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An Apprenticeship in Attentiveness: Narrative Patterning in the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna* of the *Mahābhārata*

An Expansive Narrative

"...Not only individual voices, but precisely and predominantly the dialogic relationship among voices, their dialogic interaction. He heard both the loud, recognised reigning voices of the epoch, that is the reigning dominant ideas... as well as voices still weak, ideas not yet fully emerged, latent ideas... and ideas which were just beginning to ripen, embryos of future world views."[1]

The opinion above was formulated by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail B a k h t i n regarding the works of D o s t o e v s k y. The following paper will demonstrate the existence of a similar 'dialogic relationship among voices' within the *Mahābhārata*.

The central thesis of this paper is, in summary, that the *Mahābhārata*'s own claims of encyclopaedic status, as in the well-known words "Whatever is here... is found elsewhere. But what is not here is nowhere else,"[2] constitute a powerful comment on its structure; a structure which I shall argue is inherently dialogic. This structure will be examined through a consideration of the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*.

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[1] M. B a k h t i n, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, C. E m e r s o n (ed. and trans.), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. 90.

[2] Mbh.I.56.33:

> *dharme cārthe ca kāme ca mokṣe ca bharatarṣabha*
> *yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kva cit*
>
> O Bull of the Bhāratas, whatever is here on *dharma, artha, kāma,* or *mokṣa,*
> that is found elsewhere, but what is not here is nowhere else.

And again, in the same words, at Mbh.XVIII.5.38 and I am sure elsewhere. All references are to the Poona critical edition of *The Mahābhārata*, 19 vols. plus 6 vols. of indexes, edited by V.S. S u k t h a n k a r, S.K. B e l v a l k a r, P.L. V a i d y a et al., Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona 1933–1972. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

The selection of the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*[3] to this end reflects not only their centrality and universality in all recensions of the *Mahābhārata* but also their overt interrelationship. The *Nalopākhyāna* is narrated to a disconsolate Yudhiṣṭhira by the sage Bṛhadaśva in direct response to Yudhiṣṭhira's lament at his ill fortune at dicing (which forces the Pāṇḍavas into a thirteen year exile).[4] In this way we are presented with two texts that provide a context for each other, one directly (Yudhiṣṭhira is exiled and seeks consolation as a direct result of the events of the *Dyūtaparvan* and its sequel), the other indirectly (the story of Nala sheds light on how the events of the dicing might be interpreted through comparison with another's plight). It will be argued below that it is through this mutual contextualisation that certain messages are introduced regarding the interpretation of the two texts. The sociolinguist R. B a u m a n (following the anthropological researches of G. B a t e s o n) has termed this form of communication about communication 'metacommunication':

"It is characteristic of communicative interaction that it includes a range of explicit or implicit messages which carry instructions on how to interpret the other message(s) being communicated."[5]

The demonstration of the metacommunicative dimensions of narrative patterning in the *Mahābhārata* will help to substantiate our central thesis concerning its 'encyclopaedic quality'. For by this we do not refer to a claim that the *Mahābhārata* should be taken at its word in the matter of its all-inclusiveness. Instead we argue that by a close reading of two interrelated episodes within the *Mahābhārata* we begin to discern a certain 'narrative expansivity', a generative quality which is the engine of the *Mahābhārata*'s communicative and metacommunicative progression.

Of central importance to this 'generative quality' are the potential responses of multiple audiences. It will be argued through our discussions that the two texts can not only be read in terms of their interrelated contributions to the main, or 'primary narrative' (that of the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas) but also that the range of metacommunicative devices deployed by the two texts serves to direct audience response. The range of 'internal' audiences deployed within the two texts generates an inclusivistic, expansive series of narrative 'spaces' for commentary. These are demarcated by multiple 'narrative framings', by which I refer to the embedding of one tale inside another. These framings 'imply' a further framing by the audience(s) 'external' to the text; they are thus 'expansive' and 'inclusive' and invite meta-commentary on the part of the audience(s). Among these 'audiences' are included those academics engaged in

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[3] Summaries of these two narratives have been provided as an appendix.
[4] Mbh.3.49.34.
[5] See R. B a u m a n, *Verbal Art as Communication*, Waveland Press, Illinois 1977, p. 15.

studying the *Mahābhārata*. Philip L u t g e n d o r f, in his study of the *Rāmcaritmānas* of T u l s ī d ā s, draws on this texts organising conceit of a pool set below a series of descending steps (a 'ghat'),[6] as fitting descriptions of the above process:

"These metaphorical images suggest the poet's strategy in periodically shifting his focus: to call their attention to contextual material in light of which he desires them to interpret it... (he) thus weaves a series of "commentaries" into the very fabric of the text. Another frame is implied as well... his listeners... in turn may become tellers of and commentators on his story..."[7]

The *Mahābhārata* too prompts and directs reader response through multiple narrative framings, and thus blurs the designations internal and external with regard to the text. 'Audience response', it will be argued, is ensured and developed through the device of recurring, generative ambiguity in key passages. This 'ambiguity' being a key means whereby narrative 'space' is generated. The audience is then provided with subtle 'narrative prompts' as to what should be done with this narrative 'space'.

We will therefore be arguing for an attention to 'narrative expansivity', 'discursive prompting' and 'generative ambiguity' within the text at the levels of both 'form' and 'content' to the extent that the very opposition is destabilised:

"...the specificity of art is expressed not in the elements that go to make up a work but in the special way they are used. By the same token, the concept of form took on a different meaning; it no longer had to be paired with any other concept, it no longer needed correlation."[8]

It will thus be a central aspect of our thesis that the *Mahābhārata* is both an open-ended (con)text and yet that this open-ended quality is rigorously constrained and subject to certain basic structural principles. The elucidation of these will proceed through an analysis of generative ambiguity and narrative framing in the interplay of the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*. These discussions will be extended and clarified through a 'case study' of the notion of the *akṣahṛdaya* or 'the heart of the dice'. A key and recurring term will be 'dialogue', applying not only between different episodes within the *Mahābhā-rata*, but also between different levels of textual exegesis within a single text,

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[6] The title itself refers to the 'lake of the acts of Rām', with each of its books being 'steps', or *sopāns*, leading to it.

[7] *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsīdās*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1991, pp. 25–26.

[8] B.M. E j x e n b a u m, *The Theory of the Formal Method*, in: L. M a t e j k a and K. P o m o r s k a (eds), *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1971, p. 12.

between author and audience and finally between academics themselves. It is the intention of this essay to begin the process of analysing the *Mahābhārata* as a dialogic text par excellence. It is this process which requires, as Julia Kristeva so expressively put it in a very different context, an "apprenticeship in attentiveness."[9]

Before we can proceed toward this end we must, however, examine some of the central definitional perspectives on the *Mahābhārata* and position this paper in relation to them.[10]

A Kernel of Threads[11]

"From a theoretical point of view the situation remains very much the same as it did fifty years ago, namely, chaotic. Myths are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways: as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or as the basis of ritual. Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinised heroes or fallen gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to idle play or a crude kind of philosophic speculation."[12]

Although another forty years have passed since the publication of these words, the field of enquiry into 'Mythology' has not substantially altered. All of the above strains of analysis may be located in approaches to the *Mahābhārata*[13] (with the exception of a notable inversion in that the *Mahābhārata* has been seen as based on, rather than the basis of, ritual practice). How then, armed with the foreknowledge of the difficulties that face us, are we to begin to approach the *Mahābhārata* as a dialogic text?

Historically there have been two main approaches to the *Mahābhārata*. E. W a s h b u r n   H o p k i n s dubbed these the 'Synthetic' and the 'Analytic' schools of thought. D a h l m a n n's *Mahābhārata als Epos und Rechtsbuch*[14]

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[9] *Stabat Mater*, in: T. M o i (ed.), *A Kristeva Reader*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986.

[10] The following section in particular, as well as this article in general, owe a profound debt of gratitude to J. B r o c k i n g t o n's *The Sanskrit Epics*, Brill, Leiden 1998. The combination of pithy summary and even-handed critical evaluation, as well as the superb bibliography, were invaluable research aids.

[11] This is G.J. H e l d's somewhat mixed metaphor. See his *The Mahābhārata: An Ethnological Study*, Uitgeversmaatschappij, Amsterdam 1935. It is used here to express something of the paradox of the *Mahābhārata*'s simultaneous linear and radial, narrative and meta-narrative, progression.

[12] C. L e v i - S t r a u s s, *Structural Anthropology* 1, Penguin, London 1973, p. 207.

[13] From V.S. S u k t h a n k a r's psychologisms in the final chapter of *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, (Motilal Barnarsidass, Delhi 1957) to the surprising (but rigorous) resurgence of Nature Mythology in the form of Georg V o n   S i m s o n's article *The Mythic Background of the Mahābhārata*, "Indologica Taurinensia", 12, 1984, pp. 191–223.

