἀνδρῶν) in her tapestry she is weaving. By weaving the image of the struggling warriors in her tapestry, she captures the heroes in their action. In other words, their heroic time is frozen into her woven space. As the bard (Demodocus) sings the heroes' action in the ancient days and immortalizes them through his poetic creation, Helen also creates a poetic space for the Trojan and Achaean heroes by weaving their action in the visual medium of her tapestry. Time remains static and the warriors are netted into their glorious state in her woven space. In the words of Bergren:

The art of the *Iliad* is the art of the tableau. The two conventions of realistic narration and temporal suspension produce a verbal version of what we will see in Helen's tapestry, the action of struggle in stasis, both movement in time—indeed imperfected movement—and metatemporal permanence, both at once.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Bergren, *Weaving Truth*, 46.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

I have noted in the previous chapters that Homeric women weave and they weave for some purpose. Andromache weaves a web of purple fabric with designs of roses for the well being of her husband (*Il.* 22.440-441). Penelope the paradigm of weaving weaves for the sole purpose of deceiving her suitors. What then, is the purpose of Helen's weaving?<sup>308</sup> I have already mentioned that critiques have noted about Helen's poetic ability in the *Iliad*. Naoko Yamagata writes that considering the pattern of Andromache and Penelope's web, it could be possible to think that Helen's web meant to be for Paris and indirectly for Helen herself. It would be fitting for Paris as the man who caused this war. Furthermore, Helen could have made this web, writes Yamagata, as a shroud for Paris. Or she could have even made the web for herself since she repeatedly expresses her death wish (*Il.* 3.173-4, 6.345-8, 24. 764).<sup>309</sup> Cedric Whitman looked on Helen's web as "the symbol of her self-conscious greatness and guilt, paralleling her speeches to Hector, Priam, and Aphrodite."<sup>310</sup>

Helen's "self-conscious greatness and guilt" demand some attention. Helen's "self-conscious greatness and guilt", I argue, inspires her to record the struggling warriors in action woven in a visual space that will be remembered in future. In other words, Helen's web represents the simultaneous existence of her past and present in anticipation that, someone in the future will notice her work. Moreover, Helen's web is comparable to her thinking afterwards when she claims that later poets will sing of her (*Il.* 6.357-358). It has been noted before about the scholia on Helen's web: "the poet shaped a worthy model

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<sup>308</sup> Naoko Yamagata "Clothing and Identity in Homer: The case of Penelope's web", *Mnemosyne* 58, Fasc.4 (2005), 539-546.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

<sup>310</sup> Cedric Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 118.

of his own poetry.” She only weaves the image of the present battle that has been going on in Troy, as the line 128(3.128) shows that both Trojan and Achaean warriors are fighting “for her sake” (ἔθεν εἵνεκ). If we set side by side Helen’s web and Helen’s proleptic message, then it is possible to look at Helen’s web as a representation of her own past, present, and future.<sup>311</sup> There is no visual representation of her image in the tapestry. We have already noted that the narrator does not present a verbally ornate image of Helen. I have elaborated in the previous chapter how the reputation of her beauty was well established in the past in the section on *Catalogue of Suitors* in Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women*. Helen’s web, therefore, differs from Andromache and from Penelope in a way that it is her visual representation of the ongoing war in relation to her actions in the past. It opens onto the tradition of the Trojan War that speaks of Helen’s reputation (*kleos*) and like a text<sup>312</sup> this woven narrative space will represent Helen also in the future. At this point, it is worth paying attention to the remark of Claude Calame regarding Saint Augustine’s concept of time:

Even philosophically, the present cannot be conceived of except in tension between the past and the future! To give consistency to the present, and thus to time, one must see it in a tensive way, both as remembrance and as anticipation.<sup>313</sup>

Thus Helen of Sparta seems to be a perfect example of someone who lives in Troy in constant relation to her past as the *casus belli*. Furthermore, in her private *megaron*,

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<sup>311</sup> Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, 127.

<sup>312</sup> “In Latin, French, and English there is a close semantic connexion between weaving and literary composition, since *textum*, *texte* and *text* all derive from *tegere*, “to weave.”

George A. Kennedy, “Helen’s web unraveled”, *Arethusa* 19, no.1 (Spring 1986), 5-14.

<sup>313</sup> Claude Calamé. *Poetic and Performative Memory in Ancient Greece: Heroic Reference and Ritual Gestures in Time and Space*, Hellenic Studies 18 (Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2009). See also, Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, book 11 on Time.

Helen creates her poetic space that becomes charged with battle time that is going on during her presence in Troy, not in Sparta.

### 5.3 Helen's Time and Space in the *Teichoscopia* (viewing from the wall)

When Iris comes to fetch her to witness the battle from the wall, we are informed that Iris (goddess) put into Helen's heart "sweet longing for former husband and her city and parents (3.139-40)." Granted that she lives a life that is in constant tension with her past, then, it could be possible that the very name of her former husband made her nostalgic about her past. She immediately leaves her room with tears rolling down her cheeks. We have already noted in the previous chapters how Helen " veiled herself with shining linen" and accompanied by two companions Aethra, daughter of Pittheus, and ox-eyed Clymene, (3.144) walked towards the 'viewing wall'. Here I like to investigate how the movement of the shining body of Helen viewed by the awestruck retired Trojan warriors seated at the rampart makes this wall a highly charged social space where a triple performance of space, time and social being unfolds.

The sight of Helen cloaked in "garments of shining quality" (ἀργεννῆσι καλυψαμένη ὀθόνησιν, *Il.* 3.141) changes the biological time of the old men sitting at the wall. These men too old to fight feel young again.<sup>314</sup> They remark on her fearsome beauty that justifies the beginning of this war, its continuation and yet they recommend her return to Sparta for the future well being of themselves and their children (3.156-160). While

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<sup>314</sup> Laura Slatkin, "Notes on Tragic Visualizing in the Iliad", in *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature. Essays in Honour of Froma Zeitlin*, ed. Chris Kraus, Simon Goldhill, Helen P. Foley, Jas Elsner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19-34.

remarking on Helen's beauty they understand the logic of the war and they use the word *nemesis*, "the strongest term in Homer's shame culture for 'blame'."<sup>315</sup>

Critics have discussed a lot on the term *nemesis* but my concern here is to find out the significance of this word in relation to Helen. First, Helen's beauty sends an ambivalent message to the old men sitting at the wall. According to these old men there is no blame (οὐ νέμεσις) to fight for such a woman yet they do not want to keep her in Troy. In other words, Helen epitomizes ambivalence. Second, the usage of the term *nemesis* opens onto Helen's mythic tradition. Although the Homeric epics do not mention the name of Helen's mother, the term *nemesis* does evoke her mythical birth. It has been already noted that according to the library of Apollodorus in the *Cypria* (West, 2003, pp.88-92) Helen is the child of Zeus and *Nemesis*. The version of Apollodorus informs that Helen is an immortal being who was raised by her mortal mother Leda. Moreover, the version of Athenaeus (334b) in the *Cypria* reports that Nemesis resisting Zeus by changing from one form to another finally took the form of a fish and consummated with Zeus. Then she gave birth to Helen. In both versions, however, Nemesis changed into many forms<sup>316</sup> in resisting the trap of Zeus's sexual desire. On the other hand, after a few lines (3. 238) Helen herself remarks how she and her brothers (Castor and Polydeuces) share the same mother. According to *Odyssey* (11.298) Leda is the mother of Dioskouroi. In that case, Helen is half mortal and half immortal. Another tradition claims that Leda is

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<sup>315</sup> Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 43. On shame culture, see E.R. Dodds (1951,1973, 29-63). On nemesis in the *Iliad*, see Redfield (1975, 113-16).

<sup>316</sup> Compare this myth with one of the creation myths found in the *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* where the primeval being (androgynous) creates a female from his own body and decides to mate with her. She tries to hide herself by being transformed into different animals including insects. He also turns himself into the male animal of the same genus and copulates with her.



her mother who was mated by Zeus in the form of a swan (Euripides, *Helen*, 1.19-21). Naturally, this controversy over her mother presents her with an ontological uncertainty.

At the same time, it becomes clear that the term *nemesis* is intimately tied to Helen's mythical birth. Norman Austin<sup>317</sup> remarks that the stories of Zeus mating with Nemesis and Leda in the form of a swan suggest, that, "both were cognates of an older archetype." Here Helen's body or Helen's "corporeal space"<sup>318</sup> corresponds to the emotion of the retired warriors through her mythical birth, thereby, indicating her past at the present moment and space. Helen's body, especially, her gaze resembling the immortal goddess, symbolizes Helen's own tradition. Yet at present, her role in Troy is to act as a woman who is afraid of being blamed by "the women of Troy (3.412)." In other words, her body in Troy is a repository of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Fortunately, at this point, Priam rescues Helen from the gaze of the elders at the walls.

Priam asks Helen to sit beside him and identify the Achaean warriors in the field below. Now Helen becomes viewer instead of being viewed by the elders. Soon Helen's gaze at the Achaean leaders turns into a remembrance of her past. Homer's Ilion is a city protected by a well-built wall. This wall protects the Trojan people, mainly the non-combatants including women, children and the elderly from the plain of Troy where the Trojan warriors are fighting against the Achaeans. The wall surmounted by towers comprises gates and two of these gates are named in the *Iliad*: Dardanian and Scaean. It is from the Scaean gates the old men and the women of Troy watch the battlefield below.<sup>319</sup> Note that sitting here with the elderly leaders of Troy, Priam asks Helen to identify the

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<sup>317</sup> Austin, 1994, 46, fn. 32.

<sup>318</sup> Tsagalis, 2012, 6.

<sup>319</sup> Jenny Strauss Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theater: Space, vision, and Memory in the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38.

Achaean leaders. Furthermore, this is the same space where Andromache's emotional conversation with her dear husband Hector plays out for the last time (6. 390-493). Again it is at the same wall Priam and Hecabe beg Hector to stay within the city and not to fight Achilles on the plain (xii). The wall stands between family life and heroic death on the Trojan plane of the battlefield. Yet again this emotionally charged meeting place turns into a viewing place where the non-combatants elderly and women take their seats to watch their heroic loved ones in the battlefield as if they are the spectators at a theatre.<sup>320</sup> Most importantly, the view of the vast Achaean army below the Scaean gates at present opens up a distinctive memory of the past.<sup>321</sup> Priam recalls his own journey in the past to the land of Phrygia where he saw multitude of Phrygian warriors with their horses "who were then encamped along the banks of Sangarius." (3.185-187) While Helen identifies Achaean leaders below the Scaean gates Antenor confirms Helen's statement going through his own recollection of meeting with Menelaos and Odysseus when they visited him in his hall (3. 203-224). The wall not only acts as the boundary between domestic space and army encampment but also allow them to see the present in relation to the past. Further, the episode of "viewing from the wall" raises question about Homer's narrative style.

Critics have commented on the anachronistic usage of the "viewing from the wall". According to Walter Leaf, a 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator, "such an objection appears entirely to ignore the poet's liberty."<sup>322</sup> Similarly, Gerard Genette in his *Narrative*

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<sup>320</sup> See Jenny Clay, *Homer's Trojan Theater*, 2011 on the theatricality of the *Iliad*.

<sup>321</sup> See Michael Lynn-George, *Epos: Word, Narrative and the 'Iliad'*, (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1988), 1-37.

<sup>322</sup> Walter Leaf, *A Companion to The Iliad for English Readers*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1892, p.94. <https://archive.org/details/companiontoiliad00leafrich> July.28, 2008, (accessed February, 20, 2017).

*Discourse*<sup>323</sup> makes a crucial observation by illustrating how the *Iliad* begins with the violent anger of Achilles and then the narrator goes back about “ten days” to explain the cause of his anger. While pointing out that this anachronistic narrative style in the Homeric epic, Genette illustrates its important effect on the Western literary tradition:

We know that this beginning *in medias res*, followed by an expository return to an earlier point of time, will become one of the formal topoi of epic, and we also know how faithfully the style of novelistic narration follows in this respect the style of its remote ancestor, even in the heart of the “realistic” nineteenth century. To be convinced of this one need only think of certain of Balzac’s openings, such as those in *Cesar Birotteau* or *La Duchesse de Langeais*... We will thus not be so foolish as to claim that anachrony is either a rarity or a modern invention. On the contrary, it is one of the traditional resources of literary narration.<sup>324</sup>

Kenneth J. Reckford writes in “Helen in the *Iliad*”:

Every theme is psychologically in place. The poet may not have cared about time; but if Helen surveys the Greek forces in the tenth year of the war, it is because the absence of Achilles permits a respite not otherwise possible.<sup>325</sup>

Ann Bergren<sup>326</sup> argues that the *teichoscopia* (viewing from the wall) reflects a temporal suspension as seen in Helen’s tapestry that she ‘was weaving’ (imperfect). Likewise, Bergren explains “the *τειχοσκοπία* “viewing from the wall” becomes part of a design to show beginnings in ends and by that transcendence of linear time, to show simultaneously both something that happened once and what there is in that ‘something’ that ever recurs.<sup>327</sup>

I like to argue that this “something that ever recurs” signifies Helen’s tradition. I read the epic contradiction of time in the *teichoscopia* as the narrator’s style of embedding

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<sup>323</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: 1980) first published in French, 1972.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>325</sup> Reckford, “Helen in the *Iliad*”, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 5, no.1(1964):5-20.

<sup>326</sup> Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek thought*, 2008.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. See also, George Kennedy, “Helen’s web unraveled”, *Arethusa* 19, no.1(Spring 1986),5-14.

Helen's tradition in the *Iliad*. Seen from this point of view, the *teichoscopia* is the reflection of Helen's tapestry. In order to represent the ambivalent Helen narrator uses the term ἀέθλους signifying double meaning for describing the images that Helen was embroidering in her tapestry. Instead of using a forceful battle term the poet prefers a term that could also mean "a contest specifically for a prize".<sup>328</sup> Helen is such a prize for a contest that is repeated here in the plane of Troy. Priam, instead of being Helen's father-in-law, seems to act as her loving father who is curiously asking her dear daughter to introduce her suitors who have gathered below to win her as a prize. Helen, when asked by Priam, readily identifies Agamemnon. While identifying Agamemnon as her brother-in-law she remarks: "And he was husband's brother to shameless me, if ever there was such a one. (3. 180), (δαῖρ αὐτ' ἐμὸς κυνῶπιδος, εἰ ποτ' ἔην γε.)." The English translation of the end part of Helen's statement i.e. "if there was such a one" raises a lot of problem among the classicists<sup>329</sup>. According to Robert Fitzgerald's translation it reads: "or was that life a dream?"<sup>330</sup> Richmond Lattimore writes: "Did this ever happen?"<sup>331</sup> In the context of Helen's *chronotopic* sensitivity, Walter Leaf's commentary<sup>332</sup> seems to be more appropriate. He argued:

"If ever such as one there was", i.e. if it be not all a dream. This seems to be the most likely explanation of the Greek; it is a rhetorical phrase to contrast the present with the happy past. Similar expressions occur in xi, 762, xxiv, 426, and in the *Odyssey*.<sup>333</sup>

The poetic justification of Homer not only presents Troy and Sparta in a temporal binary opposition, but also in a spatial contrast. Thus there emerges a visual spatiotemporal

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<sup>328</sup> Clader, 1976, 7.

<sup>329</sup> Kennedy, 1986, 5-14.

<sup>330</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1975), 73

<sup>331</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951), 105

<sup>332</sup> *ibid.*, 96.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

contrast between Troy and Sparta. Troy being a war zone evokes negativity while Sparta equates with her happy past. Similarly, the present time at Troy is despondent while her life in the past was carefree. Furthermore, the narrator's poetic art not only opens up a spatiotemporal contrast it also opens onto another time another space by using the poetic style of anachrony.

#### **5.4 Helen's happy past/Helen's Sparta**

As the weaver of the struggles caused for her sake between Trojans and Achaeans, Helen surveys the plane below and identifies the Achaean leaders. Before identifying Agamemnon she relates the memory of her home she left through her emotional ties to her bridal chamber, her kinsmen, her beloved daughter and to her childhood friends. Unlike the catalogue of ships in book two, Helen's catalogue in book three describes the leaders in relation to her. Personal relationship seems to be more important to her. Agamemnon is introduced as "son of Atreus", "wide ruling", "noble king" and "mighty spearman" but not as king of Mycenae. Rather, Agamemnon's identity as the brother of her husband is more important to her. Odysseus is identified as raised in rugged Ithaca and more importantly he is a trickster. Priam asks about the identity of Aias the mighty looking warrior but Helen does not say much about him except as a "bulwark of the Achaeans". On the contrary, she volunteers information about Cretan Idomeneus who used to visit Menelaus and Helen in their hall as a guest friend. Note that Helen introduces these warriors not on the basis of their huge military strength. Furthermore, neither Menelaus nor Achilles is counted among this unusual catalogue of Helen. Although the audience knows that Achilles is absent from the battle due to his conflict with Agamemnon and at present he is sulking in his own camp.

The absence of Menelaus and Achilles can be rationalized considering the *Teichoscopia* as a second contest for the re-possession of Helen. It is a reminder of the mythical past when her father Tyndareus and her brothers Kastor and Polydeukes arranged for the marriage of beautiful Helen. Even at that time Menelaus did not woo Helen. Instead it was his brother Agamemnon who wooed Helen on his behalf, although Agamemnon was already married to Helen's sister Klytemnestra. Notably, these suitors who tried to be Helen's husband in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* become the warriors in the *Iliad* in order to rescue Helen from the Trojans. The suitors turned out to be warriors on account of Helen because they took oath, at the request of Helen's father Tyndareus, to defend Helen's husband if any man should abduct her. However, if Achilles were not too young to be Helen's suitor, we are told, neither Menelaus nor any other man on the earth would win Helen's hand (Fr. 155. 50-90). Achilles not being one of Helen's suitors does not belong to the group of the heroes who took oath to help Menelaus in the event if anyone abducts Helen. Then what is his role in the Trojan War? Is it only for his quest for *kleos*? However, one cannot help but notice that Helen's time before the epic tradition is embedded in the *Teichoscopia*. In other words, the "viewing from the wall" (*Teichoscopia*) inaugurates Helen's past in Sparta with her brothers Kastor and Polydeukes.

I would argue that two kinds of traditions emerge especially when Helen cannot locate her twin brothers Kastor and Polydeukes (3.236-38) among the Achaean warriors below the wall. First, Helen addresses them as "my own brothers, whom the same mother bore". If Helen's claim is accepted then Helen's mother must be Leda. Furthermore, according to the *Odyssey* (11.298) Kastor and Polydeukes are the sons of Leda and Tyndareos. The *Catalogue of Women* clearly shows the active roles played by the sons of

Tyndareos in Helen's marriage even though they knew that the husband of Helen would succeed the throne of their father the king Tyndareos of Lakedaimon. Menelaus became the king of Sparta by virtue of his marriage to Helen.

