

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Title: Dicing: The Turning point in the Epic Mahabharata

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Abstract

The turning point of the great epic Mahabharata was the game of dicing. Here attempt has been made to study in brief the situation leading to the game of dice and its impact on the future of Hastinapura and the great Kuru Dynasty. The game of dice was one of the most important reasons leading to the war of Kurukshetra between two formidable cousin clans.

Keywords: Dicing, Clans, Turning point, consequences.

Objective

Objective of this paper is to study the background leading to dicing and its consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Mahabharata is considered the longest Epic in India. Consisting of 1, 60, 500 lines of verse in the epic, it has been rightfully termed so. Krishna Dwaipayana Vedavyasa was both the literary and biological ancestor of all the characters of the Mahabharata and Ganesha had been his scribe or copyist. First evidence of the 'written form of the epic is found in the Gupta period, which later on forms the basis of both the 19th Century Calcutta edition and the 20th C. Poona critical edition. The narration of the Mahabharata takes place in *the Naimisa* forest where the sages (rishis) of the forest heard the story from the bard Ugrasravas who had himself heard it at Janmejaya's snake sacrifice. Janmejaya was the great grandson of the Pandavas. Vaisampayana was the narrator in Janmejaya's snake sacrifice. The core of the story is a successful mutual rivalry.

BACKGROUND STORY LEADING TO DICING

The heir of the Bharata dynasty, Santanu begets three sons- The first one being the legitimate heir – Devabrata with the river Goddess Ganga. With Satyabati, the daughter of a fisher tribe, Santanu has two sons, chitrangada and Vichitravirya. Satyabati wanted Devabrata

to give up his right to the throne. It was also demanded that he bear no children as they might clash with Satyabati's grandsons for succession in future. Devabrata promises to fulfil both the conditions and known as Bhishma. Chitrangada leaves no heirs, dying unmarried. Vichitravirya marries two sisters, Ambika and Ambalika, but dies childless. Satyabati asked Bhishma to marry Vichitravirya's widows which he refused. Satyabati called Vyasa (her pre-marital son with sage Parasara) to serve the widows for offspring. Vyasa thus produces two sons- with Ambika blind Dhritarastra and with Ambalika, Pandu, a boy of fragile health. Vyasa also gave birth to a bastard son of the household- Vidura. Elder Dhritarastra was excluded from succession to the throne due to blindness. Pandu is thus crowned the king. But Pandu was unable to make his marriage successful by producing children as that would result in his immediate death. This complicated the paternity situation further. Kunti used the boon and with divine help gives birth to three sons while Madri produces another two. Together they are known as Pandavas. Pandu's eldest Yudhishthira is born ahead of the blind Dhritarastra's eldest son Duryodhana. Pandu gives up the throne and moves to forest. Meanwhile Dhritarastra became the king of Hastinapura. After Pandu and Madri's death, the Pandavas accompanied by their mother Kunti returned to Hastinapura, giving rise to the 3rd generation crisis of succession. Ideally blind Dhritarastra recognizes Yudhishthira's claim to the throne as the eldest born, but practically he does not commit to the cause of Yudhishthira or support him openly. His blind love for his son Duryodhana makes him weak and he agrees to his son's undue demand.

Duryodhana got interested in the throne and attempted to remove the recognised rightful claimants, his cousins first by assassination and later through a plan to burn them alive in an inflammable house. Pandavas discovered the plan with Vidura's help who was always bound by truth escaped unharmed. In the guise of the Brahmins, they reappeared at the swayambara of Draupadi and Arjuna wins her as common wife for all the five brothers. This marriage strengthened Pandavas position as