[14] Dames, Berlin 1895.

epitomises the former while H o p k i n s' own work is perhaps the best representative of the latter (particularly his *The Great Epic of India*[15]). D a h l m a n n attempted to argue that the *Mahābhārata* was not simply an epos (an epic) but also a Rechtsbuch (a law book) and that it was the work of a lone redactor, "a single diaskeuast, who welded various older elements of the poem into a single whole."[16] Conversely, H o p k i n s, a firm adherent to the canons of textual criticism, opined that "To this day, warped and twisted from its original purpose, it is the story, not the sermon, that holds enthralled the throng that listen to the recitation of the great epic."[17] H o p k i n s believed in the notion of an Epic nucleus of the *Mahābhārata* that had been subject to numerous didactic interpolations; these he viewed with some opprobrium. Even in the expression of this, however, his central question reflects (and distorts) our own major concern:

"For the history of the text, *the interrelation of the parts* is the one important problem... the most vicious masses of didactic fungus are really fungus and not the radical part of the tree."[18]

For H o p k i n s the interrelation of parts was purely a matter of linear sequence, a matter of painstaking textual analysis, reconstruction and cross-referencing (which is of undoubted value). However, for the purposes of a *Mahābhārata* considered in terms of dialogue, his assertion, as well as his 'didactic fungus', take on a new significance.

The 'didactic fungus' here becomes an essential part of the process of 'dialogic interaction'. The *Mahābhārata* viewed from this perspective returns us to D a h l m a n n's emphasis on the encyclopaedic quality of the *Mahābhārata*. This is especially the case in a text in which the notion of a single authorial vision (D a h l m a n n's 'diaskeuast') has been demonstrated to be untenable.[19] However, D a h l m a n n's emphasis on the essential unity of the *Mahābhārata*, his

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[15] E. W a s h b u r n H o p k i n s, *The Great Epic of India*, Motilal Barnarsidass, Delhi 1993 (1901).

[16] H e l d, op. cit.

[17] H o p k i n s 1993, op. cit., p. 367.

[18] E. W a s h b u r n H o p k i n s, *The Bhārata and the Great Bhārata*, "American Journal of Philology", 19, 1898, pp. 1–24, my italics.

[19] The hypothesis of a single compiler of the *Mahābhārata* has been severely undermined, in scholarly if not in traditional terms, firstly by the researches of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, see, for example: S.K. B e l v a k a r, *Some Interesting Problems in* Mahābhārata *Text-Transmission*, "Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (A.B.O.R.I.)", 25, 1944, pp. 83–87, 239–243, 106–119 and secondly, and definitively, in the oral formulaic research of Pavel G r i n t s e r as summarised by J.W. d e J o n g in his article *Recent Russian Publications on the Indian Epic*, "Adyar Library Bulletin", 39, 1984, pp. 1–42. G r i n t s e r's work is indebted to the pioneering oral-formulaic research of Milman P a r r y on the Homeric Epics, see: *The Making of Homeric Verse*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1971.

insistence that the 'narrative' and 'didactic' portions of the text are mutually reinforcing is a valuable insight into the *Mahābhārata*'s mode of operation if not a tenable historical theory.

Other scholars were to build on the theory of the *Mahābhārata*'s 'essential unity'. Among the most celebrated of these is Sylvian L é v i who, in his seminal article *Tato Jayam Udirayet* provides us with a highly influential statement of the *Mahābhārata*'s 'organic unity':

"...Our epic is not merely a collection of epical narrations strung together by the ends: it is a deliberate composition organically and artistically spread around a central fact and inspired by a dominant sentiment which penetrates and permeates it."[20]

This 'dominant sentiment' finds its most concentrated expression, according to L é v i, in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* and is, in essence, the advocation of a total devotion to the Lord Kṛṣṇa. The figure of Kṛṣṇa, in L é v i's view, is also a brahminical rejoinder to the magnetic appeal of the Buddha.[21] Here we find a positive evaluation of the existence of dialogic dimension in the composition of the *Mahābhārata* in direct contrast to the negative opinion of these held by H o p k i n s. This has been a recurring contrast in approaches to the *Mahābhārata* which finds its echoes in modern scholarship: for some the *Mahābhārata* is to be viewed in terms of the signal to noise ratio of an original 'message' from the distant past (from, for example, an original bardic 'Jaya' lay through to the written tradition of a projected 'Bhārata' and then to the *Mahābhārata* itself[22]), while for others it constitutes a definitive and cohesive statement of the values of a given epoch, but which epoch?

This question leads us to two of the most important theorists on the significance of the *Mahābhārata*, Georges D u m é z i l and Madeleine B i a r-

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[20] S. L é v i, *Tato Jayam Udirayet*, trans. L.G. K h a r e, A.B.O.R.I., 1, 1918–19, p. 17.

[21] L é v i's view is however based on a unconvincing opposition of a 'world denying' Buddha to "the adorable one (Bhagavat) the perfect master of chivalry". L é v i is similarly oppositional in his view that all the actions of the Pāṇḍavas are justified "because the end is the victory of the right" (p. 16). The neat opposition of the Pāṇḍavas to the Kauravas (the two branches of the Kuru dynasty in conflict in the *Mahābhārata*) in terms of the just and the unjust has been convincingly problematised by D. G i t o m e r in his article *King Duryodhana: The* Mahābhārata *Discourse of Sinning and Virtue in Epic and Drama*, in which he argues "that the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* came to be the continuing repository of crisis in the public discourse of classical India" (a thesis which will be given further consideration below). "Journal of the American Oriental Society", 112, 1992, p. 222.

[22] The 'Jaya hypothesis' finds its chief proponent in the works of B e l v a l k a r "it as though a coat originally made to fit a youth of small stature came in time to be enlarged by the opening out of certain seams and the occasional addition of cloth... until someone thought again of remodelling and substantially altering its entire cut and size", op. cit., p. 117. B e l v a l k a r outlines this triple process of 'sartorial evolution' in terms of an expansion from an original bardic lay of the account of the victory or 'Jaya' of the Pandavas.

d e a u (who describes L é v i as her 'paramaguru'[23]). D u m é z i l's thesis that the *Mahābhārata* reflects an ancient Indo-Aryan eschatological conflict in three phases (a rigged game, a great battle, and finally the government of the good[24]) and that the Pāṇḍava brothers represent his three, projected, Indo-Aryan social 'functions' ("...la fonction de souveraineté magique et morale; puis la fonction de force physique, principalement utilisée pour la bataille; enfin la fonction de fécondité, de santé, d'abondance, etc."[25]) has been of central importance in attmpting to reconstruct some of the possible structural forms and ideological constructs with which the *Mahābhārata* engages. This is equally true of B i a r d e a u's analyses of the *Mahābhārata* in terms of the *Purāṇas* and a 'universe of Bhakti'.[26] Their researches have been of profound importance in attempting to reconstruct something of the multiple contexts (and texts) in which the *Mahābhārata* unfolds and with which it engages. These have then been generalised into the various 'epochs' that the *Mahābhārata* has been seen to variously draw from, reflect, and define.

Our thesis attempts to take its place in a prior and minor role, before such grand reconstructions, in the form of a search for metacommunicative clues and long distance 'nested' dependencies between different episodes within the *Mahābhārata*. In this way, returning to our opening quote from B a k h t i n, we will find ourselves in a position to begin to reconstruct some of those multiple voices within the *Mahābhārata*, from the 'reigning' to the 'embryonic'.

The search for a 'kernel' of the *Mahābhārata* has, then, been pursued in many ways both historical and thematic. This paper, however, argues for an understanding of the *Mahābhārata* not simply as an unproblematic representation or transposition of key values or events but rather as forever engaging in a *play of applicability*, as a complex and inherently dialogic text that is encyclopaedic in its refusal, once performed, to admit of any 'externality' to its discourse(s) whatsoever.

We shall return, in closing, to the confused and yet expressive metaphor of a 'kernel of threads' with which this section opened. It was G.J. H e l d who originated this near oxymoron. The difficulty of producing a truly reflective metaphor did not, however, prevent him from producing perhaps the definitive statement on the 'analytic' and 'synthetic' approaches to the *Mahābhārata*, and it is his 'happy synthesis' that we shall attempt to achieve in our own work:

"Now when one queries why so little success has attended the indefatigable labours of famous scholars and critical investigators... it occurs to us that the

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[23] In: *Some More Considerations About Textual Criticism*, "Purāṇa", 9, 1967, p. 115.

[24] See: B r o c k i n g t o n, op. cit., p. 69.

[25] See: *La Transposition des Dieux Souverains Mineurs en Héros dans le Mahābhārata*, "Indo-Iranian Journal", 3, 1959, p. 2.

[26] See: *Hinduism: The Anthropology of a Civilisation*, trans. R. N i c e, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989.

primary answer must be: because one has taken as self-evident truth the statement, that the epic consists of a nucleus of an essentially narrative nature around which have collected so many different threads that this kernel has ultimately become indistinguishable... whether the kernel was to be found by removing the surrounding husk, according to the procedure laid down by the originators of the analytic method; or... by a consideration of the nature of kernel and husk together... according to the synthetic mode of inquiry... Why not threads only, as a matter of fact, wound, if you like, round about a kernel, but a kernel made by the threads themselves?... A tangle can only be straightened out by the happy use of analysis and synthesis together."[27]

Yato Dharmas Tato Jayaḥ: Narrative Patterning in the *Dyūtaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*

Yato dharmas tato jayaḥ, "Where *Dharma* is, there is victory" is an oft-repeated maxim within the *Mahābhārata* and should be comforting words indeed for Yudhiṣṭhira, 'King Dharma'. As an opening to our analysis of the *Dyūtaparvan*, the phrase is, however, ironical. For where *dharma* lies in the *Dyūtaparvan* is anything but clear and King Dharma himself remains silent during its most desperate questionings.