It is well attested by Finkelberg<sup>334</sup> how in Greek Heroic tradition the kingship was not transmitted from father to son. Pelops, Bellerophon, Peleus, Diomedes and many others including the first kings of Athens, for example are mentioned in the list of kings in the Greek Heroic tradition. More importantly, Finkelberg<sup>335</sup> underscores the tradition of a line of queens inherited from mother to daughter. As a result, Helen was acknowledged as the queen of Sparta. It is possible, therefore, to imagine a pattern of succession from father-in-law to son-in-law and from mother to daughter in the Greek Heroic tradition. However uxorilocal<sup>336</sup> the royal household at Sparta seemed to be, the fact remains that Helen's father and brothers were responsible for her marriage contest. Second point is that Helen<sup>337</sup> is ignorant of the fact that her brothers are no longer on earth or "the earth holds them under" understood following the experience of Odysseus (11.298-304) even though the audience is informed about the situation of Kastor and Polydeukes (3.243-244).

At this point it is possible to correlate the name of Aithre with Kastor and Polydeukes. Aithre as one of Helen's companions accompanying her to the Scaean gates

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<sup>334</sup> Margalit Finkelberg. *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>336</sup> Kenneth Atchity and E.J. W. Barber "Greek Princes and Aegean Princesses: The Role of Women in Homeric Poems", *Critical Essays on Homer*, Kenneth Atchity with Ron Hogart and Doug Price. (Boston: G.K. Hall and Co., 1987), 15-36.

<sup>337</sup> Mihoko Suzuki (1989, 40) suggests that Helen's lack of knowledge of her brothers' death "underscores her human limitations."

points to Helen's earlier abduction<sup>338</sup> by Theseus and Aithra was his mother with whom Theseus left Helen. In this event Kastor and Polydeukes had an active role in rescuing their sister Helen from Theseus. In angry retaliation the *dioskouroi* or "sons of God" brought Aithra to Sparta as a slave to Helen. Aithra followed her lady to Troy. However, Kastor and Polydeukes have no role in rescuing their sister from Troy. Although Helen was expecting her twin brothers to be at the plane of Troy for rescuing her as they did in the past from Theseus<sup>339</sup> but their absence in this case made her feel abandoned by her twin brothers perhaps for her own shameless act. Her assumption is incorrect because her twin brothers who are half-mortal and half-immortal are under the earth at this time.

The importance of twin in Helen's tradition is quite noticeable. Clader<sup>340</sup> suggests that while Helen does not have her twin brothers as her saviors in the *Iliad* she has Menelaus and Agamemnon another pair of brothers to rescue her from Troy. She also argues that it is an artistic necessity for Homer to have Kastor and Polydeukes out of the picture.<sup>341</sup> I believe Helen's tradition indicating the prominence of double elements cannot be avoided in the *Iliad*. She belongs to two countries. According to her tradition, Helen's own existence oscillates between semi- mortality and immortality through her mothers Leda/ Nemesis. Whereas her twin brothers have double destiny alternating between life and death<sup>342</sup> through their separate father Zeus/ Tyndareus. The *Iliad* narrates the warring over Helen mainly by the two sons of Arteus against the two sons of Priam.<sup>343</sup> However,

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<sup>338</sup> See Lowell Edmunds, *Stealing Helen: The Myth of the Abducted Wife in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>339</sup> See Cypria, fragment 12.

<sup>340</sup> Clader, 1976, 48-52.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>342</sup> Gregory Nagy, "Helen of Sparta and her very own Eidolon/ Classical Inquiries, accessed January 20, 2017.

<sup>343</sup> See Norman Austin, *Helen of Troy and Her Shameless Phantom* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).



the role of Dioskouroi in Helen's tradition is significant for my purpose as it dovetails with the tradition of Draupadī to whom Helen is being compared and will be discussed below. Clearly, Helen's presence at the viewing wall, instead of being anachronistic, proves to be an artistic way of revealing Helen's own tradition that was current before the epic tradition. Moreover, the viewing wall being the liminal space highlights the equally liminal situation of Helen of Sparta in temporal context. It is on the same liminal space of the wall the goddess Aphrodite in disguise approaches to take away Helen into the bedchamber of Paris.

Aphrodite in the guise of a wool-comber known to Helen in Lacedaemon, touches Helen's perfumed robe (νεκταέου ἔανοῦ, 3.385). Helen recognizes her patron goddess by her beautiful neck, lovely breast and her glittering eyes (3.396). It has been noted earlier how Helen out of fear follows the goddess veiled in a "bright, shining mantle" (3.419) and eludes the notice the Trojan women. Here an illusion of proximity<sup>344</sup> is created through the use of touch, smell, and luminous colour of Helen's robe. Note that if Helen's luminous robe veils her body, Aphrodite's brilliant body observed through Helen's sharp eyes is portrayed in detail for visualization. Helen follows Aphrodite from the liminal space(viewing wall) to the fragrant bedchamber (θαλάμῳ εὐώδει :3.382) of Helen and Paris.

### **5.5 Helen and Paris in their fragrant bedchamber**

Not only their bedchamber is a perfumed space, it is also delineated as the "high-roofed" (ὕψοποφον θάλαμον : 3.423) expressing a sense of speciousness for the audience. The goddess sits Helen down on a chair that she places facing Paris. The audience is thus

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<sup>344</sup> Tsagalis, 2012, 138.

transported to a space embellished with a chemistry of seduction. Now sitting in his perfumed bedchamber Paris remembers his first experience when they made love. But at this moment he claims his desire for Helen is even stronger than when he first seized her. This seduction scene underscores his onrush of desire<sup>345</sup> in a spatiotemporal context whereas it is not clear whether Helen feels the similar surge of desire for Paris. Worman aptly remarks: “The elusive quality of Helen’s body in narrative parallels the opacity of her role in the seductive situation: Helen can be neither fully seen nor fully known.”<sup>346</sup> This time her refusal to comply with Aphrodite in the current seductive situation does not dovetail with her own performance in the past when she abandoned her home, husband, and child in order to pursue the handsome Trojan prince to Troy. However, Helen does follow Paris to bed while war rages in the public space (battlefield).

Helen and Paris in their fragrant bedchamber are seen again in book six of the *Iliad*. Their bedchamber belongs to Paris’ palace. Paris had it built by the best workmen of Troy (6.313-315). His house like the temple of Athena (ἐν πόλει ἄκρη 6.297) is built in the citadel (ἐν πόλει ἄκρη). Among Priam’s sons and daughters only Paris and Hector live in their own palace near their father. Here the brief description of the palace of Paris represents space in association of wealth. In such an opulent space Helen is seen as supervising her handmaids’ magnificent work (6.323-324). Hector with his long spear of bronze with a shining tip of gold enters such a luxurious space where Paris is busy looking at his beautiful weapons. Now Helen asks Hector to sit beside her and speaks to Hector in honey-sweet voice but Hector refuses.

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<sup>345</sup> Note the similar imagery of Zeus’ onrush of desire for Hera in the *Iliad* 14. 313-328.

<sup>346</sup> Worman, “The Body as Argument: Helen in Four Greek Texts,” *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 1 (Apr., 1997): 163.

I like to point out the temporal markers in Helen's speech in presence of Paris and Hector in the shiny bedchamber of Paris and Helen. She starts with her usual speech in a self-debasing mode calling herself "a dog" (ἐμεῖο κυνὸς: 6.344, 6.356, 3.180), for example. As before (3.173-4) she wishes to die but this time her death wish is much more elaborate with cosmic element a gust of wind that would have swept her away before the Trojan War began:

I wish that on the day when first my mother gave me birth an evil blast of wind had carried me away to some mountain or to the wave of the loud-resounding sea, where the wave would have swept me before these things came to pass (6. 345-348).

ὥς μ' ὄφελ' ἦματι τῷ ὅτε με πρῶτον τέκε μήτηρ  
οἴχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακὴ ἀνέμοιο θύελλα  
εἰς ὄρος ἢ εἰς κῦμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,  
ἔνθά με κῦμ' ἀπόερσε πάρος τάδε ἔργα γενέσθαι.

The above speech of Helen shows her strong desire to erase her distant past, that is, the very day when her mother first bore her. Interestingly, here the time for Helen is a marker—a marked past that should have swept away her existence through a stormy wind before the beginning of the Trojan War. Compare how Penelope while praying to Artemis in the book twenty of the *Odyssey* expresses a similar wish of Helen:

Artemis, mighty goddess, daughter of Zeus, would that now you would fix your arrow in my breast and take away my life in this very hour; or else that a storm wind might catch me up and bare me from here over the murky ways, and cast me away at the mouth of backward-flowing Oceanus, as once storm winds bore away the daughters of Pandareüs (*Odyssey*, 20.61-66).<sup>347</sup>

Ἄρτεμι, πότνα θεά, θύγατερ Διός, αἶθε μοι ἤδη  
ἰὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι βαλοῦς' ἐκ θυμὸν ἔλοιο  
αὐτίκα νῦν, ἢ ἔπειτά μ' ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα  
οἴχοιτο προφέρουσα κατ' ἡερόεντα κέλευθα,  
ἐν προχοῇς δὲ βάλοι ἀπορρόου Ὠκεανοῖο.  
ὥς δ' ὅτε Πανδαρέου κόυρας ἀνέλοντο θύελλαι·

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<sup>347</sup> The *Odyssey*, trans. A.T. Murray, 1998.

In the words of Purves, both Helen and Penelope wish that a violent wind “could have broken into the narrative frame and swept them out of their poem’s existence.”<sup>348</sup>

Helen moves from what could have been most desirable in the distant past to her present stage of life when she wishes for a better husband than what she has at present. In the framework of time, Helen’s subjective experience leads her to move from past to present and then to future. Her self-awareness and her poetic consciousness enable her to foresee the future when she along with Paris and Hector will survive in the song of the future poet: “on us Zeus has brought an evil doom, so that even in days to come we may be song for men that are yet to be (6.357-58).” I am suggesting that Helen’s self-awareness of being the *casus belli*, her desire to avoid being in that role, her desire to have a better husband, and then her future role in oral poetry highlight a linear movement of time. Unfortunately, this movement of time is visualized in a space that is fragrant yet sad. Opulence of Paris’ palace is unable to satiate Helen’s desire. Helen’s appreciation of Hector’s personality is noteworthy during her lamentation at the time of Hector’s funeral.

## 5.6 The Space of Lamentation

Hector’s body is brought back from Achilles and the Trojans gather at the house of Priam to mourn Hector’s death. It has been discussed how there is a change in the structural order of three mourners of Hector, namely, Andromache, Hecabe, and Helen in the *Iliad* twenty-four. This tripartite order of mourners appears problematic considering Helen is the cause for Hector’s death. Moreover, J. Kakridis in his book entitled *Homeric*

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<sup>348</sup> Alex C. Purves, “Wind and Time in Homeric Epic”, *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 140, no. 2 (Autumn 2010): 323-350.

*Researches*<sup>349</sup> establishes that the poems of Homer use an “ascending scale of affection.”

In other words, in a set of friends and relatives, typically the closest person, that is, the wife is named last. The *Iliad* twenty-two follows this pattern where the sequence of lamentation for Hector starts with his mother and father, the people of Troy, and finally ends with his wife Andromache (22. 477-514). However, the order of participants is different in book twenty-four. Hector’s lamentation starts appropriately with Andromache but curiously ends with Helen as the final mourner. In this context Maria Pantelia<sup>350</sup> suggests that “Helen’s role as the final mourner is dictated not by gender or kinship but by her unique understanding of the importance of *kleos* and of poetry as a means of *kleos*.”

Helen’s poetic awareness of creating song to preserve heroic *kleos* is significant from her very first appearance in the *Iliad* (3.121-28). Furthermore, in book six she reassures Hector, that their sufferings for her sake will be remembered in the song for future generations (6.357-58). Likewise, while lamenting for Hector she remembers his gentle and kind nature, not what will happen to the mourner in the future without Hector (24.771-72). Helen immortalizes Hector by remembering his past glory through her song of lamentation. I am suggesting Helen’s song of lamentation for Hector is a reflection of her web. Here she is connecting Hector’s past glory with his future place in the epic poetry in which Helen is contributing at present. Time, therefore, can be visualized in a continuous spectrum of past, present, and future. Helen’s lamentation<sup>351</sup> at present will

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<sup>349</sup> Johannes TH. Kakridis, *Homeric Researches*, a Garland series (1949; repr. , New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 19-20.

<sup>350</sup> Pantelia, “Helen and the Last Song for Hector”, *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 132, no.1/2 (Autumn, 2002): 21-27.

<sup>351</sup> G. Holst-Warhaft remarks: “laments are conscious artistic narratives created and performed by women.” *Dangerous voices: Women’s Laments and Greek Literature* (London: Routledge, 1995), 97.

make sure that Hector's past glory will survive in future poem<sup>352</sup>. However, Helen's statement of time passed in Troy raises some confusion.

As Helen's lamentation mainly focuses on Hector's kindness shown towards her, she underscores her long stay in Troy: "For this is now the twentieth year from the time when I went from there and have gone from my native land... (24.765-66)" It is well accepted that after nine years of siege, Troy falls in the tenth year. Murray explains this unusual statement of Helen in the footnote of his translation of the *Iliad*:

This astonishing statement is perhaps to be explained by the legend that the Greeks shortly after Helen's abduction had made an abortive expedition against Troy, but landed by mistake in Mysia. Thence they returned to Greece, and it was only after ten years that their forces were reassembled. This legend is elsewhere entirely unknown to Homer, but it harmonizes with the form of the story which gives Achilles a grown son (see 19. 327). The whole suggests, however, an elaborate parallelism which arouses suspicion: nine years of preparation, the fleet sails in the tenth; nine years of siege, Troy falls in the tenth; nine years of wandering, Odysseus reaches home in the tenth (fn.11, p.620-21).

Nicholas Richardson points out two possible explanations for Helen's understanding of her time spent in Troy. First, she left her home a long time ago and yet Hector has always been kind to her during her long sojourn in Troy. Second, Homer uses twenty as a standard number, *Il.* 13.260, 16.847, *Od.* 4.360, 5.34, for example.<sup>353</sup> Note that Odysseus also returns to Ithaca in the twentieth year from the time he left (*Od.* 19. 223) Ithaca to join in the Trojan War.

However, Helen's role at the lamentations of Hector raises the unresolved question of her ambiguous position in the Trojan society. Who is Helen? As a kinswoman of

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<sup>352</sup> According to Suzuki, the *Iliad* is a funeral: "The poem itself is a funeral, an elegy to the civilization that was destroyed, a heroic society that passed away, as well as to the individual men and women who were caught in the process." *Metamorphoses of Helen*, 1988, 53.

<sup>353</sup> Nicholas Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary, Volume VI: books 21-24* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 358.

Hector she laments for Hector yet she is a stranger in Troy. Her existence as a stranger is the very reason why the people of Troy, except Priam and Hector, avoid her. She understands her own ambivalent situation in Troy and thus she mourns for her own “unlucky self” along with Hector:

So I wail alike for you and for my unlucky self with grief at heart; for no longer have I anyone else in broad Troy who is gentle to me or kind; but all men shudder at me (24. 773-75).

τὸ σέ θ' ἄμα κλαίω καὶ ἔμ' ἄμμορον ἀχνυμένη κῆρ·  
οὐ γάρ τις μοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ εὐρείῃ  
ἥπιος οὐδὲ φίλος, πάντες δέ με πεφρίκασιν.

The narrator of the *Iliad* introduces Helen with a death wish for her own self (3.173) and similarly ends the role of Helen grieving for her own self while gloriously participating at the lamentation of Hector. The *Iliad* ends with the death of Hector, “the best of the Trojans” but the life of elusive Helen the *casus belli* continues in the *Odyssey*.

### 5.7 Helen back in Sparta in the Time of Peace

In the *Iliad* Helen of Sparta followed Paris the prince of Troy to his home and in the *Odyssey* she is back in Sparta comfortably living in the palace with her husband Menelaus. Although the narrator does not weave any story about Helen’s return (*nostos*) to Sparta, but the meeting of Helen and Menelaus after the fall of Troy was a popular theme in vase painting of the classical period.<sup>354</sup> We are told that Ibycus<sup>355</sup> a South Italian poet of sixth century BCE writes (fr.296, now lost) how after the fall of Troy Helen took refuge into the temple of Aphrodite and Menelaus advanced to kill her but dropped the sword at the sight of her. Nevertheless, the narrator of the *Odyssey* does not provide any

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<sup>354</sup> Lilly, Ghali-Kahil, *Les enlèvements et le retour d'Hélène dans les textes et les documents figures*, 2.vols (Paris: E. de Bocard, 1955).

<sup>355</sup> See Norman Austin 1994,73; Ruby Blondell 2013, 52.

such story about Helen and Menelaus. The world of the *Odyssey* is post war; it is peaceful and cherishes family values. Helen is not a stranger here; her ambiguous status is resolved and she is a happily married Spartan wife, the mistress of the palace of Menelaus. Helen and Menelaus appear in books four and in fifteen of the *Odyssey*. However, the narrator devotes the entire book four telling about Helen and Menelaus. I like to delve into the presentation of time and space surrounding Helen and Menelaus in books four and fifteen.

### 5.8 The presentation of time and space in book four

I take a cue from Norman Austin's understanding of Homeric notation of time: "Homer's temporal notations carry a wealth of associations related to communal life, to daily human activity, and to the changing aspects of nature."<sup>356</sup> While the notion of temporality in the *Odyssey* is related to human activities, the guiding principle, I suggest, is the Greek notion of polarity. Scholars<sup>357</sup> have written extensively on the concept of polarity in archaic Greek thought. Bergren's relevant insight on the pervasiveness of the notion of polarity in archaic Greek thought is significant for my concern in constructing spatiotemporal relevance in understanding Helen in these two books of the *Odyssey*:

To begin to study Greek is to learn of its pervasive antitheses, built around the particles, μέν, "on the one hand", and δέ, "on the other hand". Supported by such syntax are the dualities of myth, philosophy, and social organization, pairs so various, subtle, and interconnected by opposition and analogy that the principle of analogous bi-polar oppositions would seem to be the mental paradigm of the age.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Austin 1975, p.85

<sup>357</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Hestia –Hermes: The Religious expressions of Space and Movement" in *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, translated by Janet Lloyd with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006). First published in French as *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris: Librairie François Maspero, 1965); G.E.R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Ann Bergren, *Weaving Truth: Essays on Language and the Female in Greek Thought*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2008).

<sup>358</sup> Bergen, *Weaving Truth*, 2008, 111.



Henceforth, I aim to view the spatiotemporal effect on Helen of the *Odyssey* through the notion of polarity. However, the notion of polarity in a spatiotemporal context becomes visible in relation to human activities. The narrator introduces Helen of Sparta for the first time in book four of the *Odyssey* in which the interconnectedness of the notion of polarity with human experiences prevails.