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Panchala king Drupada who was Draupadi's father is a powerful ally. Pandavas are no longer alone and weak. Kauravas became alert. They could understand the growing strength of the Pandavas after getting Panchala King Draupada's full-fledged support in the form of the marital relationship. Moreover Krishna and Baladeva has sympathy and solidarity with the Pandavas cause and claim. In emergency council at Hastinapura following these events, Bhishma upholds the Pandavas rights. The de facto king Duryodhana no longer listens to the advice of the elders. A compromise formula was found in the form of partition of Hastinapura. Pandavas accepted to rule a smaller territory of the Bharata kingdom in the uncultivated Khandava forest. But this is not at all the solution. Neither party surrenders the ultimate claim to full sovereignty. Clearing Khandava forest they set the glorious city of Indraprastha. Their magical palace was created by the Demon Maya; a tribute from his side to Pandavas for saving his life in the fire of the Khandava forest. Krishna suggested them to perform a **RAJASUYA**, a show to declare their independence and separate identity. Duryodhana burns with envy at the great wealth of the Pandavas on display at the consecration ceremony (ordaining to a sacred office). His anger knew no bound when he felt humiliated at Pandavas palace created by demon Maya. He was laughed at by the Pandavas except Yudhishthira and everyone around when he fell on the floor. Humiliated to the core he returns home bent on planning their destruction. This time around his anger knew no bound. With maternal uncle Sakuni, Duryodhana schemes to appease his imperial yearning once again and invites Pandavas to Hastinapura for a friendly game of dice as a part of the scheme knowing well *that* gambling is Yudhishthira's greatest weakness and Sakuni is a great player of dice who had never lost. Before dicing a lot of discussion took place between Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana while the wise Vidura was against it from the very beginning. He could foresee destruction looming on Hastinapura.

Yudhishthira accepted the offer without hesitation as gambling was his weakness. In this game he gambled away all his wealth and people to Duryodhana, including the freedom of his sons, his brothers, and himself. At each stage Sakuni mocked and provoked Yudhishthira to stake further. He finally stakes and loses Draupadi. Draupadi was subjected to abominable dishonors, including disrobing and verbal sexual abuse in a hall full of the dignitaries of the kingdom. Driven to the limit she asks question-

Yudhishthira free himself that he could have staked her, as his own liberty had already been gambled away? In other words did his husbandly rights over his wife hold when he was himself enslaved? Draupadi's question about the appropriateness of the stake leads ultimately to the official ending of the dicing game. Senior most people in the assembly remained downcast as they could not protest against the disrobing of a woman and felt ashamed at the question she posed. Nobody could give a proper answer to her questions. Duryodhana in the assembly scolds Draupadi and invites her to sit on his thigh. Then he orders Dussasana to disrobe her in front of the court. But she was miraculously saved by Krishna's intervention. Dhritarashtra used his kingly veto and declared the game null and void, restoring the status quo. He gave three boons to Draupadi to pacify her. Draupadi saves her husband's from lifelong imprisonment with the help of the boons. Totally dissatisfied with Dhritarashtra's role, Sakuni and Duryodhana once again pleaded before Dhritarashtra for another game of dice with Yudhishthira showing his unhappiness and lack of mental peace. Coxed further he agreed reluctantly. This time they play their Kingdom for the whole kingdom. Once again Yudhishthira got defeated and was forced into a 13 year exile in forest. The condition is that they should live in forests and pass the 13th year in disguise without being identified by anybody. If they are identified by anybody during that one year of disguise, they have to repeat 12 years of exile in forest and the 13th year in disguise. Pandavas started for their exile in forest. Kunti stayed back at Vidura's place.

DICING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The future of the Pandavas was determined by the game of dice. They had to undergo hardship and face many obstacles due to their defeat in the game. Yudhishthira's weakness with gambling brought about the unexpected downfall i.e. losing everything they had and 12 years of exile and 1 year of exile in disguise. Added to this is the humiliation and insult of Draupadi and his brothers at the hands of Kauravas. Draupadi was dishonoured beyond forgiveness. She was in utter rage. And her anger and asking for revenge pushed her husbands to action. Bhishma promised to take revenge for the insult Draupadi had gone through by killing both Duryodhana and Dushsasana. While Draupadi has motivated her husbands for the revenge, Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravas and wife of Dhritarashtra effectively blinds her husband further. After successfully spending 13 years in exile, the Pandavas remerged to claim Indraprastha, but were declined. Finally

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the two cousin clans were in the threshold of a gruesome war- known as the great war of Kurukshetra. At the end of dicing Narada appears and predicts the downfall of the Kauravas. Samjaya(the commentator to Dhritarastra) predicts to Dhritarastra that destruction is inevitable. Dhritarastra said that he never wanted war with Pandavas. Being a weak father he could not control his son.

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