In discussing the centrality of 'generative ambiguity' in the *Dyūtaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, we will focus on the concepts of *dharma* and *daiva* (generally translated, respectively, as 'Law' or 'Order' and 'Fate') and their relation to the events of the Dicing Sequence. The central questionings of the text will be pursued through their communicative and meta-communicative functions and resonances. It is relatively simple to demonstrate that the *Dyūtaparvan*, in this respect, contains ambiguity. It is a more complex endeavour to show that this ambiguity is generative in, and through, multiple narrative 'frames'.

In order to appreciate the complexities of the *Dyūtaparvan*'s multiple questionings we must develop an awareness of its place in the main narrative trajectory of the *Mahābhārata* and the ritual and cosmological conceptions that the text presupposes. Only then can we begin to gain a sense of the multiple interrelations the text contains both to events and ideas within the text and a whole range of more general presuppositions and notions without. This is of central importance to our thesis as we must gain a sense of these in order to establish where and how the text maximises its ambiguity and thus, we shall contend, its 'expansivity' and 'inclusivity'.

A brief synopsis of the *Dyūtaparvan* has been provided in an appendix to provide a 'fresh' context for the comments that follow.

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[27] H e l d, op. cit., pp. 24–25.

Within the *Dyūtaparvan* there is much dialogue between the characters, focussing on Draupadī's 'great riddle'; how could Yudhiṣṭhira stake his own wife when he had already staked, and lost, himself? This key question brings the central concepts of *dharma* and *daiva* into discomfiting debate. It has also been demonstrated by numerous scholars that beyond this the *Dyūtaparvan* engages, in its very structuring, with a range of mythic and ritual structures and oppositions. The text is, indeed, saturated with references which would resonate in different ways to different audiences: from its probable patterning on the Vedic *rājasūya* ritual,[28] to its evocation, in the enmity of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, of the Vedic opposition of *asuras* and *devas*[29] (through partial and full incarnations as well as the device of divine parentage; note for example the fact that Duryodhana and Śakuni are said elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* to be incarnations of Kali and Dvāpara, the two demonic enemies of Nala[30]), to its relations to what would become the classical Purāṇic cosmology of 'world ages' (and the tension between constructive and deconstructive forces in the universe).[31] That this is a dialogic and not simply an imitative engagement is demonstrated by the importance of the ways in which the *Dyūtaparvan* diverts from, and even subverts, these structures and oppositions. The *rājasūya* is disastrously inverted (the king rather than winning is won[32]), Duryodhana is an ambivalent though asuric figure (both villain and super-*kṣatriya*[33]). Indeed, the very events of the dicing are indicative of the entropic decline of universal *dharma* (reinforced through the cosmic allusions outlined above) and yet this is precisely a site for maximised heroic struggle and for maximised dialogic

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[28] This is v a n B u i t e n e n's thesis, see his article: *On the Structure of the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata*, in: J. E n s i n k and P. G a e f f k e (eds), *India Maior*, Brill, Leiden 1972, pp. 68–84.

[29] An early statement of this thesis may be found in: E. W a s h b u r n H o p k i n s, *Epic Mythology*, Biblo and Tannen, New York 1969 (1915).

[30] These incarnations are attested to in, for Duryodhana, Mbh.I.61.80, and for Śakuni Mbh.I.61.72.

[31] See, for example, R.C. K a t z, *Arjuna in the Mahābhārata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory*, Motilal Barnarsidass, Delhi 1989, and of course the work of M. B i a r d e a u.

[32] Consider J.C. H e e s t e r m a n's comment that "it may be concluded that in the enthronement–dicing-game complex the king is born in the centre of the universe, binding together its dispersed elements in his person and regulating their alternating centrifugal and centripetal rotation." In: *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration Ritual*, Mouton and Co., Gravenhage 1957, p. 156. The King was not meant to lose the dicing!

[33] This has been thoroughly and convincingly argued by D. G i t o m e r in his aforementioned article. G i t o m e r argues that Duryodhana is the "super-*kṣatriya* whose heroic virtue it is not to capitulate to Lord Krishna's plan to pāṇḍavize, i.e. theocratize Āryavarta"; op. cit., p. 223. Duryodhana's parity with the Pāṇḍavas is given curious expression within the *Mahābhārata* as well (side by side with the multiple attestations of his villainy) at Mbh.I.I.65:

duryodhano manyumayo mahādrumaḥ; skandhaḥ karṇaḥ śakunis tasya śākhāḥ
duḥśāsanaḥ puṣpaphale samṛddhe; mūlaṃ rājā dhṛtarāṣṭro 'manīṣī
yudhiṣṭhiro dharmamayo mahādrumaḥ; skandho 'rjuno bhīmaseno 'sya śākhāḥ
mādrīsutau puṣpaphale samṛddhe; mūlaṃ kṛṣṇo brahma ca brāhmaṇāś ca

interaction! That we even perceive these interrelationships is as a result of the labours of scholars themselves dialogically engaged with the *Mahābhārata*. How then, is such a rich and productive dialogue achieved and sustained?

In order to answer this question we shall now have to turn to a consideration of the phenomenon of narrative framing in the *Mahābhārata*.

Narrative framing is the 'emboxing' of one narrative inside another. It is a common feature of the *Mahābhārata* and, at a wider level, all Indian literature. Its provenance as a narrative technique is obscure, the major theory regarding its origin being that it developed from the ritual technique of embedding one rite inside another.[34] B r o c k i n g t o n states, drawing on the work of C.Z. M i n - k o w s k i:

"...this hierarchical emboxing of one narrative inside another cannot be traced further back than the *Mahābhārata*... The source of the concept is in the recursive structure of the Vedic ritual, with the more elaborate rituals formed not merely by incorporation of smaller rites but rather by their symmetrical and hierarchical structuring around a focus, while the format of the *sattras* even more than of other sacrifices provides the regular intervals (*karmāntara*) for the telling of suitable stories..."[35]

The resentful Duryodhana is the great tree, Karṇa the trunk, Śakuni the branches, Duḥśāsana the abundant blossoms and fruits, and the foolish King Dhṛtarāṣṭra the root. The dharmic Yudhiṣṭhira is the great tree, Arjuna the trunk, Bhīmasena the branches, Mādrī's two sons the abundant blossoms and fruits and Kṛṣṇa, Brahman, and the Brahmins the root.

Also of interest is Prahlāda's praise of the sage Kaśyapa, within the embedded narrative in the text, "You are wise in *dharma*, both in that of the *devas* **and** that of the *asuras*." (Mbh.II.61.65: "...*daivasyehāsurasya ca*"), it is from statements such as these that Duryodhana's *adharmic* status may be questioned. It is through the ambivalence of Duryodhana's status that G i t o m e r's notion of a 'discourse of crisis' in Classical India in reference to the *Mahābhārata* is developed. This is an excellent example of the capacity of the *Mahābhārata* to generate meta-narrational commentary "...a discourse that is formative of, as well as formed by, social behaviours and self-understandings, that is formative of, as well as formed by, textual traditions, and that is obstreperously multi-vocal" (op. cit., p. 223). Here we find the *Mahābhārata* at the centre of a complex of interpretations within which the text is far from a passive reflector. G i t o m e r traces the status of the role of Duryodhana as both straightforward villain and tragic hero through a number of dramatic versions based on *Mahābhārata* material, Bhāsa's *Dūtavākya* and Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's *Veṇīsaṃhāra*, he suggests "over the centuries, most versions of the texts seem to be committed to upholding *both* of these positions quite strongly — in other words the same truly Bakhtinian "multi-vocal" dynamism of the *Mahābhārata*" (op. cit., p. 225). Our thesis here forms a supplement to that of G i t o m e r as an attempt to provide a more formalised account of how such a complex is achieved and maintained within the *Mahābhārata* alone, it is of central importance to our thesis that the *Mahābhārata* is not 'dialogised' through external re-evaluation but is rather inherently 'dialogic'!

[34] See: M. W i t z e l, *On the Origin of the 'Frame Story' in Old Indian Literature*, in: *Hinduismus und Buddhismus Festschrift für Ulrich Schneider*, Harry F a l k (ed.), Hedwig F a l k, Freiburg 1987, and C.Z. M i n k o w s k i, *Janamejaya's Sattra and Ritual Structure*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion" (JAAR), 109, 1989, pp. 401–420.

[35] B r o c k i n g t o n, op. cit., p. 18.

The entire narration of the *Mahābhārata* takes place within two primary narrative frames, these being, King Janamejaya's Snake sacrifice (in which the sage Vaiśaṃpāyana narrates the whole tale in just such a series of *karmāntara* as B r o c k i n g t o n has outlined above) and the recitation of the bard Ugraśravas (who heard the tale at King Janamejaya's snake sacrifice and in turn relates it to a group of Bhṛgu Brahmins during the course of a twelve-year sacrifice in the Naimiṣa forest, once more during its *karmāntara*). M i n k o w - s k i suggests that this double frame story discloses the 'narrative intention' of the *Mahābhārata*. Put in another way, the two frame stories of the *Mahābhārata* sensitise the audience to the possibility of further framings.