### 5.9 The Notion of Polarity in book four of the *Odyssey*

Book four of the *Odyssey* starts with a brief description of a rough space travelled by two riders, Telemachus the son of Odysseus, and Peisistratos the son of Nestor before arriving at the opulent palace of Menelaus. The time is festive and the space is vibrant with the festive mood of the people in the palace:

And they came to the hollow land of Lacedaemon with its many ravines, and drove to the palace of glorious Menelaus. Him they found giving a marriage feast to his many kinsfolk for his flawless son and daughter within his house. His daughter he was sending to the son of Achilles, breaker of the ranks of men, for in the land of Troy he first had promised and pledged that he would give her, and now the gods were bringing their marriage to pass. Her then he was sending forth with horses and chariots to go her way to the glorious city of the Myrmidons, over whom her lord was king; but for his son he was bringing to his home from Sparta the daughter of Alector, to wed the stalwart Megapenthes, who was his son well-beloved, born of a slave woman; for to Helen gods vouchsafed issue no more after she had at the first borne her lovely child, Hermione, who had the beauty of golden Aphrodite. So they were feasting in the great high-roofed hall, the neighbors and kinsfolk of glorious Menelaus, and making merry; and among them a divine minstrel was singing to the lyre, and two tumblers whirled up and down through the midst of them, leading the dance (4. 1-19).<sup>359</sup>

Οἱ δ' ἴξον κοίλῃν Λακεδαίμονα κητώεσσαν,  
 πρὸς δ' ἄρα δώματ' ἔλων Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο.  
 τὸν δ' εὖρον δαινύντα γάμον πολλοῖσιν ἔτησιν  
 υἱέος ἠδὲ θυγατρὸς ἀμύμονος ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ.  
 τὴν μὲν Ἀχιλλῆος ῥηξήνορος υἱεῖ πέμπεν·  
 ἐν Τροίῃ γάρ πρῶτον ὑπέσχετο καὶ κατένευσε  
 δωσέμεναι, τοῖσιν δὲ θεοὶ γάμον ἐξετέλειον·

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<sup>359</sup> A.T. Murray.

τὴν ἄρ' ὃ γ' ἔνθ' ἵπποισι καὶ ἄρμασι πέμπε νέεσθαι  
 Μυρμιδόνων προτὶ ἄστν περικλυτόν, οἷσιν ἄνασσαν.  
 υἱεὶ δὲ Σπάρτηθεν Ἀλέκτορος ἦγετο κούρην,  
 ὅς οἱ τηλύγετος γένετο κρατερὸς Μεγαπένθης  
 ἐκ δούλης· Ἑλένη δὲ θεοὶ γόνον οὐκέτ' ἔφαινον,  
 ἐπεὶ δὴ τὸ πρῶτον ἐγείνατο παῖδ' ἐρατεινήν,  
 Ἑρμιόνην, ἣ εἶδος ἔχε χρυσεῖς Ἀφροδίτης.  
 ὥς οἱ μὲν δαίνυντο καθ' ὑπερεφές μέγα δῶμα  
 γείτονες ἡδὲ ἔται Μενελάου κυδαλίμοιο,  
 τερπόμενοι· μετὰ δέ σφιν ἐμέλπετο θεῖος ἀοιδὸς  
 φορμίζων· δοιῶ δὲ κυβιστητῆρε κατ' αὐτοὺς  
 μολπῆς ἐξάρχοντες ἐδίνεον κατὰ μέσσοις.

The above passage depicts the festive time narrating the joyous activities of neighbors and the families celebrating the double wedding of Menelaus' son and daughter. The cavernous road of Lacedaemon is juxtaposed by the luxurious 'high- roofed hall' where song and dance being performed. This passage underscores, in particular, the notion of polarity in ancient Greek thought. To put it in another way, the spatiotemporal situation is happy, albeit Helen is absent. In the midst of this joyous celebration marking the double wedding at the palace, arrive Telemachus and Peisistratus at the gate of the palace. While Eteoneus the squire of Menelaus cannot decide whether they should be treated as "guests" or "strangers", Menelaus welcomes them as "guests". They are given a bath by servant women and treated with sumptuous meal.

At this point, Telemachus wonders about the glittering wealth of bronze, gold, electrum, silver, and of ivory all around the hall. It is clear that here, Telemachus is the "focalizer"<sup>360</sup> through whose eyes the audience visualizes the glitter of Menelaus' hall. He speaks discreetly to Peisistratus suggesting that the court of Olympian Zeus may look

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<sup>360</sup> "Focalizer: the person (the narrator or a character) through whose 'eyes' the events and persons of a narrative are 'seen'". See the excellent article on "Narratological Theory on Space" by Irene J. F. de Jong, *Space in Ancient Greek Literature: Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*, ed. Irene J. F. de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

like this (4.71-75). Although it is not meant for Menelaus' ears, he can hear and disproves the comparison with Zeus' halls. Nevertheless, he does agree about his unmatched wealth and this reference to his wealth makes him speak at length about his travel to many lands on his way home after fighting in Trojan War. He has gathered an enormous amount of wealth during his seven years of travel yet this wealth does not seem to assuage his painfully memory of the past. He mourns the death of his brother Agamemnon brought about by "the guile of his accursed wife". Similarly, he cannot forget his very own suffering due to his wife's elopement to which he refers only indirectly:

Thus, you may understand, I have no joy in being lord of this wealth; and you may well have heard of this from your fathers, whosoever they may be, for greatly indeed did I suffer, and saw the ruin of a stately house, stored with much excellent treasure (4. 93-96).

ὥς οὗτοι χαίρων τοῖσδε κτεάτεσσιν ἀνάσσω· —  
καὶ πατέρων τάδε μέλλετ' ἀκουέμεν, οἳ τινες ὕμιν  
εἰσὶν· — ἐπεὶ μάλα πολλὰ πάθον καὶ ἀπώλεσα οἶκον  
εἴ μάλα ναιετάοντα, κεχανδότα πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλά.

Clearly, Menelaus is pointing to Helen of the *Iliad* in which she is relentlessly associated with the phrase "Helen and all her possessions" (*Il.* 3. 72, 92, 255, 282, 285). Despite the victory of the Achaeans and his return to Sparta with Helen, his past haunts him forever. Note that Helen of the *Iliad* does not stop thinking about her past in Sparta either.

Consequently, Menelaus mourns the absence of his comrade Odysseus (4. 76-112). The very name of Odysseus brings tears to Telemachus' eyes and he tries to cover his eyes with his purple tunic. Now Menelaus realizes the true identity of Telemachus but cannot decide how to tell him. Thus the much sought after wealth becomes unwanted, the joyous space unhappy and the time of celebration becomes a memorial service. A mood of melancholy pervades the hall dazzling with glitter.

In the midst of the sadness and glitter enters Helen the queen of Sparta in the shining hall. The narrator depicts her coming from her “fragrant high-roofed” chamber indicating a space that is suitable for a queen. In this gleaming setting Helen is compared to the Olympian goddess “Artemis of the golden distaff”. In fact, the passage depicting Helen’s shimmering equipment and her handmaiden’s activities to place her comfortably on a chair with a footstool below her feet is noteworthy:

While he (Menelaus) pondered thus in mind and heart, forth then from her fragrant high-roofed chamber came Helen, like Artemis of golden distaff; and with her came Adraste, and placed for her a chair, beautifully wrought, and Alcippe brought a rug of soft wool and Phylo a silver basket, which Alcandre had given her, the wife of Polybus who dwelt in Thebes of Egypt, where greatest store of wealth is laid up in men’s houses. He gave to Menelaus two silver baths and two tripods and ten talents of gold. And besides these, his wife gave to Helen also beautiful gifts—a golden distaff and a basket with wheels did she give, a basket of silver, and its rims were gilded with gold. This then the handmaid Phylo brought and placed beside her, filled with finely spun yarn, and across it was laid the distaff laden with violet- dark wool. So Helen sat down upon the chair, and below was a footstool for the feet; and at once she questioned her husband on each matter (4.120-35).

εἷος ὁ ταῦθ' ὥρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,  
ἐκ δ' Ἑλένη θαλάμοιο θυώδεος ὑπορόφοιο  
ἤλυθεν Ἀρτέμιδι χρυσηλακάτῳ ἐϊκυῖα.  
τῇ δ' ἄρ' ἅμ' Ἀδρήστη κλισίην εὐτυκτον ἔθηκεν,  
Ἀλκίππῃ δὲ τάπητα φέρεν μαλακοῦ ἐρίοιο,  
Φυλῶ δ' ἀργύρεον τάλαρον φέρε, τόν οἱ ἔδωκεν  
Ἀλκάνδρη, Πολύβοιο δάμαρ, ὅς ἐναι' ἐνὶ Θήβης  
Αἰγυπτίῃσ', ὅθι πλεῖστα δόμοισ' ἐν κτήματα κεῖται·  
ὅς Μενελάῳ δῶκε δὺ' ἀργυρέας ἀσαμίνθους,  
δοιούς δὲ τρίποδας, δέκα δὲ χρυσοῖο τάλαντα.  
χωρὶς δ' αὖθ' Ἑλένη ἄλοχος πόρε κάλλιμα δῶρα·  
χρυσῆν τ' ἡλακάτην τάλαρόν θ' ὑπόκυκλον ὅπασσεν  
ἀργύρεον, χρυσῶ δ' ἐπὶ χεῖλεα κεκράαντο.  
τόν ῥα οἱ ἀμφίπολος Φυλῶ παρέθηκε φέρουσα  
νήματος ἀσκητοῖο βεβυσμένον· αὐτὰρ ἐπ' αὐτῷ  
ἡλακάτῃ τετάνυστο ἰοδνεφὲς εἶρος ἔχουσα.  
ἔζετο δ' ἐν κλισμῷ, ὑπὸ δὲ θρῆνυς ποσὶν ἦεν.  
αὐτίκα δ' ἢ γ' ἐπέεσσι πόσιν ἐρέεινεν ἕκαστα·

### 5.10 Helen of the *Odyssey* in the Spatio-temporal context

Here the narrator adds more brilliance through Helen to the already brilliant hall of Menelaus. Although this is not a long ekphrasis like the depiction of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* XVIII, definitely, this creates a mental image of Helen as the queen of Sparta or the head of the royal household. Helen descends from her “fragrant high-roofed chamber” like a goddess. Note that she is compared to one of the Olympian goddesses “Artemis with golden distaff” whereas Menelaus refuses to compare his gleaming hall to Zeus’. Mihoko Suzuki suggests that by comparing Helen with Artemis, the goddess of chastity the narrator of the *Odyssey* transforms Helen from a “woman of passion to a chaste wife”.<sup>361</sup>

She may be a chaste wife but she is not an ordinary spinner. She appears with “a golden distaff” and the narrator gives a detailed description of Helen’s workbasket that is made of silver and to make it more valuable the craftsman covered its rims with shining gold and attached wheels on it. Clearly, this workbasket is a prized object and is placed beside Helen’s beautifully wrought chair where Helen will be seated. Not only this is a prized object also this is a gift given to Helen by Alcandre the wife of Polybus who lived in Thebes of Egypt and many houses in this city are filled with treasure. Four clues are mapped onto the workbasket of Helen. First, it is a gift given to Helen; second, the giver’s name is given; third, it has travelled far from Thebes of Egypt and finally, it is a city with treasure stored in people’s houses. Furthermore, through the dynamic aspect of the static object the narrator also embeds a temporal aspect into Helen’s workbasket. But how is it possible to have a temporal aspect of a prized object? Tsagalis aptly explains: “ By

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<sup>361</sup> Suzuki 1989, 64.

cataloguing the various owners of an object, the storyteller translates time (the remote and vast period of the past) into space.”<sup>362</sup> In other words, Helen’s precious equipment of spinning becomes a marker for Helen’s time in the land of Egypt.

Seen from the perspective of the notion of polarity, Menelaus is silent about Helen’s presence in Egypt while he narrates how he wandered over Cyprus, Phoenicia, Ethiopia, Libya and most importantly Egypt. He even recounts in detail how he encountered Proteus “the old man of the sea” and he was told that Odysseus was alive. During the same encounter, Proteus revealed to Menelaus about his own destiny. Only at this point Menelaus mentioned Helen’s name as Proteus prophesied that he would have immortal bliss in Elysium as a reward for being married to Helen.

Similarly, Menelaus after a long conversation with Telemachus hesitates to recognize him as the son of Odysseus while Helen is able to identify him as the son of Odysseus upon her very entrance into the glittering hall:

Shall I disguise my thought, or speak the truth? My heart bids me speak. For never yet, I declare, saw I one so like another, whether man or woman—amazement holds me, as I look—as this man is like the son of great hearted Odysseus, Telemachus, whom that warrior left a newborn child in his house when for the sake of shameless me you Achaeans came up under the walls of Troy, pondering in your hearts fierce war (4.140-146).

ψεύσομαι ἢ ἔτυμον ἔρέω; κέλεται δέ με θυμός.  
οὐ γάρ πώ τινά φημι ἐοικότα ὧδε ιδέσθαι  
οὔτ' ἄνδρ' οὔτε γυναῖκα, σέβας μ' ἔχει εἰσορόωσαν,  
ὡς ὅδ' Ὀδυσσῆος μεγαλήτορος υἱὸς ἔοικε,  
Τηλεμάχῳ, τὸν ἔλειπε νέον γεγαῶτ' ἐνὶ οἴκῳ  
κεῖνος ἀνὴρ, ὅτ' ἐμεῖο κυνώπιδος εἶνεκ' Ἀχαιοὶ  
ἦλθεθ' ὑπὸ Τροίην, πόλεμον θρασὺν ὀρμαίνοντες.”

Significantly, the above passage marks Helen’s uncanny ability of recognition and more importantly her Muse like ability of disguising the truth or speaking the truth. Considering

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<sup>362</sup> Tsagalis 2012, 15.

the duality of her character, it seems difficult to analyze the purpose of her acceptance as *casus belli* and thereby the sufferings of the Achaeans. Perhaps, this is a prelude to her personal tale of patriotism told at the private banquet to Menelaus, Telemachus, and Peisistratos under the influence of Helen's *pharmakon*.

### 5.11 Helen's *pharmakon*

Helen's *pharmakon* associates her with the mysterious land of Egypt once again in the *Odyssey*. During the banquet at the palace, the storyteller tells us that Helen "daughter of Zeus" (Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα) drops into the wine of their two young guests a drug (φάρμακον): "a drug to quiet all pain and strife, and bring forgetfulness of every ill" (νηπενθές τ' ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων: 4.221). Moreover, the narrator tells the audience that these "cunning drugs" (φάρμακα μητιόεντα) had been given by Polydama the wife of Thon of Egypt to Helen "daughter of Zeus" (Διὸς θυγάτηρ). Evidently, these drugs that Helen the queen of Sparta possesses also indicate a spatiotemporal aspect as these have been given to her in past in Egypt by another owner and apparently Helen travelled back to Sparta with these drugs. Yet Menelaus' tale does not include Helen in Egypt. Interestingly, Nestor and Odysseus the other two survivors of the Trojan War do not recount any tale about Helen. In book three of the *Odyssey* Nestor speaks at length about the sufferings of the Achaeans in Troy and their return journey (3.102-183, 276-326); but he does not say whether Helen accompanied Menelaus. Nor does Odysseus' account reveal Helen's presence in their return journey, except, in the book eleven (11.438) during his visit in the underworld he makes a comment: "For Helen's sake many of us perished..." (Ἑλένης μὲν ἀπωλόμεθ' εἵνεκα πολλοί). One could ask whether Helen of the *Odyssey* wants to erase her past as the woman who caused much sufferings to the

Achean heroes. I like to suggest that Helen of Sparta tries to create her patriotic glory by manipulating the spatiotemporal aspect of Trojan War.

### 5.12 Helen's own story in Trojan Space at the Time of the war

It has been noted that Helen accepts her guilt at the time of recognizing Telemachus in the hall of Menelaus. She possesses an unusual power of recognition and also a dual nature raising question about her statement. At the very beginning of the line 140, for example, raises the notion of her dual nature: “ Shall I disguise my thought, or speak the truth(φεύσομαι ἢ ἔτυμον ἐρέω;)?” Helen's Muse like ability, noted by various scholars, in the *Odyssey* endows her weave stories like a bard.<sup>363</sup> Moreover, with the help of the famous φάρμακον “drug” given to Helen by Polydama of Egypt, Helen tells story about her recognition of Odysseus disguised as a beggar when she was in Troy. This story will create a delightful mood, opposite to the melancholic atmosphere created by Menelaus, for the two young men at the banquet. Before beginning her μύθος “story”, Helen invokes the power of Zeus who gives good and ill “at one time to one and at another to another (4.236-27)” suggesting the polarizing power of Zeus. The story that Helen relates (4.240-264) projects Troy in a different spatiotemporal aspect. First, Troy is chosen to be the space to showcase the κλέος of Odysseus but more importantly, it seems, to display Helen's own “fame”. Unlike in the *Iliad*, now for Helen, Troy does not appear to be a space indicating her suffering. Second, time at Troy also transforms itself from lonely time to a time of her *kleos* when Helen of Sparta can prove herself as an ally of the Achaeans.

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<sup>363</sup> Bergren 2008, 119.



Helen controls her narration by placing Odysseus in a clandestine mission to Troy. Although Odysseus entered Troy in beggar's disguise but only Helen could recognize him. At this point, her story is believable as it has been noted how she recognized Telemachus immediately. Upon recognition Helen bathed, anointed, and put clothes on Odysseus (4.252). Then she took an oath of not revealing his presence in Troy before he had gone back to his ships. Only at this point, Odysseus told her about the plans of the Achaeans and escaped safely. However, along the way to his return Odysseus slaughtered many Trojans. Naturally the Trojan women lamented their loss but Helen rejoiced:

Then the other Trojan women wailed aloud, but my soul was glad, for already my heart was turned to go back to my home, and I groaned for the blindness that Aphrodite gave me, when she led me there from my dear native land, forsaking my child and my bridal chamber, and my husband, a man who lacked nothing, whether in wisdom or in looks (4.259-264).

ἐνθ' ἄλλαι Τρῳαὶ λίγ' ἐκώκυον· αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ  
χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ ἤδη μοι κραδίη τέτραπτο νεέσθαι  
ἄψ οἰκόνδ', ἅτην δὲ μετέστενον, ἦν Ἀφροδίτη  
δῶχ', ὅτε μ' ἤγαγε κεῖσε φίλης ἀπὸ πατρίδος αἴης,  
παῖδά τ' ἐμὴν νοσφισσαμένην θάλαμόν τε πόσιν τε  
οὐ τευ δευόμενον, οὔτ' ἄρ φρένας οὔτε τι εἶδος.

This is Helen's story carefully calibrated to maintain her faithfulness to her husband who lacks nothing, to transpose her guilt on Aphrodite, and most importantly, to establish her *kleos* along with Odysseus. It is interesting to note how in Helen's story space the disguised body of Odysseus is used as a "corporeal space"<sup>364</sup> in order to display *kleos* on behalf of Odysseus as well as Helen. Following Bourdieu and Vernant I read body as a site of social concern. Here it seems clear that the disguised body of lower rank helps Odysseus to enter secretly inside the Scaean gates and at the same time the same disguised body furnishes Helen with a special pride of recognizing Odysseus through his

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<sup>364</sup> See Tsagalis, 2011, 6.

disguise. Furthermore, the process of deciphering his body provides Helen the opportunity to show her loyalty to the Achaeans. But how this human body of the lowest rank in a society enters a palace remains unsolvable. However, the only possible answer, I suggest, is that this story shows Helen's nature of self-aggrandizement told in a "fitting manner". Subsequently, Menelaus relates his story narrating Helen's disloyalty to the Achaeans.