Let us now return to the *Dyūtaparvan*, for the episode frames an embedded narrative of its own, the tale of the trial of Prahlāda.[36]

The tale, narrated by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's wise adviser Vidura, recounts the dilemma of a King Prahlāda who is required to pronounce on the relative worth of his own son, Virocana, and another young man, Sudhanvan, in a life or death contest. Prahlāda is never in any doubt of Sudhanvan's superiority and yet he seeks the advice of a sage named Kaśyapa as to the fate of a man who fails to resolve a question of *dharma*. He is told that one who explains *dharma* falsely will kill their offerings and oblations for seven generations upward and downward. Prahlāda holds to what he knows to be *dharmic* and pronounces Sudhanvan to be the better man. Sudhanvan, impressed with the integrity of Prahlāda, lets Virocana live.

The trial of Prahlāda is of central importance in the *Dyūtaparvan*. It underscores to its principal actors the dangers of the failure to resolve an issue of *dharma*, while it offers the audience comparative material with which to judge the events of the *Dyūtaparvan* as they progress. It thus unites protagonists and audience in parallel acts of questioning and commentary. The trial of Prahlāda further offers a series of interpretative clues as to the events of the *Dyūtapar-van*. It achieves what R. B a u m a n has defined as 'the keying of a performance':

"...the process by which frames are invoked and shifted... any message, which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, ipso facto gives the receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame."[37]

Of central importance to our thesis of the encyclopaedic, expansive quality of the *Mahābhārata* will be our contention that the 'instruction' given by the trial of Prahlāda serves, not to fix the meaning of the text, but rather helps to develop further the *Dyūtaparvan* as a discourse of maximised ambiguity, this 'ambiguity' being the central 'instruction' of its main narrative.

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[36] Mbh.II.61.60–80.
[37] B a u m a n, op. cit., p. 18, quoting G. B a t e s o n.

It is our argument that the trial of Prahlāda stands in an ironic relation to Draupadī's 'Great Riddle'. For Prahlāda is never in any doubt as to the answer of his *dharmic* dilemma. He fears only the consequences of his answer for his son. Draupadī's question, as to whether she had been dharmically staked, however, strikes at a series of nebulous issues. Could Yudhiṣṭhira, as the *dharmarāja*, be wrong?[38] Was the dicing not compulsory?[39] Is a wife not the possession of her husband?[40] Multiple opinions are voiced, while Yudhiṣṭhira maintains a stubborn silence. The introduction of the story of the trial of Prahlāda, after this series of conflicting questions and opinions, does not serve to clarify the issues raised thus far but rather emphasises the failure of the elders of the *sabhā* to settle the matter. The embedded narrative, in underscoring the ambiguity at the heart of the *Dyūtaparvan*, invites meta-narration on the part of the audience. It is, within the terms of B a u m a n's definition, meta-communicative.

Here we can develop the thesis that the *Mahābhārata* is patterned after the symmetrical and hierarchical structure of the Vedic ritual around a central 'focus' in terms of narrative and meta-narrative patterning. The trial of Prahlāda, for example, represents a hierarchical 'descent', a narrative within a narrative that stimulates a reciprocal, and symmetrical, narrative 'ascent' (by stimulating, and providing a model for, meta-commentary), another 'move' within the hierarchy of narrative frames. Returning to L u t g e n d o r f's metaphor of a set of steps surrounding a central pool we might suggest that once the existence of suchlike 'steps' is highlighted, through the narration of a story within a story, then multiple movements 'up' and 'down' these steps become possible. By this, we refer to a form of 'narrative competence' on the part of the audiences both internal and external to the text. A set of steps approached in darkness is a difficult and treacherous terrain but once illuminated one immediately grasps the nature of their regularity. A measure of independence is thus granted to the

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[38] Bhīṣma (a venerable advisor of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra) appeals to Yudhiṣṭhira's virtue: "Yudhiṣṭhira may give up all earth with her riches before he'd give up the truth." (Mbh.II.60.40. v a n B u i t e n e n's translation, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1975, p. 143). Although this statement coming at a juncture when Yudhiṣṭhira has indeed given up all the riches of the earth may in itself have an ironic force! Bhīṣma also states "wives are the husband's chattels"; ibid.

[39] This is the justification of the dicing's sequel, Yudhiṣṭhira states: "It is at the disposing of the arranger that creatures find good or ill. There is no averting of either, if we must play again. Although I may know that the challenge to the dicing at the old man's behest will bring ruin, I cannot disobey his word." Mbh.II.67.4. This translation is adapted from v a n B u i t e n e n's (op. cit., pp. 158). I prefer, however, the less deterministic 'arranger' for Dhātṛ rather than v a n B u i t e n e n's 'placer'.

[40] This is Karṇa's opinion given at Mbh.II.61.26. At Mbh.II.61.32 he states:
abhyantarā ca sarvasve draupadī bharatarṣabha
evaṃ dharmajitāṃ kṛṣṇāṃ manyase na jitāṃ katham
Draupadī is part of all (Yudhiṣṭhira) owns, O Bull of the Bhāratas,
So how can you believe that Draupadī (Kṛṣṇā), dharmically won, has not been won?

audience/participant. The embedded narrative, like the embedded ritual, presupposes its positioning within a greater structure; this structure must, to preserve its symmetry, for every 'embedding action' engage in a reciprocal 'framing action'. By this, I mean that by introducing a story within a story it institutes a new meta-narrational layer of commentary about this story. As you may step down you may step up. All of this takes place around the central 'focus' of the maximised ambiguity of the events within the *Dyūtaparvan*, a very deep 'pool' indeed:

"It presents itself not as a work of art but as reality itself. No boundary marks off this text from the world. Even in recitation, it functions not as a purveyor of dramatic illusion, nor as an imaginative venture in narrative, but as the vehicle of what might properly be termed realistic insight. And it is no accident that this insight, or series of insights, presents itself to us in the context of intractable dilemma and hopelessly frustrating ambiguities."[41]

In this way the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* progresses in linear terms (the events of the dicing necessitate and comment on the battle at Kurukṣetra) and expansively (by means of the 'generative ambiguity' at its heart) through a series of concentric narrative framings that come to include the audience and their potential meta-narrational commentaries, commentaries which are themselves based on a tacit narrative competence. A competence that structures and directs audience response and which is precisely derived from the range of allusions and dialogic references built into the text (that relate to ritual, myth, cosmology and ethics). This process will be expanded upon below in terms of the relationship between the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*. These processes are of fundamental importance as they involve the *Mahābhārata* in an endless, dialogic *play of applicability* whereby new narrative resonances may be generated. This is the fundamental sense in which the *Mahābhārata* is 'encyclopaedic' according to our thesis.

The ambiguity of the *Dyūtaparvan* is, then, an expansive force that is magnified as it 'emanates' through successive narrative frames. The narrative 'vistas' to which one has access increase as one moves through the hierarchy of frames, from the numerous embedded narratives, through the 'sacrificial' frame stories to the audience itself.

David S h u l m a n has observed of the dice-game that it "tears the surface of everyday experience to reveal the dynamic forces at work in the universe."[42] We would modify this statement to suggest that the *Dyūtaparvan* 'tears the surface'

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[41] D. S h u l m a n, *Towards a Historical Poetics of the Sanskrit Epics*, "International Folklore Review", 8, 1991, p. 11.

[42] See: *Devana and Daiva*, in: *Ritual, State and History in South Asia, Essays in Honour of J.C. Heesterman*, A.W. V a n D e n H o e k et al. (eds), Leiden, Brill 1993, pp. 350–365 (quotation from p. 360).

of linear narrative to reveal the 'dynamic forces' at work in the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative patterning. It saturates its discourse with prompts as to the nature and force of its dialogue. The use of embedded narrative, as we have seen, signals an exegetical and inter-referential process that is fundamentally open-ended yet not without direction. In this way, the *Dyūtaparvan* is a particularly dense locus of meta-communicative features. These rely on the generative ambiguity at its heart.

Dialogic Narratives: the *Nalopākhyāna* and the *Dyūtaparvan*

"...The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not finite, it is open; in each of the new contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean.*"[43]

We will now examine the ways in which the *Nalopākhyāna* and the *Dyūtaparvan* provide 'new contexts' for one another's interpretation, a dialogic interaction that allows both texts to reveal 'ever newer ways to mean'. The discussion will allow us to demonstrate how our notion of the 'encyclopaedic quality' of the *Mahābhārata* operates not just within a single text but also throughout the *Mahābhārata* in terms of an expansive inter-textual dialogue. This will provide the all-important element of balance in our paper between expansive and directive forces in the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative patterning.

The discourse of 'maximised ambiguity' outlined previously will be complemented by an emphasis on the 'discursive directionings' offered in the relationship between two different episodes in the *Mahābhārata*. In this way our account of narrative framing can be refined into not just an account of 'discursive magnification' (as in the relation of the trial of Prahlāda to the *Dyūtaparvan*) but also into an account of controlling factors in the narrative and meta-narrative progression of the *Mahābhārata*. It will be argued that, although the range of potential meanings derivable from a given text, is of course near infinite, the *Mahābhārata*, through the powerful device of multiple embedded narratives, attempts to place constraints on this process.

Before we embark on this analysis, however, I draw the reader's attention to the synopsis of the *Nalopākhyāna* in the appendix.

The parallels between the *Nalopākhyāna* and the progression of the main *Mahābharata* narrative have been enumerated by a number of scholars. S h u l m a n, for example, listes a "striking series of recapitulated motifs":

"...both stories proceed through svayaṃvara... to a disastrous dice game after which the hero or heroes, bereft of wealth and status, must depart for the

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[43] M. B a k h t i n, *The Dialogic Imagination*, M. H o l q u i s t (ed.), M. H o l q u i s t and C. E m e r s o n (trans.), University of Texas Press, Austin 1998, p. 346.

wilderness; in both there is a crucial period of hinding and disguise; both speak of recognition and restoration in an agonistic mode (the holocaust of battle for the epic as a whole; another climactic dice game for Nala)."[44]

Van Buitenen also provides futher evidence of the striking commonalities in the two texts. He points to a striking parallel between Damayantī's and Draupadī's loss, or near loss, of their garments; "he (Nala) loses his kingdom; he must dwell in the forest; his wife follows him; they rest in a traveller's lodge in the forest that is inexplicably called a *sabhā*, an assembly hall; in this *sabhā* Damayantī loses half her skirt and is deserted."[45] These events seem to both parallel and exaggerate the events of the *Dyūtaparvan*, an actual, if partial, stripping for an attempted one, an actual desertion for the metaphorical 'desertion' of Yudhiṣṭhira's silence in the *Dyūtaparvan*.

J.D. Smith in his article *The Hero as gifted Man: Nala in the Mahābhārata* focuses on the duplicity of the snake that Nala rescues and suggests, "Nala has been rewarded with a favour which turns out to be a deceit which turns out to be a favour; he has been poisoned with venom that will do him good; and he has lost another of his gifts for his own benefit."[46] This is a very interesting series of ambivalent events that are, as Smith puts it, "simultaneously malign and benign". This is of undoubted interest in terms of the main narrative and particularly the *Dyūtaparvan*. For in the *Dyūtaparvan* we see the possible erosion of the opposition of the losing of the dicing and the winning of the battle of Kurukṣetra. This central ambivalence is here, I would contend, being underscored once more.

The narrative might conversely be seen to communicate a message of hope to Yudhiṣṭhira; what seems to be cruel ill fate (his dicing and exile) will turn out to be essential to the achievement of his main aim, becoming the 'world suzerain' and *Dharmarāja* (thus supporting analyses that interpret the victory of the Pāṇḍavas at Kurukṣetra as a government of the good on the Dumézilian model). Indeed Nala *has* to stake Damayantī in the all or nothing throw of the dice by which he wins back his kingdom from his brother. Yudhiṣṭhira may perhaps draw consolation from this necessity.

This, however, seems a simplistic interpretation, both the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna* are powerful comments on the essential ambivalence of *daiva* itself which is "part of a cosmic structure with inherently violent and destructive components which also, it should be emphasised, motivate the regeneration of the cosmos."[47] Nala's encounter with the snake encapsulates

[44] D. Shulman, *On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala*, "Journal of Indian Philosophy", 22, 1994, p. 2.

[45] van Buitenen 1975, op. cit., p. 183.

[46] In: *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, C. Shackle and R. Snell (eds), Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1992, pp. 13–31.

[47] Shulman 1993, op. cit., p. 358.

both the destructive and the regenerative dimensions of the cosmos. Nala's physical appearance, is 'destroyed' by the snake's bite yet the bite is also one of the primary means whereby Nala's 'regeneration' is affected. Yudhiṣṭhira however, at this point in the narrative, cannot be so certain of his eventual 'regeneration' and indeed when it comes to pass, in the form of the victory of Kurukṣetra, its cost is crippling.

In the *Dyūtaparvan* it is *dharma*, and its establishment, which is the central concern of its ubiquitous questionings, and it is these questions of *dharma* that suffer from the greatest poverty of definitive answers. The trial of Prahlāda has really only one point of intersection with the main narrative, in its emphasis on the absolute requirement of an answer to suchlike questionings. The *Nalopā-khyāna*, however, has a wide range of clear parallelisms with the events of the main narrative of the *Dyūtaparvan* (see above). These multiple points of intersection we shall argue provide not one but rather many meta-communicative messages regarding this and the main or 'primary' narrative.

We have already introduced the concept of the 'keying' of narrative frames but thus far we have only encountered a very simple example of this. The story of the trial of Prahlāda functions in our view simply to maximise the ambiguity of the proceedings of the *Dyūtaparvan* by highlighting the absence of definitive answers to its central questionings. What then does the *Nalopākhyāna* achieve in terms of commentary on the main narrative of the *Mahābhārata*? And how does it incite and direct meta-commentary?

The relationship of the *Nalopākhyāna* to the *Dyūtaparvan* is both complex and reciprocal. The *Nalopākhyāna* continually calls attention to its position within the wider text, this is primarily achieved within the text by means of the device of interjected vocatives, to be discussed below. These vocatives emphasise the fact that the events of the dice game, by means of Yudhiṣṭhira's lament, are the direct stimulus for the narration of the *Nalopākhyāna*. It is because of the two texts' close inter-reference that Nala is seen in terms of Yudhiṣṭhira and vice versa. This relation exercises a transformative force on both of the interrelated narratives. They are placed in this position by two agencies, that of the text, i.e. its linear narrative progression, and that of the audience engaged in non-linear acts of textual juxtaposition and commentary, crucially at the instigation of the two texts through the device of multiple parallelisms!

These parallelisms are continually underscored through the very simple yet effective device of interjected vocatives. Throughout the *Nalopākhyāna* these interjections are addressed by Bṛhadaśva to Yudhiṣṭhira and usually take the form simply of an honorific or respectful title such as *Bhārata*, 'O Bhārata', *Viśāṃ Pate*, 'O lord of men', or *Kaunteya*, 'O son of Kuntī', placed, generally, at the end of a line. The ubiquity of these interjections[48] suggests a concern to

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[48] At for example Mbh.III.50.06, 30, 31, Mbh.III.51.01, 08, 25.

invoke and re-invoke the context of narration not as a background but as an integral part of the text and its progression.

Pavel G r i n t s e r[49] has provided us with the most detailed account of oral-formulaic features in the *Mahābhārata*. G r i n t s e r emphasises the importance of the formulaic endings of *pada*-s and the function of supporting words in these endings; among these he includes 'semantically neutral' vocatives. We see here however that a vocative which is of itself semantically neutral may, in its positioning, invoke a narrative frame which exercises a profound force on the interpretation of the events of the embedded narrative and vice versa. This is of even more importance in an oral context when there would be a logical continuation of this series of address to the audience 'external' to the text. Thus we can see in this relatively simple feature an elegant device whereby dialogue is ensured and developed across multiple narrative, and potential meta-narrative, frames. The trial of Prahlāda contains no such interjected vocatives while the *Nalopākhyāna* is peppered with them from its opening onwards. What is the significance of this? We would argue that it relates to the more complex relation of the *Nalopākhyāna* to the *Dyūtaparvan* and their interrelation as dialogic narratives.

This leads us to a point that seems to be counter-logical at first. That an ambivalent text which embeds a text of a more straightforward character in fact only places its own irresolvable character in greater focus *thus maximising its own ambiguity* (as in the trial of Prahlāda). While two texts of a similarly complex character actually, assuming there are multiple points of contact, serve to clarify one another! A single point of contact allows for the communication of only a single message about the frame narrative while the more points of contact between the embedded and the framing narrative the more meta-communicative clues one is provided with, the more complex the 'keying' of the frame. To return to L u t g e n d o r f's 'ghat' metaphor we are at last granted an encompassing freedom to move about its steps and even to test the waters of its central pool...

Such a theoretical summary of the relations between the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna* requires further elucidation. We will therefore proceed to our promised discussion of the *akṣahṛdaya*, 'the heart of the dice' and the relation of this concept to the interrelated notions of *dharma* and *daiva*. How are these three notions inter-referentially developed in the two texts? How does this relate to our discussions of narrative patterning and our 'expansivity thesis'? Let us proceed then to something of a case study.

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[49] Whose work is summarised by J.W. d e J o n g in his article, op. cit.

Dharma, Daiva and Devana: the Heart of the Dice
and the Heart of the Narrative

This section will attempt to demonstrate through a specific 'case study', an analysis of the notion of the *akṣahṛdaya* 'the heart of the dice', the way in which the *Nalopākhyāna* and the *Dyūtaparvan* enter into productive and expansive dialogue. It will be argued that this is achieved both in terms of the progression of the main narrative and also meta-communicatively not just in terms of an invitation to meta-narration (through the device of 'generative ambiguity') but through a more rigorously constrained and directed series of discursive prompts and resonances that centre on *devana* ('dicing') and its mastery. It will also be argued that the concept of the 'heart of the dice' has some powerful comments to make on the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative structure. *Devana* and *akṣahṛdaya* will be mobilised as models of not just a deconstructive/reconstructive cosmos but also of an ambiguous/directive narrative.

Let us begin, therefore, with a summary of the multi-layered *devana* imagery within our two texts.