### **5.13 Menelaus's story under the influence of drugged wine**

In the story-space of Menelaus, unlike in Helen's, Troy remains as the land of enemy from where he is going to retrieve his wife Helen and she, appears to be the ally of the Trojans instead. His story also took place in Troy during the time of the Trojan War. Furthermore his report of Helen comes from an enclosed space from which it is difficult to see. While Menelaus along with Odysseus and his comrades were waiting inside the wooden horse placed within the Scaean gate, he heard Helen's voice. Menelaus recalls her circling the wooden horse three times, touching and mimicking the voices of the Argive wives. Menelaus thought that Helen, at that point, was acting under the influence of a god wishing to grant glory to the Trojans. He even remembers Deiphobus following behind Helen (4.274-279). Who is this Helen? Could Menelaus manage to have a glimpse of Helen? He does not recall seeing her; he only heard her mimicking voice.

Helen's mimicking ability recalls the Maiden of Delos in the *Hymn to Apollo* (162-64) in which these maidens could mimic all voices. Note that even in his memory space Menelaus had doubt about Helen's irrational behavior and decided to blame on some "superhuman power" (δαίμων) just as Helen, in her story space, blamed Aphrodite

for following Paris to Troy (4. 261-64). Even Priam in the *Iliad*, as we know, blames gods for Helen's folly (3.164).<sup>365</sup>

Who is this Helen who knew the ambiguous effect of her φάρμακον ? The narrator marks these drugs as the “cunning drugs” (φάρμακα μητιόεντα) or “possessing *metis*” usually known as the epithet of Zeus. Bertolin aptly remarks: “Helen through the drug, wants to assume the role of Zeus in determining what is to be remembered and what not.”<sup>366</sup> Clearly, this seems to be the reason behind Helen's abrupt invocation to Zeus before telling the story to men at the banquet. In addition, Helen's drug “possessing *metis*” travels from the land of Egypt where, we are told:

For there the earth, the giver of grain, bears greatest store of drugs, many that are healing when mixed, and many that are baneful;

Αἰγυπτίῃ, τῇ πλεῖστα φέρει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα  
φάρμακα, πολλὰ μὲν ἐσθλὰ μεμιγμένα, πολλὰ δὲ λυγρὰ (4.229-30)

Thus the drugs in Egypt have their own characteristics and Helen as a head of the household uses the drug for manipulating the conversations at the banquet thereby, establishing her authority over her guests.

#### 5.14 Prized objects symbolizing Space and Time

It is remarkable how many precious gifts she has received during her travel from Egypt to Troy. In other words, like the Homeric men, she too has gathered gifts “via a network of guest friends of a kind that is normally limited to men.”<sup>367</sup> Likewise, she also bestows gifts upon others. Compare the scene of Telemachus' departure in book fifteen

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<sup>365</sup> See Dodds 1951, pp. 2-8.

<sup>366</sup> Reyes Bertolin, “The Search for Truth in *Odyssey* 3 and 4”, Splendide Mendax: *Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature*, ed. Edmund P. Cueva and Javier Martinez (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2016).

<sup>367</sup> Blondell, 2013, 76.

where both Menelaus and Helen enter their storage and then appear with most “most beautiful gifts” for Telemachus. The narrator delineates in detail how Helen selects her gift for Telemachus:

And Helen came to the chests in which were her richly embroidered robes, that she herself had made. One of these Helen, the beautiful woman, lifted out and brought, the one that was most beautiful in its embroideries, and the amplest. It shone like a star, and lay beneath all the rest (15. 104-108)

Ἑλένη δὲ παρίστατο φοριαμοῖσιν,  
ἐνθ' ἔσαν οἱ πέπλοι παμποίκιλοι, οὓς κάμεν αὐτή.  
τῶν ἔν' ἀειραμένη Ἑλένη φέρε, δῖα γυναικῶν,  
ὃς κάλλιστος ἔην ποικίλμασιν ἡδὲ μέγιστος,  
ἀστήρ δ' ὧς ἀπέλαμπεν· ἔκειτο δὲ νεῖατος ἄλλων.

The above passage recalls the scene in the *Iliad* six where Hecuba selects a gown that “shines like a star” (ἀστήρ δ' ὧς ἀπέλαμπεν, *Il.* 295) for dedication to Athena. The storyteller tells us that Paris brought these garments from Sidon where he stopped on his way home with Helen. Here this garment is a reminder of Helen’s transgression and thereby, a ruinous object like Helen herself. In the *Odyssey*, in contrast, the garment that Helen chooses as a gift for Telemachus has no negative association. Although it is a similar gown made in a similar fashion but its maker is Helen the queen of Sparta herself. Clearly, Helen’s gift for Telemachus bespeaks Helen’s understanding of guest friendship. Menelaus’ gift a “most precious” mixing bowl, made of silver and trimmed with gold, “the work of Hephaestus” (15. 114-117) displays a history of aristocratic friendships that passes from man to man as this gift was also acquired from a king during his voyage home from Troy.

Helen’s gift, on the other hand, is the product of her own labor. It is intended for Telemachus’ future bride but for now it should be kept with his mother, Penelope:

This gift, dear child, I too give you, a remembrance of the hands of Helen, against the day of your longed-for marriage, for your bride to wear it. But

until then let it lie in your halls in the keeping of your dear mother (15.125-128).

δῶρόν τοι καὶ ἐγώ, τέκνον φίλε, τοῦτο δίδωμι,  
 μνημ' Ἑλένης χειρῶν, πολυηράτου ἐς γάμου ὥρην,  
 σῇ ἀλόχῳ φορέειν· τεῖος δὲ φίλῃ παρὰ μητρὶ  
 κεῖσθαι ἐνὶ μεγάρῳ.

Note that by declaring “a remembrance of the hands of Helen” she implies the authorship in the past and her future recognition through her gift to Telemachus. The storyteller’s description of the robe that “shone like a star” underscores Helen’s weaving skill.

Blondell writes:

This is, moreover, the only explicitly commemorative garment in the poem, and the only such “memorial” to commemorate a woman. As the work of Helen’s hands it fulfills this function in two ways, since she is both the skilled artisan who made it and the owner who disposes of it. Again this makes her role extraordinary, since aristocratic men do not typically make the gifts they pass on to other men. Helen’s gift is thus a self-promoting gesture of a highly unusual kind.<sup>368</sup>

### 5.15 Ominous sign at the time of Telemachus’ departure

At the moment of Telemachus’ departure Helen overshadows again her husband by showcasing her super human knowledge. It has been noted how at the very end of their visit when Menelaus is ready to pour libation for their safe journey, an eagle swoops down and carries off a white tame goose. When asked to interpret the meaning of this sign, Menelaus ponders how to interpret this omen in a fitting manner whereas his wife is quick to prophesy “as the immortal gods” put in her heart. She interprets the sign as the return of Odysseus and taking vengeance on the suitors preying on his faithful wife. Then Telemachus tells her: “So may Zeus grant, the loud thundering husband of Hera; then will I even there pray to you, as to a god.”(15.180-1). The frank acknowledgement from

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<sup>368</sup> Blondell 2013, 77.

Telemachus, in particular, that he will worship her as a goddess in her own land, suggests Helen's divinity. Worman reads the "avowal" of Telemachus as a "pledge to the establishment of a Helen's cult in Ithaca like that which did exist in the archaic period in Sparta and perhaps elsewhere."<sup>369</sup> If Helen of the *Iliad* is not aware of her brothers' disappearance underground in Ithaca, Helen of the *Odyssey* speaks like Muses (4.140), possesses super human knowledge (4.143-144), weaves stories like a poet (4.240-264), and finally, prophesies like a seer (15. 172-178).

### 5.16 Helen's Divine Space

In light of Helen's portrayal in the *Odyssey*, it is undeniable that the narrator highlights Helen's divine power much more in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*. Note that Helen of the *Odyssey* is the queen of Sparta and it is well known that, it is in Sparta itself where she was worshipped as goddess.<sup>370</sup> Then what about Helen's stay in Egypt? I like to point out that Egypt is mentioned as an absent space comparatively more in the *Odyssey* than in the *Iliad*. In addition, this absent space refers to distinct objects related especially to Helen (*Il*.6.289-292; *Od*. 4.124-132, 227-234) whereas Menelaus her husband, as noted before, is silent about her presence in Egypt.

Yet in another poetic tradition, Stesichorus, for example, Egypt plays an important role. It is well known that Stesichorus wrote a *Palinode* to get back his eyesight that he lost as a punishment from the goddess Helen. Previously Stesichorus, following a Homeric account, composed a song of her going to Troy with Paris. Then he sang a new song denying that she ever went to Troy:

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<sup>369</sup> Worman, *The Cast of Charecte: Style in Greek Literature*, 64.

<sup>370</sup> West, "Immortal Helen" in *Hellenica* vol.1, 2011.

This not a true story,  
 You did not embark in the broad-benched ships,  
 You did not reach the citadel of Troy. (Plato, *Phaedrus* 243a2-243b3)

οὐκ ἔστ' ἔτυμος λόγος οὗτος,  
 οὐδ' ἔβας ἐν νηυσὶν εὐσέλμοις,  
 οὐδ' ἴκεο Πέργαμα Τροίας.<sup>371</sup>

Helen, therefore, stayed in Egypt during the war. In light of Helen's unspoken connection to Egypt, it is worth mentioning excellent argument provided by West:

"It makes better sense to suppose that the Egypt story existed earlier, before Helen's attachment to the Trojan War, and so had to be worked in with it."<sup>372</sup> After explaining Stesichorus' version of Helen, he argues: "The Egypt story, then, was the goddess's version; and since it was principally in Sparta that the goddess flourished, it may have been a Spartan version."<sup>373</sup> It is not impossible, then, to assume that Helen's divinity is more pronounced in the spatiotemporal context of the *Odyssey*.

Furthermore, Helen's divinity is projected through her space in the epithets that are carefully deployed in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. She is either known as the "daughter of Zeus" (Διὸς θυγάτηρ) or "sprung from Zeus" (Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα). The narrator describes Helen as "sprung from Zeus" in the *Iliad* at 3. 199, 418 and also the same epithet is used for Helen in the *Odyssey* 4.184, 219; 23.218. But the *Odyssey* depicts Helen as "daughter of Zeus" only at 4.227 along with Athena at 3.337 etc; Muse at 1.10, and Artemis at 20.60, Persephone at 11.217. Even though Helen in the *Iliad* is depicted as the "daughter of Zeus", she herself does not mention Zeus as her father. In book three of the *Iliad*, for example, where she alone notices the absence of her brothers among the

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<sup>371</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu), accessed Dec.2017.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

Achaean warriors, she mentions that she shares the same mother with her brothers the *dioskouroi* or “sons of god”(3. 238).

However, Nagy and West claim that Helen of Sparta is also divine in the *Iliad* because, she is the sister of Kastor and Poludeukes the dioskouroi. Drawing from the song of recantation by Stesichorus Nagy explains that by connecting with her brothers through their mother the “immortal Helen at Sparta” becomes “ the mortal stand-in for Helen at Troy.”<sup>374</sup> He continues: “If her brothers at Sparta both have their lights shut off there, then the light of Helen’s divinity at Troy must also be shut off.”<sup>375</sup> Clearly, Helen’s existence in divine space is not explicitly highlighted in the *Iliad*. However, West also underscores Helen’s relation with her twin brothers the Dioskouroi.

The Dioscuri and Helen represent the rarest thing in Greek mythology, but a thing which has every right to be found there: a nugget of Indo-European mythology, preserved from a time long before the Hellenes came to Greece. No other hypothesis can explain their detailed similarities to figures who appear in the mythologies of two other peoples remote both from the Greeks and each other, both speakers of Indo-European languages of a particularly archaic and conservative character, and thus peoples who might be expected, if any do, to have preserved elements of the most ancient beliefs of the Indo-European communities. The source-texts for these mythologies are on the one hand the hymns of the, *Rigveda*, which are older than any surviving Greek poetry, and on the other the folk-songs of of Latvia.<sup>376</sup>

In other words, West connects Helen with the daughter of the Sun or the Sūryā of the Vedic myth and her twin brothers the *Asvins* with the Dioskouroi.

Likewise, Clader relates Helen to the “Indo-European Sun-princess” and her twin brothers. Clader, unlike Nagy, offers a different reason for the absence of Dioskouroi in the *Illiad*. She explains that the mythic relationship of Helen with Dioskouroi lost its

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<sup>374</sup> Nagy “Helen of Sparta and her very own Eidolon”, accessed January 2017.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> West, 2011, 85.



significance by the time of the epic and Menelaus and Agamemnon replaced her twin brothers instead. Furthermore, Clader<sup>377</sup>, like West, points out Helen's importance as a local deity in the area around Sparta. Her major cult site was the Menelaion at Therapne, near Sparta. This cult site near Sparta still exists and Blondell reports that archaeologists have found many votive offerings at this site. Although this site was shared with Menelaus commemorating their marriage after the Trojan War, some of the votive offerings found at this site were specifically dedicated to Helen. Moreover, both Clader and Blondell<sup>378</sup> inform that, Herodotus mentions in the fascinating anecdote about Helen's power in his *Histories*. He tells in his *Histories* (6.61) of a beautiful woman who became the third wife of the king Ariston of Sparta. This beautiful woman used to be an ugly baby. The nurse of the ugly baby brought her to the shrine of Helen at Therapne. According to the tale, Helen herself appeared and touched the baby. As a result, the ugly baby grew into the most beautiful woman in Sparta. It is important to note that both West and Clader underline Helen's mythical connection to Indo-European tradition as well as to the local cult in the area around Sparta and even on the island of Rhodes where she was worshipped as "Helen of the Tree".<sup>379</sup> Thus, according to Clader, Homer's Helen emerges out of the "blend of Indo-European and pre-Indo-European elements".<sup>380</sup>

My emphasis is that Helen of the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, through her own supernatural power alludes to the existence of her own cult in Sparta. Obviously, Helen of the *Odyssey* does not share the same space or time with the Helen of the *Iliad*. The land of Troy signals a place of suffering for Helen as narrated in the *Iliad* whereas in the *Odyssey*,

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<sup>377</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 63-80.

<sup>378</sup> Blondell, 2013, 44-45; 159.

<sup>379</sup> West, 2011, 81.

<sup>380</sup> Clader, *Helen: The Evolution*, 83.

as it has been noted, Helen utilizes her memory of time and space during the Trojan War to construct her own glory. Seen from the spatiotemporal perspective, the narrator presents essentially the same *casus belli* Helen in polar opposition in the epics. In the *Iliad*, she is the abducted queen of Sparta in a strange land where she lives in memory of her past in the middle of the war that has been going on over her and her possessions. But in the *Odyssey*, she is back in Sparta reunited with her husband and the Trojan War is a distant memory, it seems, in her mental space. On the whole, Homer's Helen definitely emerges as "the blend of Indo-European and pre-Indo-European elements": she comes from a matrilineal tradition; she has her own cult in Sparta; yet, she is the "daughter of Zeus" and more importantly, the sister of dioskouroi.

## Chapter Six: Draupadī

### Introduction

This chapter aims to construct time and space in relation to Krishnā-Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*. It intends to follow the same methodology of understanding Helen in relation to time and space in the *Iliad* and in the *Odyssey*. It must be noted that a very important notion of time in the epic *Mahābhārata* is understood as Fate. From this point of view, the concept of time in the Indic epic is not comparable with the concept of time found in Homeric epics. But I intend to focus on two points in relation to time that I have discussed in the chapter on Helen. First, drawing attention to Vernant's perspective on Hesiodic concept of succession of races, I have noted that Hesiod arranged the succession of generations with declining virtue. Hesiod inserted the generation of heroes ("the godly race of men-heroes, who are called demi-gods", *Work and Days*, 159) in between metallic generations of Bronze and Iron. Second, space and time are embedded in Helen's verbal/non-verbal actions and thereby, indicating the interconnectedness of time-space.

I have briefly mentioned at the beginning of this thesis (p.32, fn.55) that a similar motif of war taking place at a transition from one generation/age to the other exists in Hesiod's *Work and Days* as well as in the *Mahābhārata*. In addition, similar to the Hesiodic concept of demi-gods, five demi-gods fought the war in the Indic epic. However, we learn about the age/ generation of heroes who fought in the Trojan War to rescue Helen from Hesiod, not from Homer. The *Mahābhārata*, on the contrary, writes about the four ages/generations in the book/ of the Beginning. It seems clear that both Helen and Draupadī appear at a particular time when the heroes/demi-gods have to fight a just war. First, I will discuss the temporal similarity.

Second, I argue that it is possible to view Draupadī in her spatio-temporal context as narrated in the text. In fact, the narrator has used many non-verbal symbols that have important significance relating to Draupadī's character and the impending war. In this chapter I intend to analyze the importance of space as a symbolic function in order to discern the character of Krishnā-Draupadī in the epic. Most importantly, I aim to point out that the depiction of time and space in this epic is realized through visual activities. Finally, the concept of interconnectedness of time and space (following Bakhtin) is significant in this epic. It is important to note that no previous studies have been done on Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata* from the perspective that I intend to investigate in this chapter.

Hence, I propose to study the character of Krishnā-Draupadī through the following observations:

1. Awareness of time
2. Symbolic function of space
3. Time and space are visualized through images.
4. Time and space are interconnected.

### **6.1 Awareness of Time in the *Mahābhārata***

The time and space of Draupadī's birth convey crucial points related to Draupadī. Note that the birth of Draupadī is a part of divine plan just like it has been for Helen. Although it seems that the succession to the throne has been the main cause of the *Mahābhārata* war but Draupadī has been destined to play the role of the destroyer of the unjust warrior class. The mythical time of Draupadī's birth correlates with the superhuman birth of five brothers who are semi-divine. In addition, the human form of Krishna as the *avatara* of the lord *Vishnu* with the goal of helping to defeat the unrighteous cousins of Pāndavas

takes shape at the same time. At the very beginning of the *Mahābhārata*, the bard *Ugrashravas* relates the time of this righteous battle:

In the interval between the *Dvāpara* and the *Kali yugas* there happened at Samanta-panchaka the encounter between the armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas.<sup>381</sup>

antare caiva samprāpte kalidvāparayor abhūt  
samantapañcake yuddham kurupāṇḍavasenayoḥ (1.2.9)

The *Mahābhārata* informs that there are four *yugas* or world age: *Kritā*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara*, and *Kali*. From one Yuga to another, the virtue/morality or *dharma* is said to decline by one- fourth (*Mbh*.3.148). The very first yuga/age is called *Kritā* (perfect participle of the verb *Kri*, to do) when everything is perfectly done. It is also called *Satya* (Truth) Yuga. This is the age when the moral-order of the world was perfect. The following passage in the *Mahābhārata* (XII. 224.22-23) shows *dharma* and truth on equal footing:

*Dharma* was four-footed [whole, like a bull standing on four legs] and complete, as was truth also, in the *Krtayuga*. Then no other teaching at all wrongly [*adharmena*] arose. But in others [other ages], *dharma* declined from that teaching by one foot [in each] and *adharma* increased, with theft, untruth, and illusion.<sup>382</sup>

caturpāt sakalo dharmah satyam caiva kṛte yuge  
nādharmenāgamah kaś cit paras tasya pravartate  
itaresv āgamād dharmah padaśas tv avaropyate  
caurikānṛta māyābhir adharmaś copacīyate

*Kritā Yuga*, therefore, is “four-quartered” firmly established in *dharma* where as in the *Tretā* (third) *Yuga* three of the quarter *dharma* remains. Then in *Dvāpara* (two) the moral order of society decreases even more; this *Yuga* becomes two-footed. Finally, in the *Kali*

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<sup>381</sup> K.M. Ganguli, trans.