In our discussions of the *Dyūtaparvan* we referred to the multiple ritual, mythic and cosmic allusions based on *devana* that the text contained. These included the basis of the events of the narrative in the dicing component of the Vedic *rājasūya*, as well as the importance of Duryodhana and Śakuni's roles as incarnations of the *asuras*, Kali and Dvāpara (Nala's two demonic opponents). These identifications resonated, at a macro level, with the overarching cosmological process of the progression of the four *yugas* (Dvāpara and Kali being the names of the final two ages) and, at a micro level, with specific throws of the dice. Game and cosmos were thus elegantly entwined. *Dharma* and *daiva*, and their discussion and mobilisation at both macro and micro levels, provided the primary dynamism within the text for shifts between these levels. Draupadī's "great riddle" and Vidura's narration of the narrative of the trial of Prahlāda, as well as his urgent exhortations,[50] facilitated the expansion of this discussion across multiple narrative frames. 'Decision-making' was emphasised again and again as of central importance both in the short and the long term and in the small

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[50] Vidura maintains a certain externality to the proceedings offering no advice other than the necessity of the resolution of Draupadī's question, thus he serves to draw attention to the failure of the men of the *sabhā* to come to any agreement. His role seems to maximise the ambiguity within the *Dyūtaparvan* through his constant directives:

> *evaṃ vai paramaṃ dharmaṃ śrutvā sarve sabhāsadaḥ*
> *yathāpraśnaṃ tu kṛṣṇāyā manyadhvaṃ tatra kiṃ param*

Thus you have heard the highest *dharma*, all of you who sit in the *sabhā*.

Now think on what should be done in response to Draupadī's question! (Mbh.II.61.80).

Vidura, by narrating a tale to the assembly, is the key agent of the 'keying' of a meta-communicative frame. His address might both be to characters within the text and the audience without. Vidura is, in this passage, like the poet who indicates the existence of narrative 'steps' in L u t g e n d o r f's analysis of the *Rāmcaritmānas*.

and the grand scale. This emphasis 'keyed' the narrative framings of the text in tandem with the multiple resonances of *devana*. The text thus systematically developed an emphasis on the necessity for 'deliberative response',[51] amongst both characters and audience, while simultaneously providing an incredible wealth of matter to deliberate on and respond to.

In the *Nalopākhyāna* these relations and emphases were both underscored and developed. Kali and Dvāpara (with all their associative baggage) themselves emerged as the chief opponents of King Nala. The story again centred on the game of dice, and indeed Kali, near the close of the tale, on leaving the body of Nala[52] enters a *vibhītaka* tree, the nuts of which were used for dicing![53] The *Nalopākhyāna*, however, brings into focus a concept only alluded to in passing in the *Dyūtaparvan*, this being the notion of *akṣahṛdaya*, 'the heart of the dice'. Let us turn, then, to a consideration of this concept.

Yudhiṣṭhira states in the *Dyūtaparvan* that, "Gaming is trickery, an evil; there is no *kṣatriya* skill in it... Śakuni don't defeat us by crooked means and cruelly."[54] Śakuni repudiates this view with the following argument:

"It is only through 'trickery' indeed that a learned man surpasses an unlearned one, or a wise man a fool, but people don't call that 'trickery'."[55]

For Śakuni, then, his knowledge is not trickery but superiority. This knowledge, that makes Śakuni undefeatable, is most clearly expressed in the concept of the *akṣahṛdaya*, which he is said to possess.[56] Nala receives the same *akṣahṛdaya* from Ṛtuparṇa in the *Nalopākhyāna*[57] and Yudhiṣṭhira receives this knowledge at the close of his hearing the *Nalopākhyāna*.[58]

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[51] The notion of 'deliberative response' is drawn from Julius L i p n e r's analysis of the dicing sequence in chapter 8 of his *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, Routledge, London 1994.

[52] The very coexistence in the King of *devic* and *asuric* forces (the gifts of the Gods, the possession by Kali) may in itself be seen as a powerful message regarding the 'mixed' and complex nature of human existence and advances the erosion of the line between *dharma* and *adharma* that we have seen previously in the figure of Duryodhana. At the simplest level Nala may be seen to dramatise the necessity for, and the constraints on, 'deliberative response' in an inherently complex cosmos, this also, of course, reflects the requirements of, and constraints on, audience response.

[53] See: A.B. K e i t h, *The Game of Dice*, "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society", 1908, and G.J. H e l d, op. cit., pp. 243–293.

[54] Mbh.II.53.3. V a n B u i t e n e n's translation (although '*kṣatriya* skill' replaces B u i t e n e n's 'baronial prowess', op. cit., 1975, p. 128).

[55] Mbh.II.53.11.
śrotriyo 'śrotriyam uta nikṛtyaiva yudhiṣṭhira
vidvān aviduṣo 'bhyeti nāhus tāṃ nikṛtiṃ janāḥ

[56] Mbh.II.51.03. V a n B u i t e n e n gives "Be sure, the dice are my bows and arrows, the heart of the dice my string, the dicing rug my chariot!", op. cit., 1975, p. 122.

[57] Mbh.III.70.5–20, the term occurs in line 23.

[58] Mbh.III.78.15.

While the coincidence of the term *akṣahṛdaya* in the two texts should not be overestimated in its significance, the coincidence in the knowledge of the *akṣahṛdaya* of an element of control, of power, in the terms of the characters, and in the terms of the *Mahābhārata*, narrative directionings, is of fundamental importance. Nala is exiled when he loses at dice, and his return is predicated upon his new mastery at dice. Yudhiṣṭhira is likewise exiled after a loss at dice and he too learns the skill of dicing (from the sage Bṛhadaśva precisely after having heard the *Nalopākhyāna* and to obviate the danger of Yudhiṣṭhira having to commit to another disastrous dice game!). Both characters and narrative seem, to a limited extent, to take their cue from mastery or the lack thereof, of dicing. Cosmological interpretations of *devana* here take on a new significance, not only in terms of kingship and the notion of the king as cosmic centre, but also in terms of *dharma, daiva* and the force of these concepts for our discussions of narrative patterning in the *Mahābhārata*.

In order to develop this argument adequately we must now turn to S h u l m a n's analysis of the interrelations of *devana, dharma* and *daiva*. Shuman suggests that *daiva* is the "connecting link between microcosm and macrocosm, i.e. the individual's situation within the deeper structure of reality."[59] He argues that *devana*, like the sacrifice, is "a way of re-composing a disarticulated universe" at both micro and macro levels, he further suggests that this requires a preliminary deconstruction of the universe. All this is dependent on the complex interrelationship (indeed interpenetration) of microcosmic and macrocosmic forces. We are already aware of how *dharma* also crosses and re-crosses these 'boundaries' in terms of, for example, one's own *dharma*, one's caste *dharma* and the wider cosmic *dharma* and that *dharma* itself encompasses its own entropic decline.

In S h u l m a n's view *daiva*, and we might add *dharma*, are inherently 'tricky', and *devana* is of such central importance precisely because it is the primary mode whereby one may potentially gain some mastery over these 'negative', 'deconstructive', aspects of the cosmic process. This mastery is best expressed in the knowledge of the *akṣahṛdaya*, 'the heart of the dice'. For if one can control the dice one can control much else besides. There is, according to S h u l m a n, an empowering homology here. One may gain symbolic control of the universe through knowledge of *devana*. This resonates very strongly once more with the sacrificial system. Indeed in the Vedic *rājasūya* we find the total interrelationship of dicing, ritual and the notion of 'cosmic control' (in the form of the notion of the king as cosmic centre). While in the *Dyūtaparvan*, of course, we find an ironic engagement with the *rājasūya* and in the *Nalopākhyāna* a complex engagement with the *Dyūtaparvan*! Thus we begin to discern a series of steps, or narrative frames, (both textual in the case of the *Nalopākhyāna* and

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[59] S h u l m a n, op. cit., 1993, p. 359.

extra-textual in the case of the *rājasūya*) that provide a wide range of prompts as to their interrelationship.

S h u l m a n makes a direct connection between the sacrificial system and the knowledge of the heart of the dice. He suggests that the knowledge of the bandhus, "the hidden interconnection of disparate orders or levels of existence" in the Brahminical sacrificial system is replaced in the dice-game by the counting-wisdom of the successful player. He goes on to state:

"These bandhus assert not a literal claim for identity but a ranked relationship, normally obscured, which the sacrifice articulates and stabilises in place... planes of existence are brought into alignment so that the possibility of communication between them can exist... we can imagine a concentric superimposition around a central point shared by all levels."[60]

This is a fascinating comment not just for the parallel between sacrifice and *devana*, which, after all, is already a reality in the ritual dicing of the *rājasūya*, but also for its resonances with the understanding of the narrative structure of the *Mahābhārata* we have thus far argued for. We have already suggested, drawing on W i t z e l, M i n k o w s k i and B r o c k i n g t o n, that the parallels between narrative and ritual structure in the *Mahābhārata* were indeed striking. This was mainly seen in structural terms in relation to the emboxing of one narrative or ritual inside another.

S h u l m a n's analysis allows us to develop this comparison further as *devana* becomes not just the 'cause' of 'crisis' but a model of the entire cosmos that incorporates crisis and resolution, construction and deconstruction.[61] *Dharma*

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[60] S h u l m a n 1994, op. cit., p. 23.