<sup>382</sup> Ruth Cecily Katz, trans. *Arjuna in the Mahabharata: Where Krishna is, There is Victory* (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 183.

*Yuga* the Dark Age signaling the present age, the *dharma* operates with one quarter (twenty-five percent) of its full strength, that is, it balances on one foot only.

The theory of *Yuga* parallels Hesiod's theory of races/ages, a similarity that needs to be elaborated.

Note that unlike in Hesiod the concept of *Yugas* or world ages does not evaluate the moral decline in metallic forms. Instead, it expresses the concept in a typical Hindu view of a sacred cow standing firmly on its four feet and then morality or virtue declines as the cow gradually loses its foot. My concern is the age/generation of heroes that Hesiod inserts in his scheme of World Ages. It has been noted that Trojan War happened in the age/generation of heroes. Vernant<sup>383</sup> points out that there was no unbridgeable gap between the mortals and the immortals in the heroic age: hence the existence of *hemitheoi*. Likewise, the *Mahābhārata* War happened at the juncture of the last two declining *yugas* when heroes were the five brothers who were also *hemitheoi*.

Furthermore, as the heroes were more just in the heroic age, the heroes or the five semi-divine brothers were just and had to fight for a right cause in a righteous battle. Following the order of the creator god (cited in previous chapters) these five semi-divine brothers together become the husbands of Kṛṣṇā-Draupadī. These five semi-divine brothers known as the Pāṇḍavas (sons of Pāṇḍu) belong to the kṣatriya (warrior) class. Besides the epic notion of heroic age, time is equated with fate as indicated in the book one (1.3. 147-154). In the same passage, night and day are represented by black and white threads. Most importantly, the concept of fate is symbolically introduced here through the image

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<sup>383</sup> Vernant, 2006, 100.

of two young women weaving<sup>384</sup>. In addition, they keep turning their threads from the black ones to white ones. After a few lines, it has been explained that these two women turning forever the black and white threads represent the “One- that – Places and the One- that Disposes” (*ye te striyau dhātā vidhātā ca* 1.3.172) Clearly, the *Mahābhārata* equates Fate with Time.

The notion of time analogous to fate is communicated to the audience at the beginning of the epic. While relating the tales of the *Mahābhārata* War to the sages<sup>385</sup> performing sacrificial ritual at the forest, the bard Ugrasravas transmits a pivotal concept of time as understood in the epic. He relates how Sanjaya imparts the meaning of Time to the blind king who laments the death of his sons in the devastating war. Sanjaya consoles the lamenting king with the following words:

It was to be thus, and you must not grieve beyond it. With the greatest wisdom, who can ward off fate? No one steps beyond the Ordainer has ordained. All this is rooted in Time, to be or not to be, to be happy or not to be happy. Time ripens the creatures. Time rots them. And Time again puts out the Time that burns down the creatures. Time unfolds all beings in the world, holy and unholy. Time shrinks them and creates expands them again. Time walks in all creatures, unaverted, impartial. Whatever beings there were in the past will be in the future, whatever are busy now, they are all the creatures of Time—know it, and do not lose your sense. (1.186-190)

bhavitavyaṃ tathā tac ca nātaḥ śocitum arhasi  
daivaṃ prajñā viśeṣeṇa ko nivartitum arhati  
vidhātṛvihitaṃ mārگاṃ na kaś cid ativartate  
kālamūlam idaṃ sarvaṃ bhāvābhāvau sukhāsukhe  
kālaḥ pacati bhūtāni kālaḥ saṃharati prajāḥ  
nirdahantaṃ prajāḥ kālaṃ kālaḥ śamayate punaḥ  
kālo vikurute bhāvān sarvāṃl loka śubhāśubhān  
kālaḥ saṃkṣipate sarvāḥ prajā viśṛjate punaḥ  
kālaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu caraty avidhṛtaḥ samaḥ

<sup>384</sup> Weaving is an ancient image often used by the Indo-Europeans. Hesiod in *Theogony* (218, 905) mentions three goddesses of Fate: Klotho (‘Spinner’), Lachesis (‘Apportioner’), and Atropos (‘Inflexible’).

<sup>385</sup> Tr. Luis Gonzalez-Reiman. *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India’s Great Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages*, Asian Thought and Culture 51(New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 32-33.

atītānāgatā bhāvā ye ca vartanti sāmpratam  
tān kālanirmitān buddhvā na samjñāṃ hātum arhasi

Clearly, the above passages indicate that the notion of time in the *Mahābhārata* shows that no one can escape Time. Accordingly, events must follow their own trajectory.

However, the destructive aspect of Time<sup>386</sup> is found as early as in the Rig-Veda.

The hymn to Ushās, the personification of dawn expresses how everyday human generation wastes away by her (RV. 1.92.10). It seems, then, rather challenging for constructing time and space with Draupadī when Time is understood as eschatological. Furthermore, she cannot have any agency when it is noted that the purpose of her life was already charted out as the destroyer of kshatriya race. In the context of this eschatological understanding of Time as Fate allowing no human agency, I argue that Draupadī's body is portrayed as an argument leading to the war in the *Mahābhārata*. I read her body as her “corporeal space”. To put it differently, I read her body as a “site”. Christos Tsagalis aptly explains:

Corporeal space, though, is not linked only to women. The “body” as a site of social and ideological concerns has been systematically employed throughout human history.<sup>387</sup>

We have already noted how Vernant analyzes the value of a heroic body in Greek literature. Moreover, in the *Iliad* we read how no one liked Thersites due to his ugly body (2.215). Similarly, a female body as a “site” generates value oriented reactions from social and ideological views. Helen's body, for example, provokes male desire and awe simultaneously. Tsagalis writes:

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<sup>386</sup> Luis González-Reimann, *The Mahābhārata and the Yugas: India's Great Epic Poem and the Hindu System of World Ages* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 20.

<sup>387</sup> Tsagalis, *From Listeners to Viewers: Space in the Iliad*, 7.



Helen's body is the epitome of corporeal space, since it symbolizes a creature that provokes male awe and sensation (as in the Trojan elders in *Iliad* III 156-158) and effectively "plays" with notions of hierarchy, which it tellingly challenges.<sup>388</sup>

Building on the similar model of Helen, I view Draupadī's body as a "corporeal space". Likewise her beautiful body serves as the paradigmatic object of male desire from the beginning to the fourth book of the epic. Yet, her mobile body signals a subject position that repels the male desire and in doing so, it seems, she creates her own space charged with hostility and her own time that moves in coordination with the space where she is located. It is my intention to map out her desirable yet destructive body that moves from space to space in coordination with time.

## 6.2 Time and Space of Draupadī's Birth

Draupadī was born at the end of a sacrificial ritual performed at the request of the Pāñcāla king Drupada. At the end of the ritual when oblation to the fire was being offered there arose from the fire a robust youth with a colour of fire and fully armed. At that precise moment an incorporeal voice announced that this youth would fulfill the king's wish by killing the Brahmin teacher Drona. Immediately after the appearance of the male youth, a young woman appeared not from the sacrificial fire but from the earthen altar of the ritual. Again a disembodied voice announced that this woman would destroy the warrior class (*kṣatriya*). It has been noted before that the king did not have this special ritual performed for the birth of a daughter. Seen from this point of view, the birth of Draupadī (daughter of Drupada) was superfluous. But considering the divine plan she had to be born at the end of the ritual. I read this as a special time when her present unusual birth is connected to her past act (as it has been noted earlier in the first chapter that she

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

was ordained to be born along with five Indras) and to her pre-determined role of destroying the kshatriyas in future.

Moreover, the time of Draupadī's birth is deeply connected to the space from which she arose. According to popular notion Draupadī was born from the ritual fire but the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* offers a definite image of her rising from the ritual altar (*Vedi*). This ritual altar is an earthen altar resembling the curvature of a woman's waist. This kind of earthen altar was built for placing ritual implements<sup>389</sup>. Draupadī also known as *Pāñcālī* (daughter of Drupada, the king of Pāñcāla) arose from this particular type of altar resembling a woman's waist. Note that Draupadī's waist has been compared to this ritual altar "which has features of a woman's torso, tapering at the middle between wider 'shoulders' and 'hips'".<sup>390</sup> It is crucial to remember that in the *Mahābhārata*, as we have noted, Draupadī's body is depicted in transparently visual terms (1.155.41-45)

Image removed in accordance with copyright laws

Figure 1: The Ritual Altar (*Vedi*) from which Draupadī arose, as represented by Jamison.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> See Alf. Hiltebeitel. *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 485.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Jamison, 1996, 39.

Notably, the birth of Krishnā-Draupadī takes place because of her previous existence of which the king Drupada could not have any knowledge. The important point is that the king sponsored this ritual in order to procure a son who would destroy the Brahmin teacher of archery of the Kuru princes. A youth fully armored with the color of fire arose from the ritual fire. Note the gendered space of their birth: son from the fearful fire and the daughter from the defenseless earth. Then how could she lead the kshatriyas to their ruin? Here I take a cue from Stephanie Jamison's observation: "Women's sexuality is viewed with much ambivalence: it can be a destructive as well as a creative force (1996, p.256)." Seen from the above depiction of Draupadī, it is possible to surmise the awe inspiring negative force of her body that mimics the earthen altar of the Vedic ritual. In fact, her body incorporates both human passion and divine determination as well. It has been noted before how her physical presence at her marriage incurred the desire of possessing her by the kings and princes including the Pandava brothers who were present there to showcase their prowess at archery. Further, we have noticed when Arjuna won her and brought her to his mother, how the brothers were perfectly enamored by her incomparable physical beauty. Again and again her physical beauty or her corporeal space ignites a seductive passion.

When Yudhisthira wagers her at the game of dice, we have already noted how he announces her physical appearance like an object that is a part of his enormous possession (2.58.32-38). In particular, his description of her wife shows more appreciation of her physical beauty and unfailing mentioning of her as possessing a slender waist (*sumadhayayā*) as if it has become her epithet. However, it is also possible that her "slender waist" is a constant reminder of her miraculous birth from an earthen vedi of a sacrificial ritual. Her body, therefore, symbolizes the auspiciousness of a Vedic ritual.

Furthermore, her body is also a reminder of mythical time when it was decided by Śiva and approved by Vishnu that Draupadī would be born as the wife of the Pāṇḍavas (*Mbh.* 1.189.30-45). Likewise, the body of Draupadī is also a sign indicating the future or the violent end of the warrior class. Thus the past, present and future converge in the corporeal space of Krishnā – Draupadī. Yet the audience does not know how that fated destruction of the warrior class will happen. Gary Morson, a scholar of Bakhtin aptly remarks:

When an oracle or omen predicts a given inevitable outcome, it does not necessarily specify the path leading to it. Rather, it suggests that whatever path is chosen and whatever choices are made the omen will be fulfilled... Destiny or Fate specifies the end point, not the intermediate ones.<sup>392</sup>

My concern is to explore how the narrator of the *Mahābhārata* has created these paths that would lead Draupadī to the destruction of the warrior class. The first book of the epic hardly renders any speaking role to her. She with her Śrī like beauty silently agrees to get married to five brothers of the kshatriya (warrior) class.

### 6.3 Draupadī as Śrī

It has been noted in the book one of the *Mahābhārata* (1.189.29,33) that Draupadī is the incarnation of Śrī. The term Śrī, among its many interpretations, generally signifies “fortune”, “prosperity”, and “welfare”.<sup>393</sup> Gonda points out that many of the *Brahmana* literatures highlight the connections that exist between śrī and *kshatra* – “ruling power, dominion, chieftaincy”.<sup>394</sup> It has been noted earlier how Gonda elaborates on the existence of this inevitable connection between the king and Śrī in ancient India. Already in the pre-

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<sup>392</sup> Gary Saul Morson. *Narrative of Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 64-65

<sup>393</sup> For an extensive discussion, see J.Gonda, *Aspects of Early Visnuism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1969, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition).

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

epic literature, *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* (2,4,4,6), for example, the idea arises of a royal man's duty to be wedded to Śrī. As a goddess Śrī is believed to select, of her own accord, a mighty king as her husband. Śrī is also described as residing in the sovereign.<sup>395</sup>

Many passages in the epic provide us with elaborate royal mythology regarding Śrī. The book of Peace (*Śāntiparvan*) belonging to the twelfth book in the epic contains many mythical materials concerning Śrī. This book writes Bhīshma the eldest and the most wise of the Kuru dynasty telling Yudhishtira about how Śrī came to Indra the king of the gods. Before coming to Indra she dwelt with three successive generations of demon (Asura) kings who were highly virtuous. While leaving Bali the third Asura king, Śrī herself announces to Indra: “Neither the Creator nor the Ordainer (*dhātā, vidhātā*) governs me; it is Time alone which causes my goings about”<sup>396</sup>: *na dhātā na vidhātā māṃ vidadhāti katham cana kālas tu śakra paryāyān mainaṃ śakrāvamanyathāḥ* (12.218.10). Clearly, Śrī moves from one place to another as Time dictates.

In another account she tells Indra that before coming to him she stayed with the *Asura* kings from the very beginning of the creation of the creatures (12.221.48).<sup>397</sup> More importantly, she used to stay with them because initially, the Asura kings were very virtuous.<sup>398</sup> Then she announces that she came to Indra on her own accord (12.221.80).

Bali the last Asura king abandoned by Śrī reminds her unstable behavior twice:

This Royal Prosperity [*rājaśrī*] which you have obtained and which you consider to be incomparable formerly dwelt in me. Contrary to that [?], she does not remain in one place [*naiśā hyektra tisthatī*]. Indeed, she has dwelt in thousands of Indras who were superior to you. Fickle [*lolā*], having

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<sup>395</sup> Gonda, “Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious point of view (continued)” in *Numen* 3, Fasc. 2. (April, 1956): 131.

<sup>396</sup> Translated by Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, 159.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-191.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.* Virtues and Kings are the two important concerns for Śrī.

abandoned me, she has come to you... Do not brag, O Śakra<sup>399</sup>. You should become tranquil. [If you] go on in this way, having abandoned you she will quickly go to another. (12.217.57-59: tr. Hiltebeitel)

yām etām prāpya jānīse rājaśriyam anuttamām  
sthitā mayīti tan mithyā naiṣā hy ekatra tiṣṭhati  
sthitā hīndra sahasreṣu tvad viśiṣṭatameṣv iyam  
mām ca lolā parityajya tvām agād vibudhādhipa  
maivaṃ śakra punaḥ kārṣṭh śānto bhavitum arhasi  
tvām apy evaṃgatam tyaktvā kṣipram anyam gamiṣyati

In another passage (12.220. 44-46) the Asura king Bali instructs Indra to be watchful over *Rājaśrī* as she will not stay with him forever. It seems, therefore, she moves to any king according to her own choice. On the contrary, the epic informs Śrī's continuous association with virtuous kings. During a discourse with Indra, she says:

I dwell in the vans and on the banners of victorious kings of virtuous dispositions, as in their dominion and cities... Formerly, I dwelt with the Asuras, bound by *satya* (truth) and dharma, but having seen them assume adverse natures, I have left them to reside in you (12.221.23,26).<sup>400</sup>

rājñām vijayamānānām senāgreṣu dhvajeṣu ca  
nivāse dharmāśīlānām viṣayeṣu pureṣu ca  
asureṣv avasaṃs pūrvam satyadharmanibandhanā  
vipārītāṃs tu tān buddhvā tvayi vāsam arocayam

In the context of Draupadī as Śrī<sup>401</sup> incarnate I argue three themes are clearly incorporated from the mythology of Śrī in Draupadī of the *Mahābhārata*. First, in the context of the epic where Draupadī is Śrī incarnate, the theme of her *svayamvara* in the *Mahābhārata* is fitting. Secondly, while she has “freedom of choice” yet at the same time it is mentioned by Śrī that she is ruled by Time. Provided that Draupadī was born for the purpose of destroying the kshatriya race at the juncture of two epochs (*yugas*) I argue that

<sup>399</sup> Epithet of Indra.

<sup>400</sup> Translated by Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle*, 164.

<sup>401</sup> Wendy Doniger writes: “ But the pre-Vedic, Indo-European goddess survives in the form of Śrī, the fickle goddess of prosperity, who plays fast and loose with a number of mortal kings.” in *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 180.

she is governed by Time in the epic. Finally, it was due to highly virtuous Yudhishtira, she stayed with the Pāṇdavas during the entire period ‘till the king Yudhishtira regained his kingdom back by defeating his cousins in the war. Therefore, Draupadī’s corporeal presence by her senior husband’s side is mandatory.

In light of the above arguments, I propose to read Draupadī as Śrī/ Royal Prosperity/ Sovereignty. It is from this point of view the anomalies of Draupadī’s presence in the dicing hall and her special garment can be understood. She as the symbol of Sovereignty gets married to the greatest archer Arjuna and consequently to his four brothers as well. It is quite possible to assume that Draupadī as “Sovereignty” is the maker of the sovereign king Yudhishtira. However, in order to rationalize the need of a dice game in the assembly hall, I take a cue from van Buitenen’s article “On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata”.<sup>402</sup> According to van Buitenen, the game of dice is ritually decreed and it is required after the Royal Consecration.

The second book of the *Mahābhārata*, that is, the *Book of the Assembly Hall* is of pivotal importance. Furthermore, this is the book where the inheritance problem between the Kauravas and the Pāṇdavas becomes acute and then get solved after the marriage alliance of the later with the king Drupada of Pāṇcāla. Then the regent king Dhritarāshtra decides to distribute the wild unused part of his kingdom to his nephews the Pāṇdavas who are the alleged sons of his brother Pāṇdu. Yudhishtira being the eldest of them becomes the ruler of the new domain while the throne remains with Dhritarāshtra at Hāstinapura. However, to legitimize his ruling of this new domain, Yudhishtira has to

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<sup>402</sup> J.A.B. van Buitenen, “On the structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata” in *India Major: Congratulatory Volume Presented to J. Gonda*, ed. J. Ensink and P. Gaefke (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 68-84.

perform a special Vedic ritual of *rājasūya* that validates him not only as a king but also bestows “universal sovereignty” on him.