[61] One might also consider the work of A. H i l t e b e i t e l and most especially chapter four of his *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*, Motilal Barnarsidass, Delhi, 1991. H i l t e b e i t e l argues that there is a pattern of presence and absence in the relationship of Śiva and Krishna (Vishnu) and that Śiva is most often present at the points at which 'violence is done to *dharma*', this contrasts with Krishna's role as an *avatāra* of Vishnu sent to restore *dharma* and, crucially, explains his absence at the critical point of the dicing. H i l t e b e i t e l suggests, drawing on an insight of B i a r d e a u's, and the evidence is compelling, that Śiva's 'presence' during the dice-game of the *Dyūtaparvan* can be discerned through its parallels with Śiva's dice-game with Pārvatī atop Mt. Kailāsa. G i t o m e r's view (*King Duryodhana*) of Duryodhana as an anti-bhakti, Krishna-blind, *atikṣatriya* might serve here to corroborate H i l t e b e i t e l's presence/absence thesis, and Duryodhana (who, with Śakuni, parallels Śiva's role most closely in H i l t e b e i t e l's analysis) is in the ascendancy precisely during Krishna's absence. It also, however, might be seen to partially problematise the notion of a 'violence against *dharma*' being committed. Are Duryodhana's actions necessarily *adharmic*, most especially in terms of the *dharmic* decline of *dharma*? The *Mahābhārata* seems to be ambiguous on this point, consider Duryodhana's death speech "Who is more fortunate than me? I'm bound for heaven with my friends and kin, unshakeable Krishna! You will live on to grieve, all your purposes destroyed!" (Mbh.IX.60.49, G i t o m e r's translation, op. cit., p. 228). Duryodhana is always true to his *kṣatriya dharma*. We see here, however, in any case, further evidence of the centrality of deconstruction and reconstruction in the text and a new level,

and *daiva* are here, through *devana*, rendered 'visible', brought into a universe of discourse both within and without the text. We might, once again, tinker with one of S h u l m a n's descriptions and suggest that through *devana* 'planes of narrative are brought into alignment'. *Devana* allows for multiple resolutions of the questions that surround *dharma* and *daiva* in our two texts. This is crucially within the parameters of the communicative and meta-communicative force of the events of the multiple narratives to which the characters have only partial access and which only the audience can access in full. These parameters being defined through the layered references within the text to textual and extratextual mythic, ritual and cosmological constructions (which we have only outlined).

It is our contention that the concept of *akṣahṛdaya* focuses and directs these textual and extra-textual questionings. If the position of the interpreter is analogous to that of the characters within the text, as we suggested above, let us consider their actions in relation to the meta-communicative signallings of the text. For example, when Duryodhana and Śakuni monopolise the *akṣahṛdaya* they are able to affect their fortunes and disrupt Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*. Similarly Puṣkara can oust his brother only with this knowledge of the 'heart of the dice'. The two Kings, Yudhiṣṭhira and Nala, also require the *akṣahṛdaya* as a pre-requisite for their successful return to power. Mastery of dice does indeed seem to grant a considerable level of power to those who obtain it. How does this relate to meta-narrational instruction?

S h u l m a n focuses on the relation of *devana* and *akṣahṛdaya* to the sacrificial system and at a wider level the cosmos; however, for the purposes of our paper, we wish to pursue an additional, related, parallel, that between *devana* and narrative patterning. We shall suggest that just as there is a 'heart of the dice' there is an analogous 'heart of the narrative', a model of an idealised narrative competence, of an empowering textual mastery, which parallels that of the mastery of *devana*.

The 'heart of the narrative' is something that the audience already have access to in the form of their tertiary perspective on the events within the text. To return once more to L u t g e n d o r f's 'step' analysis, the audience can 'see' (thanks to signalling within the text) both the central pool of the *Mahābhārata*'s main narrative and all of the steps that lead down to, and from, it. Just as mastery at dice in S h u l m a n's thesis allows for the re-composing of "a disarticulated universe" the audience, engaged in multiple acts of commentary and cross-reference, can recompose, through a deliberative, dialogic, response, the narrative before them; they may move about its steps and waters. That the two texts focus so strongly on the relation of dice and cosmos, control and its absence is the most powerful argument so far adduced for our thesis that the

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that of the Gods, at which this can be seen to unfold once more in relation to *devana*! It also underscores the extent to which destructive and reconstructive roles can never be definitively assigned.

Mahābhārata is a directive as well as an expansive narrative. In delving so deeply into the concepts of *dharma, daiva* and crucially *devana,* and its mastery, multiple powerful messages concerning both cosmic **and** narrative structure are communicated.

The narrative patterning of the *Mahābhārata* may well be based on the structure of the sacrificial system but it resembles far more closely, in its narrative and meta-narrative progression, the deconstructive/reconstructive dynamic of the game of dice. The game of dice is in turn a more representative, and thus more dangerous and unpredictable, model of the cosmos than the sacrificial system. Mastery of *devana,* which crosses and recrosses both micro and macro levels, can be seen to signal the necessity of mastery, or at least attention to, the *Mahābhārata*'s complex narrative structure and progression, it thus sets up a model of idealised narrative competence.

The concepts of *dharma* and *daiva* set up a 'generative ambiguity' within the text while *devana* and *akṣahṛdaya* provide the most powerful instructional comments on how questions concerning these concepts might be resolved. It is important, however, to emphasise the fact that no definitive answers are provided, instead we are offered a rule-bound process of interpretation that allows for multiple resolutions of the key dilemmas and resonances the text sets up.

Devana is centred on structered rules of play, it allows in the text for a breaking down of key concepts but also allows for their reconstitution. *Dharma* and *daiva* are brought into question and debate and yet the very model of the dicing-as-cosmos makes powerful statements about the two concepts' role and function. The audience is granted a measure of 'control' here, the heart of the narrative is offered to them but with such a range of ritual, mythic and cosmological allusions that their response is far from a 'free play' and resembles much more strongly a rule-bound throw of the dice. In this way, through *devana* we begin to see the isomorphism inherent in a destructive/reconstructive cosmos and an ambiguous/directive narrative. The narrative patterning of the *Mahābhārata,* through the centrality of *devana* (and behind this ritual structure) participates in, or perhaps is a model of, the wider cosmos. The role of the *akṣahṛdaya* as facilitating the "recomposing of a disarticulated cosmos" directly parallels, in fact powerfully suggests, the role of the audience as masters of the 'heart of the narrative', as re-composers of a disarticulated (or perhaps better a multiply articulated) text.

Thus the notion of the *akṣahṛdaya* provides a series of instructions as to how the generative ambiguity of the *Mahābhārata*'s multiple narratives may be resolved but only in so far as it provides a model of a productive engagement with the text. It also reveals the central way in which according to our thesis the *Mahābhārata* models its internal discourse on the encompassing complexity of all discursive practice. The 'heart of the narrative' like the 'heart of the dice' beats in a vast body of discursive possibility and practice.

Conclusion: Currents in the *Mahābhārata*

It was the intention of our paper to demonstrate the 'encyclopaedic quality' of the *Mahābhārata* through an analysis of the interrelated narratives of the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*. It was our argument that the *Mahābhārata* both maximised and directed response to its discourse(s) and that this was achieved primarily through the device of narrative framing and discursive 'prompts'.

In summary then, drawing on the work of Mikhail B a k h t i n once more, we wished to demonstrate the existence of both 'centrifugal' and 'centripetal' forces in the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative patterning. By 'centrifugal' forces we refer to our demonstrations of 'generative ambiguity' in the *Mahābhārata*. By 'centripetal' forces we refer to our discussions of 'narrative prompts' and cosmic and narrative 'isomorphisms of structure'. Centripetal forces centralise and unify meaning, they provide directionings and prompts as to the significance of an event while centrifugal forces fragment and diversify meaning, they maximise ambiguity. This thesis aimed to demonstrate the existence in the *Mahābhārata* of both of these forces.

These discussions taken together aimed to provide a cumulative suggestion of the way in which the *Mahābhārata* patterns its discourse inter-referentially both within and, potentially, without the text and how this engages the *Mahābhārata* in an endless *play of applicability*. In this way existing references are expanded and new resonances developed. This is the understanding of an 'encyclopaedic *Mahābhārata*' that our paper aims to develop, a *Mahābhārata* forever negotiating and expanding its 'meaning'.

It is B a k h t i n's thesis that meaning does not belong to an individual 'word' rather he suggests that, "meaning is the effect of interaction between speaker and listener produced via the material of a particular sound complex."[62] We would modify this statement to suggest that meaning, in the *Mahābhārata*, is the effect of interaction between text and participant produced via the structure of a particular narrative complex. Such a statement allows the *Mahābhārata* to unfold as a text in multiple narrative and meta-narrative contexts. It further follows a middle path between extremes of reader response theory and notions of text which somehow assume that texts un-problematically 'emit' meanings. The *Mahābhārata* is thus encyclopaedic in the inclusivity of its discourse, a discourse that forever requires, demands and structures, multiple responses.