The *Mahābhārata* gives elaborate description of the celebration of the inauguration of the king Yudhisthira. While enumerating the incredible gifts given by various kings to Yudhisthira at his Royal Consecration at their newly established kingdom *Indraprastha*, the *Kaurava* prince Duryodhana becomes excessively depressed (2. 43.1-36). Consequently, Duryodhana as a mere *Kaurava* prince feels highly threatened by the Royal Consecration that legitimizes Yudhisthira as the paramount king of the *Kauravas*. Thus in order to assuage Duryodhana’s frustration his maternal uncle Śakuni, an accomplished player of dice advises Duryodhana to invite Yudhisthira for a game of dice, because, he argues: “Yudhishtira is fond of gambling, but does not know how to play (2.44.18).” On the contrary, the epic does not show any reference to Yudhishtira’s fondness for dice game rather, it shows that he knows the evil effect of gambling (2.52.10). The king Yudhisthira has to play against his cousin Duryodhana who entrusts his maternal uncle Śakuni to play on his behalf. The king having no skill at playing the game loses all his wagers, including his brothers, himself, and his beloved queen. Against this background, the queen Draupadī enters the assembly hall.

#### **6.4 Draupadī’s body as corporeal space in the Assembly Hall**

It is noted in the text that the assembly hall had been primarily built for playing a game of dice. Consequently, a lot of royal spectators other than the large family of the Kuru king Dhritarāstra and the four Pāndavas were present in the gaming hall. The presence of royal women at the assembly hall can be assumed from the instance when Draupadī tries to run toward them for protection while Duhśāsana tries to grab her



(2.60.21).<sup>403</sup> The theme of royal women's presence in the assembly hall is generally ignored. How did they feel witnessing the needless abuse of Draupadī? However, the bard informs the audience the feelings of the royal women through the narration of the blind king's subjective experience after the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī left for exile in the forest: "All the women of the Bhāratas who had gathered with Gāndhārī cried out in anguish when they saw Krishnā brought to the hall (2.72.19)." This is the version of the blind king Dhritarāshtra who expresses his emotional statement to his low-born half-brother Vidura. But the epic does not give any reference supporting this information of the blind king. While Draupadī the Pāṇḍava queen actively seeks help from the royal ladies of the Kauravas, they do not respond to her plea. It is important to note that while the royal women of the Kauravas are already in the public space as onlookers, Draupadī is forcefully brought from her private space to the public space. Furthermore, Duhśāsana drags her to the assembly hall by "her long and blue and wavy" tresses. This is the same hair that has been sprinkled with ritually sanctified water at the consecration of her husband the king Yudhisthira. No one at the hall even tries to stop her tormentor. The bard aptly depicts Draupadī as *nāthavatīm anāthavach* (2.60.24): possessing husbands (protectors) yet as if having none. However, a point often overlooked is the different treatment of the same female body—a body that has been reduced from royal status to the status of a female slave in the public space of the assembly hall.

The king Yudhisthira looses his possessions, brothers, himself and Draupadī to his opposite party, that is, the prince Duryodhana in a game of dice. Thus they have become his slaves. However, the word "slave" (*dāsa/dāsī*) in ancient India generally means

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<sup>403</sup> Van Buitenen: "In despair she ran where the women sat of the aged king, the bull of the Kurus." *The Mahābhārata* II, 141.

domestic servant or attendant. Yudhisthira himself wagered a hundred thousand slave girls and few thousand male slaves at the game of dice as cited before (2.27.54-55). Generally, the people captured in war are held as slaves and sometimes for being unable to pay off debt one is held as a slave to the lender.<sup>404</sup> Moreover, the first book of the *Mahābhārata* also gives examples of being enslaved through the loss of a wager (1.14 and 1.73-78) as it has been cited before. Thus the same body of a queen turns into the body of a female slave (*dāsī*): hence it does not deserve any respect. Draupadī, therefore, is brought to the public space of the dicing hall by force. Furthermore, her slave body is also a menstruating body at this point. Even after being informed repeatedly, she is dragged into the hall and exposed to the public gaze. She has no *nātha* (protector) in true sense of the term. Her menstruating slave body raises the most haunting question regarding her treatment by her kinsmen by marriage. How is it possible to bring her to the male gaze especially in her condition? It is important to note that the physical abuse of Draupadī dovetails with the very request of the Earth<sup>405</sup> asking for protection from the Creator God in the first place.

With this view in mind, I argue that Krishnā-Draupadī is the Earth in human form and in being so it is not impossible to assume that the terrestrial space representing the corporeal space of the queen has to be subjugated by force. While the protector of the earth, the “universal sovereign” has been defeated in the game of dice or has been stripped off his power to rule, then, his royal power symbolized by *Śrī*, that is, his chief queen Draupadī must be taken away from them. Clearly, Krishnā-Draupadī can be seen as the dark Earth arising from the earthen alter and also as *Śrī* as mentioned in the epic itself.

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<sup>404</sup> See Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 206.

<sup>405</sup> See also Hiltebeitel, “Draupadī’s Garments”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22 (1980), 97-112.

Yet it remains unclear why the menstruating body of the Pāṇḍava queen appears in public space. It is precisely through the transformation of the queen's body into slave's flesh, and further, the exhibition of her defenseless body the narrator metaphorically expresses the abusive kshatriya power that caused the overburdened Earth to complain in the first place. Further, Draupadī who is the incarnation of the goddess Śrī herself also represents the contrary form of the goddess.

Note that Śrī is the Indian goddess Lakshmī representing Fortune, Prosperity and Beauty.<sup>406</sup> However, the goddess of Fortune, Śrī-Lakshmī can assume the contrary form of Alakshmī, the goddess of Misfortune who is her elder sister (Jyeshthā).<sup>407</sup> This goddess the elder sister of Śrī-Lakshmī signifies impurity (*malām*) and likewise, the menstruating Draupadī is also impure. The *Mārķendya Purāna* (one of the major eighteen *Purānas*) writes that the goddess is “Śrī herself in the homes of well-doers, but Alakshmī in those evil-doers (LXXIV.4).” In view of the above depiction of the goddess, the evil people do not deserve to witness the beautiful corporeal space of Draupadī in pure state. In other words, we can recognize that the personification of Fortune and Misfortune are the two polar aspects of Śrī. Compare Draupadī with the “Loathly Bride” as cited before in Celtic contexts. At this point, Draupadī can be looked upon as “loathly” due to her present physically impure condition. Further, her scornful glance signals the impending devastation of war.

When she is dragged into the Assembly hall, it has been noted earlier how the “slim-waisted” Draupadī's “side long glance” unsettles her silent husbands—her

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<sup>406</sup> Śrīsūktaṃ a hymn in 29 verses dedicated to the Indian Goddess Śrī-Lakshmī is appended to the Rig-Veda.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid. , verse 8.

“wretched lords”. (2.60.35-36) Here the narrator uses her body for the inevitability of war by evoking her scornful glance at her husbands—as if her glance is making them ready for declaring war against the Kauravas. With long disheveled hair Draupadī stands clad in her single cloth stained with blood among men in the hall built for gambling. But how is it possible to allow anyone to bring her among men at the time when she is supposed to be the source of pollution especially for them? I suggest that her new servile status of a female servant changes the value of her body according to the hierarchized tradition of India. Uma Chakravarti writes<sup>408</sup>: “Honour, virtue and modesty are the monopoly of the upper castes; conversely the lower orders are excluded from claiming such values.” Duhśāsana while dragging Draupadī into the Assembly Hall answers to her with a similar attitude:

Sure, you be in your month, Yajñasena’s daughter,  
Or wear a lone cloth, or go without one!  
You have been won at the game and been made a slave,  
And one lechers with slaves as the fancy befalls! (2.60.27)

rajasvalā vā bhava yājñaseni; ekāmbārā vāpy atha vā vivastrā  
dyūte jitā cāsi kṛtāsi dāsī; dāsīṣu kāmaś ca yathopajoṣam

Furthermore, Karna, a friend of Duryodhana does not accept the validity of Draupadī’s marriage to five men at the same time and thus he calls her a “whore” while everyone in the hall silently witnessed the verbal abuse. After establishing her as a whore who does not deserve the treatment reserved for upper class or caste, he orders Duhśāsana to strip the garments from the Pāndavas and Draupadī. Hearing Karna’s order the Pāndavas voluntarily take their upper cloth (*uttariya*) off and sit down. However Draupadī

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<sup>408</sup> Uma Chakravarti. “Who speaks for whom? : The Queen, the Dāsī and Sexual Politics in the Sabhaparvan” in *Mahābhārata Now: Narration, Aesthetics, Ethics*, ed. Arindam Chakrabarti, Sibaji Bandopadhyay (London: Routledge, 2014), 132-152.

also wears an upper garment on top of her single cloth that covers her lower as well as upper body (2.60.25, 47). As M. A. Mehendale<sup>409</sup> explains the social implication of taking off the upper garments: “The upper garments of the Pāṇdavas and Draupadī were to be removed because, apparently, the *dāsas* and *dāsīs* had no right to use them.” Thus the kshatriya body of a king, it seems, can turn into a slave body—a totally polar opposite in status. Likewise, the body of a kshatriya queen becomes impure when turns into a body of a female servant. Accordingly, her blood stained garment does not signify the danger of pollution as a slave body is in constant state of defilement. For this reason, I suggest, Draupadī can enter the Assembly Hall without any objection from the onlookers of the game. The narrator uses the body of Draupadī as a harbinger for destruction from the very beginning of her appearance on the earth. Now he capitalizes on her menstruating body as the discourse of war. As a menstruating woman she is wearing a single piece of cloth stained with blood and the narrator employs this garment of her during her particular time of the month in various ways until Draupadī departs with her husbands for the forest.

### 6.5 The garment of Draupadī

As mentioned above Draupadī’s garment exhibits that she is going through menstrual cycle at present and she stands in a public space that is mostly crowded by men including her husbands. Although royal women are included among the onlookers but their presence is ignored. The Pāṇdavas fail in their husbandly duty in protecting (*rakshana*) their wife. They sit there without their upper cloth symbolizing their nobility. Draupadī, on the contrary, stands firm refusing to accept her alleged status of slavery. Duḥśāsana starts to strip Draupadī publicly by force but is unable to remove her garment,

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<sup>409</sup> M.A. Mehendale. “Once Again ‘Draupadī’s Garments’,” *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 50, Golden Jubilee (1990), 285-290.

as endless garment appears to cover the body of righteous Draupadī. How is it possible? Franklin Edgerton, the critical editor of the *Sabhāparvan* explains that “cosmic justice” is “apparently implied”:

No prayer by Draupadī; no explanation of the miraculous replacement of one garment by another; no mention of Krishna or any superhuman agency. It is apparently implied (though not stated) that cosmic justice automatically, or “magically” if you like, prevented the chaste Draupadī from being stripped in public. It is perhaps necessary to embroider the story. Yet to me, at least, the original form, in its brevity, simplicity, and rapid movement, appeals very forcefully. (1944, xxix)

The popular version of the scene of the endless replacement of garment to cover the corporeal space of Draupadī believes that Krishna being invoked by her provides the endless coverings. Julius Lipner<sup>410</sup> writes: “Be that as it may, in the final analysis *dharma* has vindicated Draupadī. Her faith in *dharma* has not been void, although it has cost her dear.” Draupadī’s single cloth, therefore, remains on her body covering her corporeal space of a virtuous wife. Finally, during all the chaos in the gambling hall, evil omens start to appear in the hall reserved for ritual in the palace. Consequently, frightened by the portents, the blind king Dhritarāshtra returns all the possession to the king Yudhishthira and let them go back to their own kingdom.

But this decision by the king is not acceptable by Duryodhana and his supporters. He persuades his father to recall the Pāndavas for another match of dice. This time it is decided that they play only once: the loosing party must go to exile in forest for twelve years and live in an inhabited place in disguise on the thirteenth year of the exile. If the loosing party is discovered during the year in disguise then they must endure another twelve years of forest dwelling. The Pāndavas come back and get defeated again in the

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<sup>410</sup> Lipner, 1994, 207.

game to Duryodhana. Duryodhana specifies that they together with Krishnā-Draupadī must live in the forest for twelve years and during these twelve years of exile in the forest they must be clothed in deerskins. Being obliged to follow this term of agreement, the Pāndavas along with their wife Krishnā-Draupadī prepare to leave the city of Hāstinapura.

The most striking point regarding Draupadī is that she returns with the same attire and disheveled hair. Curiously, she exits the city clothed in the same blood stained garment. It has been pointed out how she curses that the Kaurava women will enter Hāstinapura in a similar physical condition with similar attire as she is leaving the city of Hāstinapura now. Most importantly, Draupadī's disheveled hair and her bloodstained garment at present, act as a symbol of bloody death of the husbands of the Kaurava women in the impending war. A situation will occur when her present impurity will reappear in their future when they will lose their protectors in war. I suggest that Draupadi intentionally keeps her garment and hair, in a defiled state so that they create a memory space for the citizens of what injustice has been done to her. Furthermore, her corporeal space and her garment bespeak the violation of the goddess Śrī and the future consequence of this horrible act. Thus Krishnā-Draupadī/Sovereignty leaves the city along with her five husbands and especially accompanying one of them who is no longer the sovereign king of a country.

#### **6.6 Draupadī and her husbands' exile in the forest**

In ancient India the forest played an important role in their society. It was stipulated that a householder in his last stage of life was supposed to retire in a forest where he along with his wife would live contented with a life of contemplation and studying Vedas. Sages used to live in the forest. It is the wild or uncultivated space that was situated outside the settled space/village where the ruling king and his law-abiding

people used to inhabit. However, the wild space/forest (*vana* or *aranya*) was usually not far from the village rather it was situated at the edge of the village. Kings frequented the forest for hunting animals that lived in the forest. Thus forest is a space that is outside the cultivated or civilized space yet the kshatriya princes and the brāhmin boys usually spent their student life there with the sages to be educated by them. To put it differently, the forest as depicted in ancient India could very well be considered as a liminal<sup>411</sup> space. The *Mahābhārata* tells us stories of demons (*Rākshasas*) that lived in the forest too and they used to roam the forest especially during night.

In fact, one of the demons Kirmīra appeared to the Pāndavas when they were walking with Draupadī on the third night of their forest dwelling. Here again the depiction of Krishnā-Draupadī's hair comes to the fore:

When she came nearer, Krishnā of the lotus eyes trembled and fearfully closed her eyes. With her hair disheveled and ruffled by Duhśāsana's hand, she looked like a river in spate that runs between five mountains (3.12.16-17).

taṃ samāsādyā vitrastā kṛṣṇā kamalalocanā  
adṛṣṭapūrvam samtrāsān nyamīlayata locane  
duḥśāsana karotsrṣṭaviprakīrṇaśiroruhā  
pañca parvatamadhyasthā nadīvākulatām gatā

The above verse shows that Draupadī has not arranged her hair in a braid since Duhśāsana has touched her hair that had been sprinkled with ritually pure water. Her disheveled mass of hair embodies a visual representation of the barbaric abuse of her corporeal space, lest anyone forget that event. She keeps her hair in the same fashion throughout her twelve years wanderings with her husbands in the forest. The pulling of her hair becomes a permanent cause of her anger leading up to the destruction of the Kauravas. Furthermore,

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<sup>411</sup> See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).



the narrator uses the beauty of her body once again to create an uncontrollable desire on the male onlookers.

Book of the Forest depicts Draupadī 's beautiful body while she is standing alone at the doorway of the hermitage of the sage Trinabindu in the Kamyaka forest. Her husbands went hunting leaving her with their household priest and her maid. The king Jaydratha of Sindhu accompanied by many princes was passing by the forest and they all noticed Draupadī. But the king mesmerized by her beauty said to his friend, the prince Kotikāśya:

Whose is this woman of flawless limbs, if she is human at all? There is no point for me to marry now that I have seen this superbly beautiful lady! It is she I shall take and return to my kingdom! Go and find out, my friend, whose she is, who she is, and from where. Why has this woman of the lovely brow come to the thorny forest? Will this gem of the world with the comely curves, the perfect teeth, the long eyes, the slender waist, share my love today? Shall my desires be fulfilled by my obtaining this choicest of women? Go and find out who her protector is, Kotika! (3.248.12-16)

sa koṭikāśyaṃ rājānam abravīt kāmamohitaḥ  
kasya tv eśānavadyāṅgī yadi vāpi na mānuṣī  
vivāhārtho na me kaś cid imāṃ dṛṣṭvātisundarīm  
etām evāham ādāya gamiṣyāmi svam ālayam  
gaccha jānīhi saumyainām kasya kā ca kuto 'pi vā  
kimartham āgatā subhrūr idam kaṇṭakitaṃ vanam  
api nāma varārohā mām eṣā lokasundarī  
bhajed adyāyatāpāṅgī sudatī tanumadhyamā  
apy aham kṛtakāmaḥ syām imāṃ prāpya varastriyam  
gaccha jānīhi ko nv asyā nātha ity eva koṭika

The king of Sindhu's friend goes in and finds out about her. The king enters the hermitage and Draupadī following the rule of hospitality welcomes him with a meal of fifty deers. But the king not interested in food tries to persuade her to accompany him instead: "Be my wife, woman of the beautiful hips, desert them, and enjoy yourself! With me you get all the land of Sindhu and Suvira (3. 251.16-17)!" It is important to note that the king proposes to establish her as the queen of his kingdom. In other words, Draupadī

symbolizing sovereignty should not exist without being tied to a land. Naturally, Draupadī being a strong woman refuses his proposal and also pushes him away when seized by her *Kuśa* grass skirt. This is a surprise for the king. Her “languid glance” wearing a grass skirt must have created an impression of her unhappiness due to her poor situation. He does not realize her immense strength be that mental or physical:

Jayadratha held her by her skirt,  
But with all her strength she pushed him away;  
And his body repulsed by her, that miscreant  
Fell down like a tree whose roots have been cut (3.252.23).

jagrāha tām uttaravastradeśe; jayadrathas taṃ samavākṣipat sā  
tayā samākṣipta tanuḥ sa pāpaḥ; papāta śākhīva nikṛttamūlaḥ

Once again she has to defend herself against the kshatriya violence and this time her husbands are not even available to protect her. However, this attempted abduction fails as her husbands return on time for her rescue.

Draupadī continues her wanderings with her husbands as “very lean and good ascetics” (*sukriśāh sutapasavinah*; 3.125.19). Not only does she wanders with them during their exile, she herself wears “bark skirt and deerskin” (3.226. 20) or a “brownish red garment” (*kāshāyavasanām*; 3.227.10) as worn by monks. In fact, Duryodhana alludes to the rigid austerity maintained by Krishnā-Draupadī and he believes that she is going through severe austerity just to attain her goal: destruction of Duryodhana’s life and the success of the Pāndavas in the impending war (9.4. 18; 58.10). Draupadī’s garment suitable for her ascetic practices in the forest, I argue, is the inversion of what one expects from Śrī who is the very representation of royal prosperity in the palace. Her garment to cover her beautiful body plays a crucial role during the thirteenth year of their exile when they are supposed to live in disguise among people.

### 6.7 Draupadī and her five husbands in disguise at the palace of the king Virāta

The Pāndavas and Draupadī discuss among themselves how to enter the kingdom of Virāta in perfect disguise at the beginning of the *Virātaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. They decide to hire themselves out to the service at the Matsya king, Virāta. Yudhisthira will pose as a Brahmin Dicing Master for the king, Bhima as a kitchen chef and a professional wrestler. Arjuna will be in disguise of a transvestite who is skilled in music and dancing. Nakula will be the trainer of the Royal horses and Sahadeva will look after the cattle of the king Virāta who has hundred thousand cattle.

Note that when it comes to Draupadī's turn Yudhisthira comments:

What kind of work shall Krishnā-Draupadī perform, for she does not know how to do the work that women do? Delicate, young, a famous princess, devoted to her husbands and a lady, how shall she perform? From the time she was born the radiant woman has had knowledge but of garlands, perfumes, ornaments, and all manner of clothing (4.3.13-15).

kena sma karmanā kṛṣṇā draupadī vicariṣyati  
na hi kiṃ cid vijānāti karma kartuṃ yathā striyaḥ  
sukumārī ca bālā ca rājaputrī yaśasvinī  
pativratā mahābhāgā katham nu vicariṣyati  
mālyagandhān alaṃkāraṇ vastrāṇi vividhāni ca  
etāny evābhijānāti yato jātā hi bhāminī

This is the first time the epic relates about the life-style of Krishnā-Draupadī not only as a princess at the royal palace of Drupada but also as the main queen at the palace of the Pāndavas. One can imagine the attractive body of this “delicate” woman wearing perfume, gorgeous jewelry, and various kinds of expensive garments. However, in reality this “delicate” woman is the one who pushed the king Jayadratha to the ground when he seized her by her grass skirt in the forest while her husbands were away hunting keeping her under the protection of a maid- servant and the house priest. Draupadī's answer to her husband juxtaposes his statement regarding her ability:

Bhārata, there are in this world maidservants who serve as chambermaids and live under no one's protection. No other women go about like this, in the verdict of the people. I'll call myself Sairamdhri, a chambermaid with a skill in hairdressing. If you ask me, I shall say I am my own mistress. I'll wait on Sudeshnā, the king's famous wife. She will look after me when I get there, don't be so worried (4.3.16-18).

sairandhryo 'rakṣitā loke bhujīṣyāḥ santi bhārata  
naivam anyāḥ striyo yānti iti lokasya niścayaḥ  
sāhaṁ bruvāṇā sairandhrī kuśalā keśakarmanī  
ātmaguptā carīṣyāmi yan mām tvam anupṛcchasi  
sudeṣṇāṁ pratyupasthāsyē rājabhāryāṁ yaśasvinīm  
sā rakṣīṣyati mām prāptāṁ mā te bhūd duḥkham īdṛśam

Note that Draupadī's decision of impersonating a "chambermaid with a skill of hairdressing" is a complete inversion of her own status. Although after the exile in the forest she is back to her own environment of royal palace yet, she decides to stay here as a chambermaid of the queen. Moreover, this is the first time she wants to be isolated from her five husbands.

Consequently, in her attempt of disguising herself Draupadī conceals her hair and wraps herself up in a single large, black, dirty garment and poses herself as a "chambermaid" or Sairamdhri, a Sanskritized loan word from non-Aryan source.<sup>412</sup> While roaming the streets of the kingdom asking for a job of "chambermaid" she attracts the attention of the queen Sudeshnā who notices her from her palace balcony. The attractive body of Draupadī cannot be concealed even in disguise although her dirty garment connects her to a low caste. According to van Buitenen's insightful information, the name Sairandhrī is the feminine form of a group of lower caste people as known as Sairamdhra. However, Buitenen does not agree that the *Sairandhras* belong to any caste as Manu (10.12) claims. Buitenen thinks this particular group belongs to a tribe who gathers or eats

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<sup>412</sup> Van Buitenen, vol. 3, 8.

mushroom “*silindhra*”, “a borrowed word in Sanskrit”. It is well known that tribal women in India not bound by caste law enjoy unlimited freedom. Therefore, Draupadī in disguise of a tribal woman would not raise any doubt about her having five husbands. Clearly, this is a very clever decision on Draupadī’s part and Yudhisthira seems to approve his wife’s proposal. It is remarkable that he does not ponder about the effect of her physical presence on others. He is only happy knowing that she has made “a vow to be a good woman.”

Despite her disguise, the unmistakable beauty of Draupadī’s corporeal space creates enormous doubt on queen Sudeshnā. Having heard that she wants to work for her as her Sairandhrī, she says:

The people you mention are not as beautiful as you, radiant woman—so beautiful are only they who order many slaves and slave women who are maids (4.8.10).

She gazes at her physical appearance with awe: She is endowed with well developed bust, thighs, and slender waist. Her heels are not large, her throat is lined like a conch shell, and her face is like the full moon. She is poised with grace and sweet speech. Endowed with these auspicious attributes she could be one of the goddesses, thinks Sudeshnā (4. 8. 11-14). It seems that the queen herself is enamored by Draupadī’s beautiful countenance. Naturally, she worries that once the king notices Draupadī’s irresistibly divine beauty then he would leave her. But Draupadī replies that no man can have her as she is married to five *Gandharvas*.<sup>413</sup> It is astonishing that no one questions about the impossibility of marriage between a low born woman and *Gandhrvas* the supernatural being “of great

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<sup>413</sup> *Gandharvas* are supernatural beings.

beauty and artistry”. Van Buitenen explains the fact that “it is likely that these Gandharvas were understood as wandering minstrels with a fancy title.”<sup>414</sup>

On the other hand, it does not seem impossible that Draupadī is accepted as a supernatural being with supernatural husbands. To put it differently, the “bodily *hexis*” of Draupadī, I argue, betrays her attempt to pose as a woman of low class. Her dirty garment does not conceal the radiant body of the goddess Śrī or the body of a princess on human level. Her hierarchized body moves in a hierarchized manner. It must be noted that although she is not queen any longer, she is still the daughter of the king Drupada of Pāñcāla. Van Buitenen argues that like the other wives of the Pāndavas, she could have gone back to her father’s palace and waited there for their return. Besides, Draupadī’s brother has taken her children with him to the palace of Drupada. Yet, Draupadī stays with her husbands enduring attempted abduction and sufferings. However, it does not seem possible for her to follow the path of her co-wives when the stipulation of the last game demands that she should live with her husband in exile (2.67.10). Furthermore, considering that Draupadī is Śrī incarnate or the personification of Lady Sovereignty she has to be with her husbands at all times to remind them to avenge her assault by regaining the land of the sovereign king Yudhisthira. Most importantly, I argue, it is not enough for her to stay with her husbands, she must make sure that they regain the kingdom that is tied up with her at all times. But this is the first time Draupadī wants to establish herself as an independent woman but a woman with unseen male protectors. Not only does she reassure the queen that she is protected she also informs her how she has worked for the wife of Krishna and also for Draupadī who gave her the name Mālīnī, ‘garland girl’. Moreover,

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<sup>414</sup> Van Buitenen, vol. 3,9.

she knows the task of a chambermaid—the dressing of hair, the making of garland and the grinding of cosmetics. Eventually, Draupadī does secure her employment from the queen Sudeshnā. In this case, I argue, her radiant body space plays a dominant role in securing her job.

I have pointed out earlier how Draupadī's radiant body produced uncontrollable erotic desire in male visual field as happened before in the forest with Jayadratha. Definitely, the queen Sudeshnā recognizes her erotic attraction: hence her fear of employing her in the palace. In fact, the queen's brother Kīcaka who is the king's marshal falls in love with Draupadī at first sight and he asks the queen:

My pretty, who is this ravishing Goddess,  
Do tell me, who is she and whence, this lovely?  
She stirs up my spirit and sways my heart,  
I know of no medicine that could cure me! (4.13.7)

kā devarūpā hṛdayaṃgamā śubhe; ācakṣva me kā ca kutaś ca śobhanā  
cittaṃ hi nirmathya karoti mām vaśe; na cānyad atrauṣadham adya me matam

Being obsessed with Draupadī's incredible beauty, he approaches her and proposes with great passion:

I will shed the wives whom I had before,  
Sweet-smiling wrench, they shall be your slaves!  
I myself am your slave now, my comely woman,  
For you to command, my pretty, forever! (4.13.12)

tyajāmi dārān mama ye purātanā; bhavantu dāsyas tava cāruhāsini  
ahaṃ ca te sundari dāsavat sthitaḥ; sadā bhaviṣye vaśagovarānane

Draupadī, indeed, rejects his proposition but is forced to fetch some drink for him as demanded by the queen on the occasion of a holiday. She reluctantly goes to Kīcaka's own quarters and prays to the Sun for her protection. While she is in his quarters, he advances on her but she pushes him to the floor. Then she runs for help to the men's hall where the dice Master (Yudhisthira) is busy playing dice with the king. While following

her to the hall, Kīcaka throws her on the floor and kicks her before the very eyes of the king. At this point, an invisible bodyguard sent by the Sun throws Kīcaka on the floor. However, the king ignores this uproar and so does the dice master for fear of being identified. (4.15.32) This scene is the replica of the previous molestation of Draupadī in the hall of the Kauravas where her husbands were reduced to slaves. The only difference here is that only Bhīma is present in the hall with Yudhishtira and he restrains Bhīma's anger for her assault. This is the third time that Draupadī becomes molested by powerful men and two out of three episodes depict her husbands as silent onlookers among the powerful men in the royal court. It is Bhīma who does not hesitate to defend his beloved wife and thus responding to his wife's request secretly kills this arrogant general who dares to possess her. This murderous event generates uproar in the kingdom. Having heard of the vulnerable situation of this kingdom, the Kaurava army attacks them for a cattle raid. Arjuna to the astonishment of the prince Uttara helps him to defeat the attacking army.

Eventually, the true identities of the Pāndavas and Krishnā-Draupadī are revealed to the king Virāta.<sup>415</sup> The daughter of the king gets married to the son of Arjuna and Subhadra the sister of Krishna. Yudhishtira along with his brothers and Draupadī remain in this kingdom and after discussing with their various allies send emissary to Dhritarashtra for return of their share of the kingdom. During their discussion over war strategy, Yudhishtira, Arjuna, and even Bhīma's conciliatory tones enrage Draupadī. She says she is ashamed of Bhīmsena's strength and Arjuna's prowess in archery if Duryodhana "stays

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<sup>415</sup> In fact, the princess Uttarā wanted to marry Arjuna but at his insistence a marriage had been arranged between Uttarā and Arjuna's son Abhimanyu. Abhimanyu the great warrior died in the battle. His son continues the lineage of the Pāndavas. All the sons of Draupadī through her five husbands were brutally killed.



alive for another hour.” While she speaks, the depiction of her body and her bodily *hexis* come to the fore as if rallying for war:

Saying this, the black-eyed, heavy-hipped woman gathered up with her left hand the side of her hair, which was soft and curled at the ends, beautiful to look at and jet-black, perfumed with fine scents, showing all the good marks, and glossy like a cobra; and the lily-eyed one approached the lotus-eyed one with an elephant’s steps. Eyes filled with tears, Krishnā spoke to Krishna. “This hair was pulled by Duḥśāsana’s hands, lotus-eyed lord; remember it at all times when you seek peace with the enemies! If Bhīma and Arjuna pitifully hanker after peace, my ancient father will fight, and his warrior sons, Krishna! My five valiant sons will, led by Abhimanyu, fight with the Kurus, Madhusūdana! What peace will my heart know unless I see Duḥśāsana’s swarthy arm cut off and covered with dust! Thirteen years have gone by while I waited, hiding my rage in my heart like a blazing fire. Pierced by the thorn of Bhīma’s words, my heart is rent asunder, for now that strong-armed man has eyes for the Law only!” (5.80.33-41)

ity uktvā mṛdu saṃhāraṃ vṛjināgraṃ sudarśanam  
 sunīlam asitāpāṅgī puṇyagandhādhivāsitam  
 sarvalakṣaṇasaṃpannam mahābhujaga varcasam  
 keśapakṣaṃ varārohā grhya savyena pāṇinā  
 padmākṣī puṇḍarīkākṣam upetya gajagāminī  
 āsrupūrṇekṣaṇā kṛṣṇā kṛṣṇaṃ vacanam abravīt  
 ayaṃ te puṇḍarīkākṣa duḥśāsana karoddhṛtaḥ  
 smartavyaḥ sarvakāleṣu pareṣāṃ saṃdhim icchatā  
 yadi bhīmārjunau kṛṣṇa kṛpaṇau saṃdhikāmukau  
 pitā me yotsyate vṛddhaḥ saha putir mahārathaiḥ  
 pañca caiva mahāvīryāḥ putrā me madhusūdana  
 abhimanyuṃ puraskṛtya yotsyanti kurubhiḥ saha  
 duḥśāsana bhujam śyāmaṃ saṃchinnam pāṃsugunṭhitam  
 yady ahaṃ taṃ na paśyāmi kā śāntir hṛdayasya me  
 trayodaśa hi varṣāṇi pratīkṣantyā gatāni me  
 nidhāya hṛdaye manyuṃ pradīptam iva pāvakaṃ  
 vidīryate me hṛdayaṃ bhīma vāksālya pīḍitam  
 yo 'yam adya mahābāhur dharmam samanupaśyati

The aforementioned speech of Draupadī, Śrī incarnate evokes the destructive side of her through her very posture of gathering her black mass of jet-black hair with her left hand. This very posture, Hildebeitel points out, seems to recall the image of a goddess, the

goddess of destruction.<sup>416</sup> Furthermore, standing in that position she demands to witness the cut off arm, the arm that touched her hair, of Duḥśāsana. Hiltebeitel argues that Draupadī the auspicious goddess of fortune (Śrī-Lakshmī) also represents the goddess Kālī the goddess of destruction.<sup>417</sup> It is important to note that the depiction of Draupadī's black hair disheveled or braided symbolizes a divine dimension. Draupadī with disheveled hair alludes to the Goddess in her destructive form or in her inauspicious form who has been noted as *Jyestha* representing the contradiction to Śrī the goddess of fortune. Clearly, her black mass of hair symbolizes disorder and violence. Yet the myth of this goddess is not found in the epic but in the *Mārkaṇḍeya-Purana* that is post-epic.

Compare her disheveled hair, for instance, with her hair braided after the defeat of the Kauravas in the war when Bhīma tells Yudhishtira: “By good luck, the sinful Duryodhana has been slain with all his followers in battle. By good luck, you have gone the way of Draupadī's mass of hair.”<sup>418</sup> (12.16.25) The last line of Bhīma's address to Yudhishtira deserves more explanation. Hiltebeitel translates this line literally: *draupadyāḥ keśapaksasya distyā tvam padavīm gataḥ*. Although *padavīm* does mean the “way”<sup>419</sup>, Hiltebeitel notes that K. M. Ganguli brings out the implicit meaning of the line: “thou too, hast attained to the condition of Draupadī's locks”. Furthermore, Ganguli elaborates on “the condition of Draupadī's locks” in his footnote:

i.e., thou hast been restored to the normal condition. Draupadi had kept her locks disheveled since the day they had been seized by Duhsasana. After the

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<sup>416</sup> Alf. Hiltebeitel. “Draupadī's hair”, *Purusārtha* 5, (1981):170-214.

<sup>417</sup> Alf. Hiltebeitel. “Śiva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī” in *History of Religions* 20, no. ½. Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Aug.-Nov., 1980), 147-174. See also David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and the Sublime in Hindu Mythology*. Berkeley (University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>418</sup> Hiltebeitel, 1981, 200-201.

<sup>419</sup> When the Pāṇḍavas enter the forest, Nakula remarks that they are “following the way of Draupadī” (*draupadyāḥ padavīm caran*; 2.68.45).

slaughter of the Kurus those locks were bound up as before, or restored to their normal condition.<sup>420</sup>

However, Hiltebeitel's translation as the "mass of hair" seems to be fitting in this situation rather than her "locks". The important point is that Draupadī has gone back to her normal coiffure after the slaughter of Duryodhana and his fellow warriors. Draupadī's coiffed hair, it seems, plays a significant role in relation to her divine space. The Pāndavas share the stage of impurity with Draupadi and they are reborn from their disguised status at the palace of the king Virāta. Once reborn, they strategize the plan of revenge and when Duryodhana ignores their demand for their share of the kingdom, the great battle starts. Upon the victory of the Pāndavas, begins the coronation of Yudhishthira. The Pāndavas go through these stages, argues Hiltebeitel, in "following the way of Draupadī's mass of hair". Now the coiffed hair of Draupadī naturally indicates the coronation of the king:

For in the rebinding and anointing of Draupadī's hair the latter is implicit: she is "Royal Prosperity" or "Sovereignty"—Rājaśrī—incarnate, and her anointing represents the restoration of Yudhishthira's access to sovereignty.<sup>421</sup>

Through the symbol of Draupadī's hair, it seems, her divine space merges into her corporeal space. To put it differently, the bound up hair of Draupadī indicates the alliance of personified Sovereignty with sovereign king. From Bhīma's point of view, Yudhishthira's kingship signifies his normal state of existence as the sovereignty personified. Correspondingly, I suggest her unfortunate time is tied up with her untidy hair and fortunate time with her coiffed hair.

It is worth noting at this point that there is a definite lack of understanding about her beautiful body and its dangerous attraction. From the very beginning her body is

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<sup>420</sup> K.M.Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, book 12, section xvi, 30.

<sup>421</sup> Hiltebeitel, 1981, 201.

depicted with utmost feminine charm but only queen Sudeshnā while punctiliously specifying her corporeal space does recognize the destructive attraction of Draupadī's body. Surely, her husbands are quite aware of Draupadī's corporeal beauty as it is noted how Yudhishtira presents Draupadī just before wagering her in the game of dice. Yet her husband Yudhishtira and his devoted brothers unwittingly left her under the protection of the house priest and a maid in their dwelling in the forest. Again, they are totally oblivious to the danger that her beautiful body could generate at the palace of Virāta. Draupadī's attractive corporeal space generating destructive space recalls Helen's beautiful body/corporeal space generating the Trojan War. But Draupadī, unlike Helen, moves with her husbands in various geographical locations and she only suffers for their sake.

### **6.8 Draupadī in divine space**

The birth of Draupadī from a sacrificial Vedi establishes her completely divine existence on human plane. She has been adored and victimized for her beauty on earthly space, as any other woman with extraordinary beauty would be. I like to point out that she plays her role of a perfect *pativrata* towards the end of the epic when the king Yudhishtira decides to retire from ruling his kingdom. After the war, he has been installed on the throne of Hāstinapura and he has been ruling as a great king with Dhritarāshtra's guidance. After a while, Dhritarāshtra along with his wife and Kuntī the mother of the first three Pāndavas retire in the forest. Eventually, Yudhishtira decides to retire and so do his brothers and Draupadī. Clad in tree barks they resolve to follow the path of renunciation and wander through the various regions of India. It is important to note that they form a row in hierarchized order of following each other. Yudhishtira proceeds first, Bhīma follows him, then Arjuna followed by the twins in birth order and

finally behind them all walks Krishnā-Draupadī forming the sixth. Later on a dog joins them in their journey together.

While walking behind her husbands, Draupadī falls first and dies. But her husbands move ahead without looking back. Bhīma asks Yudhishtira why she is the first one to loose her life and Yudhishtira answers that she loved Arjuna the most. Gradually her husbands also die on the way for some characteristic blemishes, while her senior husband who brought her immense suffering enters heaven without losing his body. Yudhishtira's entrance into heaven in his human form signifies his flawless character.

The final book eighteen depicts how Yudhishtira sees Draupadī decorated with garland of lotus seated in heaven imbued with the splendor of sun. Seeing her suddenly the king Yudhishtira wishes to ask her a question. But Indra stops him and says:

This one is Sree herself. It was for your sake that she took birth, as the daughter of Drupada, among human beings, issuing not from any mother's womb, O Yudhishtira, endued with agreeable perfume and capable of delighting the whole world. For your pleasure, she was created by the wielder of the trident. She was born in the race of Drupada and was enjoyed by you all. (18.4. 9-10)

śrīr eṣā draupadī rūpā tvadarthe mānuṣaṃ gatā  
ayonijā lokakāntā puṇyagandhā yudhiṣṭhira  
drupadasya kule jātā bhavadbhiḥ copajīvitā  
ratyartham bhavatām hy eṣā nimitā śūlapāṇinā

Here again, the epic informs us that Draupadī was fashioned by Śiva the god of destruction. Therefore, it becomes possible to discern the destructive aspect of the Pāṇḍava queen who is Śrī incarnate the most auspicious goddess. Yet it remains unclear why Yudhishtira had a sudden desire to ask question even in heaven that is truly her own divine space. Moreover, we will never know what could be his question. Van Buitenen provides us with remarkable insight regarding the *Mahābhārata*. He explains that:

The epic is a series of precisely stated problems imprecisely and therefore inconclusively resolved, with every resolution raising a new problem, until the very end, when the question remains: whose is heaven and whose is hell? (1975, vol.2, p.29)

To sum up, I have attempted to construct a *chronotope* that is suitable to Krishnā-Draupadī. Although her life on human plane is divinely pre-ordained but the audience does not know how she being the goddess of prosperity is going to shape a particular situation in a particular time and space. Following Morson's suggestion I explored the ever- changing path of Krishnā-Draupadī. Considering her body as the corporeal space I have noted how the epic depiction of her body dovetails with the auspicious beauty of Śrī and with her opposite the inauspicious goddess of destruction. I have argued how her extremely desirable body creates a space charged with disorder and a conflicting time. Thus, it seems, even in her divine space the very sight of Draupadī generates a desire in Yudhishtira's mind to ask a question.

### Conclusion

Keeping in mind that Helen and Krishnā-Draupadī belong to completely different cultures and yet their respective cultures can be traced back to a common Indo-European heritage, I have attempted to probe the two epic narratives of Homer and the ancient Indic narrative of Vyāsa. My primary emphasis has been to examine the narratives of the character of Helen of Sparta in the two Greek epics and of Krishnā-Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata* through a comparative approach.

My point of departure in section one is the myth of overburdened Earth that appears in the epic cycle explaining the necessity of Helen's birth. I have highlighted the strikingly parallel myth of an overburdened Earth explaining the births of Helen and Draupadī as instruments of war both in the *Iliad* and in the *Mahābhārata*. While following a "typological" method of comparison, I have argued how this particular myth traces the traditions of the Trojan War and the *Mahābhārata* war to the Indo-European heritage. Moreover, through this myth I have argued that both Helen and Krishnā-Draupadī are divinely ordained to be the instruments of war. In order to bolster my argument of asserting these two royal women as *casus belli* I have constructed a tripartite system of motifs: Birth, Beauty, and Marriage. In view of the narratives of their portrayals through the three motifs, two important consequences have come to the fore: First, the bronze age civilization attests the succession of kingship in ancient Greece from father-in-law to son-in-law as reported by Finkelberg. Second, the myth of Śrī has a parallel in the Irish tradition as the myth of Sovereignty as highlighted by many scholars, Rees and Rees, for example.

The second part of my dissertation discusses individually the self-presentation of Helen of Sparta and Krishnā-Draupadī of Pāñcāla through their skilful verbal manoeuvre.

Drawing on Lateiner's definition of non-verbal behavior in Homeric epic and also Bourdieu's theory of bodily *hexis* I have attempted to explore the narratives of Helen in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Similarly, I have engaged the same method to explain the case of Draupadī. While being extremely aware of their own worth, they both maneuver their situation for their own defense through their excellent verbal skill. As their situation varies so does their rhetorical skill. However, coming from totally different regions of the globe, they do differ in their speaking power.

From the very beginning, Helen's poetic ability has been compared to the narrator himself. Furthermore, Helen is the weaver of tapestry and the weaver of tales as well. At the *Teichoscopia*, she speaks to Priam with modesty. When asked by Priam, she introduces the Achaean warriors with great authority and never forgets to direct her answer in relation to her ownself. She is elusive. She blames herself for leaving her home, but the audience will never know whether she left Menelaus willingly or unwillingly. When approached by Aphrodite at the rampart, she recognizes the goddess and refuses to follow her to the private chamber of Paris. While in his bedroom, she does not hesitate to rebuke the goddess. Similarly, she reproaches Paris for leaving the battlefield. Then she changes her mind and asks Paris not to go back lest he dies. When Hector visits Helen and Paris in their private chamber, Helen speaks to Paris in "honey-sweet words" (6.343) but she calls herself dog as she has blamed herself in communicating to Priam. She blames Paris for his lack of shame but praises Hector for his understanding of public indignation. Her profound understanding of the ambiguous gift of Zeus enables her to have a proleptic vision of poetic immortality for Paris, Hector, and herself. At the lamentation of Hector, not only does she earn the position of a most important mourner, she also praises Hector in relation to herself. Helen's authoritative rhetorical skill in the *Iliad* reveals her royal



position in Sparta. She is the queen of Sparta, and Menelaus gains her kingdom only by marriage. The veiled body of beautiful Helen is not entirely transparent in the visual field of the onlookers. Similarly, her excellent verbal skill seems veiled as well to the audience. Coming from a royal household where matrilineal descent is practiced, Helen has to be ambiguous in her speech in a patrilineal Trojan society. Thus she has to blame herself but her usage of words for self-blaming, as has been noted, fits in only in the world of heroes.

However, the narrative of Helen in the *Odyssey*, unlike in the *Iliad*, is a subtle display of Helen's divinity. She is introduced as descending from her high roofed chamber like a goddess in the middle of their glittering hall; her spinning implements are made of gold and silver and she is compared to "Artemis of the golden distaff". She has an uncanny ability of recognition. Her art of speaking reflects the utterances of Muses in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In fact, Helen's good drug has an epithet generally used for Zeus. Clearly, she is the "daughter of Zeus" and she wants to undertake the role of Zeus through the drug, as Bertolin points out. Even Menelaus will have an everlasting life in the Elysian plane for being married to Helen, "the daughter of Zeus". Being back to her own land Helen can flaunt her ability to decipher the ominous signs; she can foretell the future. Although the world of Troy is a distant past for her, like in the *Iliad*, she continues to weave. She proudly offers a robe that she has woven to Telemachus for her future bride. The very fact of gift giving as a token of guest friendship is usual only in the world of heroes, as Menelaus also offers a beautiful bowl to Telemachus. Helen's gift signifies the authority of a queen. In view of Helen's power of speech, she speaks in the *Iliad* as a royal female authority from a matrilineal society and in the *Odyssey* as an established queen with a divine heritage.

The narrative of Krishnā-Draupadī from the perspective of her self-presentation through her power of speech, as I have noted, is different due to her culture and situation. Although the unusual birth of Krishnā-Draupadī is not unknown to the people in the *Mahābhārata*, she has not been treated as the goddess Śrī. Her divine beauty does not inspire any reverential awe that is suitable for an immortal goddess like Helen at the rampart, for example. Instead, she has suffered utmost indignities even in the presence of her five husbands, hence, her powerful speech for her self-defense. The narrator of the *Mahābhārata* depicts her mainly on the human plane, except for, the last book (eighteenth) where her real identity is revealed.

Draupadī's portrayal is the upholder of an ideal *pativratā* (devoted to husband only) in the Hindu world. By contrast, at the assembly hall, she reveals her self-awareness with her carefully crafted question. She follows the *dharma* of an ideal wife as stipulated by the brāhmanic society yet, at the same time, she does not accept her status of a slave as the result of her husband's gambling. So she dares to question the very procedure of this game of dice witnessed by the royal people at the royal hall. Her insubordinate attitude in presence of royal elders is not encouraged in a patriarchal society. Yet, it is said that due to her fierce practice as an ideal wife, the god Dharma (in abstract sense) saves her from being derobed. A similar paradox is found in the scene where Draupadī tries to encourage her senior husband to retaliate against Duryodhana for taking away his part of kingdom by unfair means.

Draupadī's conversation with her senior husband during their stay in the forest again shows her rhetorical skill. Yudhishtira admonishes his wife for arguing "too much", for doubting "too much", and thus transgressing her normative role as an obedient wife. As the wife of a kshatriya, on the contrary, Draupadī does not comprehend her

husband who passively accepts his defeat. Therefore, for the well being of her husband, she willfully decides that she must lead him to the right path. Clearly, this kind of logic must not be encouraged when proposed by a wife to her husband. Moreover, she makes a huge error at the end of her speech by recounting her educational experience at the royal household of her father where a reputed teacher used to give scholarly discourse. A devoted wife must not show off her knowledge even in an indirect way to her husband. It is crucial to note that there is a gap between Draupadī's understanding of her duty (*dharma*) as a devoted wife and the duty of an ideal wife stipulated by the brāhmanic society. She must not transgress the society's code of conduct and yet, she does. The narrator gives another example of her showing off her great skill in a friendly dialogue with the wife of Krishna.

When the wife of Krishna visits Draupadī at their dwelling in the forest, she asks an inquisitive question about her ability to keep her five husbands satisfied. She speaks to her in great detail. Draupadī reminds her that they are satisfied because, not only does she attend to her husbands' need with great care, she also supervised the royal household in their formal palace where myriad of domestic servants worked and innumerable people were entertained. Most importantly, the final verse (3.222.51) asserts that she alone "among the glorious Pāndavas" knew the income and expenses of the royal revenue. Furthermore, it was she who used to manage the huge treasury of her husbands with financial mastery. Thus, with painfully exhaustive work of an ideal wife on a daily basis, she pleases her five husbands. It is impossible to accept that any human being can perform so much work unless it is the ideal standard set for a woman in a patrilineal society and Krishnā-Draupadī is depicted as the epitome of that ideal. It is also possible that Krishnā-Draupadī's dialogue with the wife of Krishna is a veiled way of indicating the difficulty

of serving her husbands following the ideal of a *pativratā* woman. Although the cultural world of Draupadī differs greatly from that of Helen's, I have shown that these heroines demonstrate unique similarity in their self-presentation through their rhetorical skill.

In the third or the final section of this dissertation, I have attempted to investigate the function of space and time in shaping the characters of aforementioned queens of the two ancient literatures. Drawing on insightful articles of Irene de Jong, brief analysis of Helen in Christos Tsagalis's book explaining the function of space and time in the *Iliad*, Norman Austin's understanding of time and space from Homer's perspective, and above all Bakhtin's concept of interconnectedness between time and space I have attempted to view Helen through the narratives of time and space in the Homeric epics. I have applied the same model in understanding the function of time and space through the narrative of Krishnā-Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*.

In the first chapter of this reading, I have examined the narratives of Helen of Sparta in relation to time and space in the *Iliad* and also in the *Odyssey* as well. I have attempted to construct Helen at the time of war that is happening in Trojan space and then at the time of peace when she is back to her own original royal space at Sparta. I have elaborated how Helen in the *Iliad* captures the belligerent time of the heroes in her woven space. Watching Helen's beautiful body wrapped with shining linen advancing to the *Teichoscopia* revitalizes the aged warriors seating at the wall. The viewing wall acts as a social space and at the same time, a liminal space that stands between the royal household and the battlefield. Here at the *Teichoscopia*, Helen travels back to her happy time in Sparta while identifying the Achean heroes for Priam. Helen's interaction with beautiful Aphrodite happens on this wall and from this liminal space she follows the goddess to Paris's fragrant bedchamber. Again in the same chamber Hector comes to see Paris and

Helen. While conversing with Hector, she weaves her past, present and future through her self-awareness and poetic consciousness. Similarly, at the public space of Hector's lamentation, Helen connects Hector's glorious past that will be sung in future through her unique lamentation. Time, in the *Iliad*, therefore, can be visualized in a continuous spectrum of past, present, and future.

Helen's space and time in the *Odyssey* is marked with the notion of polarity. Homer devotes books four and fifteen to narrating Helen in the company of Menelaus and their dinner guests: Telemachus and Peisistratus, son of Nestor. The world of the *Odyssey* for them is the world of peace and it cherishes family values. The book four begins in the midst of a joyous event celebrating the double weddings of Hermione to the son of Achilles and Megapenthes, son of Menelaus and a slave to the daughter of Alcetor of Sparta. The glorious palace of Menelaus filled with joy of celebration juxtaposes the brief description of rough space travelled by Telemachus and Peisistratus at the very beginning of book four. After a while, shiny Helen like "Artemis of the golden distaff" descends from her high roofed chamber in the brilliant hall adding more brilliance. She is surrounded by precious objects embedded with distant time and space. Although her precious gifts including her good drug come from Egypt, but her travel to this distant space is not mentioned and Menelaus is silent about Helen's presence in Egypt. Therefore, Helen's unspoken connection to Egypt compounded with the narration of her *pharmakon*, story space, and of her supernatural power in the *Odyssey* may cast light on the poetic tradition of Stesichorus.

The chapter on Draupadī particularly, in the final section of this dissertation emphasizes that the function of space and time in relation to Draupadī is realized through visual images. As her beautiful body serves as a "site" of male desire, she also creates her

own space charged with hostility in coordination with time while moving with her husbands from one space to another. As Śrī, her corporeal existence beside her senior husband affirms the sociocultural position of a king in ancient India. In light of the aforementioned background, I view Draupadī's body as a "corporeal space".

Viewing Draupadī as "a corporeal space" provides insight into the narrator's repeated allusion to her body. The narrator associates the shape of her body in relation to the ritual altar suggesting a constant reminder of her birth predetermined for violent purpose. She keeps her mass of dark hair loose as a reminder of her assault and thus to encourage her husbands to fight against their cousins in order to regain their lost kingdom. Menelaus and Agamemnon gathered the whole Achaean army to retrieve Helen in order to re-establish Menelaus's honour. But, in the case of Draupadī, she herself reminds her senior husband to prepare for the great battle and thereby keeps her five husbands united in taking revenge for her assault. Moreover, I have shown how the descriptions of her garments are particularly important in signifying the temporal context of her existence.

Her bloodstained garment signifies the impending bloody war and she is the *casus belli*. At the time of her leaving the Kuru kingdom, she purposely keeps her bloodstained garment on as a visual reminder of her torture so that the citizens must not forget her suffering. During her stay at the forest with her husbands, she keeps the same attire of a renunciant like her husbands and I have noted how narrator points out her sage like body. Again her garment indicates her impending spatio-temporal situation, her dirty garment at the palace of the king at the time of their living incognito, for example. Finally she binds her hair, as noted, when the war is over. Yet, scholars pay no attention to the significance of her corporeal depictions, and her garments according to her situations in spatio-temporal contexts.

Although the audience knows about her unusual birth, she does not exhibit any supernatural power. Rather her dignity is saved by supernatural power. To put it differently, she is rewarded by divine power, as she is the ideal follower of duty (*dharma*) of a married woman. Her senior husband, son of the god *Dharma*, does not even acknowledge her divinity. Her husbands leave her on the snowy path when she dies and they continue their journey towards heaven. It is noted how hard it is for Yudhisthira to restrain himself from questioning her even when she appears in heaven in full splendor of *Śrī*.

In the final analysis the necessity of their birth as *casus belli* still seems unclear. Achilles who was demi-god as well as the “best of the Achaeans” could have fulfilled the “will of Zeus”. The Trojan War could have happened because of the desire of territorial expansion. Similarly, the *Mahābhārata* war could have happened over the succession of the throne. It has been elaborated that Helen of Sparta had her own cult in her own country and her superhuman abilities in the *Odyssey* definitely bespeaks her divinity. West and Clader, as noted above, show how Homer’s Helen is a blend of the Indo-European and pre-Indo-European cultures. Furthermore, I have pointed out how Finkelberg and Atchity inform that the Aegean civilization in Bronze Age demonstrates the evidence of matrilineal system due to which Menelaus became the king of Sparta. In view of the above scholarly information and Homer’s portrayal in the *Iliad*, it is possible to suggest strongly that Helen of Sparta in the *Iliad* displays a tradition that stands at the crossroad of the Aegean matrilineal civilization and Indo-European patrilineal tradition. Thus, it is not difficult to assume that the tradition of Helen’s birth as *casus belli* is an Indo-European invention of harnessing powerful goddess of Aegean civilization.

Similarly, the birth of Krishnā-Draupadī as an agent for destroying the warrior race in the *Mahābhārata* is superfluous. As we have been told above that the goddess Śrī herself born from the ritual altar becomes the common wife of the five demi-gods. More importantly, she is the perfect example of an ideal wife as expected in a patrilineal society. I have accentuated how she is portrayed as the epitome of the *pativrata* ideal as narrated by Draupadī herself in her dialogue with the wife of Krishna in the *Mahābhārata*. At the same time, Draupadī's bellicose speech inciting her husbands to fight following their *dharma* of the Kshatriyas suggests a totally opposite image of her. I have pointed out how Madelaine Biarreau compared Draupadī with the goddess whose origin dates back to the Indus civilization of India. Moreover, We are told that originally Śrī was the pre-Vedic goddess of fertility who has been incorporated in the Vedic pantheon at a latter stage. I argue that Draupadī can be<sup>422</sup> the social manifestation of pre-Vedic ideology (Indus valley civilization) in her bellicose yet *pativrata* performance stipulated by the patrilineal society of the Hindu world. In conclusion, while the ambiguous character of Helen of Sparta displays the beginning of the Indo-European society, equally equivocal character of Krishnā-Draupadī of Pāñcāla reflects the residue of pre-Vedic ideology in a patrilineal society embedded in Vedic ideology. As a result, the portrayals of Homer's Helen and Vyāsa's Krishnā-Draupadī do not play the simple role of catalysts for creating war. Rather, they convey their identities through power of speech while trying to fit in a patrilineal society.

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<sup>422</sup> C. Scott Littleton, *The New Comparative Mythology: An Anthropological Assessment of the Theories of Georges Dumézil* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1982), 234.



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