We have titled our conclusion 'Currents in the *Mahābhārata*'. This requires something of an explanation. It is our contention that analyses of the *Mahābhārata* that attempt to definitively enumerate its ritual, mythic and cosmological significances rob the text of its sense of 'motion' of its 'expansive quality'. We

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[62] M. B a k h t i n, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, L. M a t e j k a and I.R. T i t u n i k (trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1998, pp. 102–103.

would like to shift this metaphor, in closing, to one of electrical current, so as to underscore some of the central critical concerns of this paper:

"Meaning... is like an electrical spark that occurs only when two different terminals are hooked together. Those who ignore theme (which is accessible only to active, responsive understanding) and who, in attempting to define the meaning of a word approach its lower, stable, self-identical limit, want, in effect, to turn on a light bulb after having switched off the current. Only the current of verbal intercourse endows a word with the light of meaning."[63]

We have been concerned to demonstrate the existence of 'this current' in the *Mahābhārata*. The metaphor of 'current', however, also highlights an omission within this paper. We have not been able to include, due to limitations of time and space, any account of the importance of power relations in the negotiation of meaning(s) within and without the *Mahābhārata*. The metaphor of the current between two terminals suggests an overly determined and mechanistic relation. Our account has been similarly 'neutral' in its concern simply to explicate something of the complexity of the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative patterning. This was achieved without reference to this 'patterning' as a site of potential conflict.

This 'neutrality' could have perhaps been mitigated through a series of specific 'case studies' of interpretative trends in relation to the *Mahābhārata*. G i t o m e r achieves this in his study of 'King Duryodhana'[64] and his style of analysis might also be applied to 'meta-historical' studies of scholarly engagements with the *Mahābhārata*. In this way we would have been able to gain a clearer idea of how, to borrow L u t g e n d o r f's metaphor a final time, the multiple audiences of the *Mahābhārata* moved around its steps and swam in its deep central waters. This paper, however, attempts to place itself in a prior, and minor, role before suchlike (re)constructions. It has all too often been the case that nuanced accounts of the social negotiation of power and meaning are hampered by simplistic accounts of text and vice versa. This thesis should be seen, then, as a first and logical step into a vast and complex field. A first step which builds into its understanding of the *Mahābhārata* an 'indefinite, unconcretized other' as a necessary theoretical presupposition of our orientation toward the text and more importantly of the text's orientation toward us:

"An essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its addressivity... the utterance has both an author and an addressee. This addressee can be an immediate participant-interlocutor... a differentiated collective of specialists in some area of cultural communication,

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[63] B a k h t i n 1998, op. cit., p. 103.
[64] G i t o m e r 1992, op. cit.

a more or less differentiated public, ethnic group, contemporaries, like-minded people, opponents and enemies, a subordinate, a superior...”[65]

The *Mahābhārata* develops through these and many other communicative contexts, its 'addressivity' undiminished by its long history. This is, we would contend, precisely because of the features of its narrative patterning that this paper has begun to enumerate and which allow the *Mahābhārata* to remain forever encyclopaedic. This makes of the text, to shift metaphors a final time, a "*garden of forking paths*":

"...in the mids of this perplexity, I received from Oxford the manuscript you have examined. I lingered, naturally, on the sentence: *I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths*. Almost instantly, I understood: "the garden of forking paths" was the chaotic novel; the phrase "the various futures (not to all)" suggested to me the forking in time, not in space. A broad rereading of the work confirmed the theory. In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pen, he chooses — simultaneously — all of them. *He creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions."[66]

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[65] M. B a k h t i n, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, V.W. McGee (trans.), C. Emerson and M. Holquist (eds), University of Texas Press, Austin, 1999, p. 95.
[66] J.L. B o r g e s, *The Garden of Forking Paths*, in: *Labyrinths*, tr. D.A. Y a t e s and J.E. I r b y, Penguin, London 1964, pp. 44–54.

APPENDIX

A Synopsis of the *Dyūtaparvan* and the *Nalopākhyāna*

The Dyūtaparvan (Mbh.II.43–72)

Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind Kaurava King, has invited Yudhiṣṭhira and the Pāṇḍavas to a 'friendly' dicing match despite implorings to the contrary from his wise councillor, Vidura. The inspiration for the dicing came from the combined connivances of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's son, Duryodhana, and Duryodhana's maternal uncle, Śakuni, a master gambler. The two wish to win from Yudhiṣṭhira all that he has. Duryodhana is driven by a profound jealousy of the glorious new Pāṇḍava capital of Indraprastha. He has been further aggravated by a series of humiliations that befell him during his stay at the Pāṇḍavas' magically built Palace. Perhaps most important of all is Duryodhana's jealousy and fear of Yudhiṣṭhira's gloriously successful (at least ostensibly) *rājasūya*, a Vedic rite that has granted 'King *Dharma*' world suzerainty.

Śakuni and Duryodhana are singularly successful in their plan to ruin Yudhiṣṭhira. After twenty intensely dramatic plays, Yudhiṣṭhira has lost all he owns, his kingdom, his brothers, himself and finally even Draupadī, the beautiful common bride of the Pāṇḍavas. Draupadī is dragged into the assembly hall (the *Sabhā*) and subjected to numerous indignities, all of which cry out for vengeance. In response to this turn of events Draupadī poses what v a n B u i t e n e n has called "The ultimate riddle": "Bhārata, whom did you lose first, yourself or me?" For if Yudhiṣṭhira was not in possession of himself Draupadī contends that he could not have staked her. Events spiral out of control culminating in an attempt by Duḥśāsana (one of Duryodhana's ninety-nine brothers) to strip Draupadī of her garment althought, through the power of her virtue, she remains clothed. A series of debates, threats, oaths and bitter reproaches follow during which multiple opinions of the rights and wrongs of the situation are expressed. The tale of the trial of Prahlāda is narrated by Vidura to emphasise the necessity for a resolution of Draupadī's question to the assembly or "*dharma* will be offended". Finally Dhṛtarāṣṭra comes to his senses and halts the proceedings but only upon the inauspicious cry of a jackal. Dhṛtarāṣṭra grants Draupadī three boons, but as a *dharmic Kṣatriya* wife she accepts only two, namely the freeing of Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers.

The dicing sequence, however, has a sequel, an all or nothing throw that Yudhiṣṭhira loses once more. This loss results in the exile of the Pāṇḍavas for thirteen years, twelve of which are to be spent in the forest (during which time the *Nalopākhyāna* is narrated) while the thirteenth must be passed incognito.

The Pāṇḍavas leave the Kaurava capital of Hāstinapura dressed in deerskins and in a series of symbolic postures that prophesy the inevitable destruction of the Kauravas at the Kurukṣetra battle. Thus ends the Dicing sequence and its sequel.

The Nalopākhyāna (Mbh.III.50–78)

The Story of Nala is drawn from the third book of the *Mahābhārata* (the *Āraṇyakaparvan*). It is narrated by the sage Bṛhadaśva to Yudhiṣṭhira in response to the latter's contention that he is the most unfortunate of mortals. The story is introduced by way of consolation, as Nala is presented as having been even more luckless than the now destitute and forest-dwelling, King Dharma.

Bṛhadaśva relates the story of the handsome and talented King Nala of Niṣada and the beautiful and virtuous Damayantī, daughter of King Bhīma of Vidarbha. The two fall in love merely through descriptions of one another's virtue and beauty. King Bhīma, on noticing the lovesick state of his daughter, decides to hold a *svayaṃvara* (a bridegroom choice). The Gods themselves compete against Nala in the *svayaṃvara* by assuming his form to confuse Damayantī. Only when Damayantī throws herself on their mercy do they assume their own forms. Damayantī then chooses Nala. The gods, pleased with the purity of Damayantī's love for Nala, bestow gifts upon Nala: Indra's appearance at sacrifices, splendid movement, invulnerability to, and the immediate presence of, fire, a taste for food, firmness in *dharma*, water whenever wanted, a fragrant garland and twin children. Nala marries Damayantī and the two live happily together.

Nala's winning of Damayantī also, however, has negative consequences. The demonic Kali is enraged at Nala's success at the *svayaṃvara* and resolves to possess Nala at the first opportunity. His villainous partner is another demonic entity, Dvāpara, who is to enter the dice that will be the instruments of Nala's downfall. Twelve years elapse before Nala commits the ritual error that allows Kali the opportunity to possess him. Kali immediately possesses Nala.

Puṣkara, Nala's brother, challenges Nala to a game of dice. Nala loses all except Damayantī (whom he will not stake!), the two leave, destitute, for the forest. Nala, due to the urgings of Kali, deserts Damayantī. The two endure a series of unwanted, and much lamented, adventures and encounters in the forest. Damayantī is eventually engaged as the chamber maid of the Queen mother of the Cedis. Nala is transformed into a hunchback by the bite of a snake that he rescues from a forest fire (he is able to do this because of his invulnerability to fire), the venom of which slowly poisons Kali. Nala finds employment as the charioteer of King Ṛtuparṇa of Ayodhyā under the pseudonym of Bāhuka.

Damayantī is recognised as a princess and begins to send out search parties for Nala. She suspects, owing to a series of clues, that Bāhuka is Nala. Damayantī decides to hold a second *svayaṃvara* in order to flush Nala out. Ṛtuparṇa orders

Bāhuka to drive to Vidarbha in a single day. Ṛtaparṇa sees a *vibhītaka* tree and instantly counts its nuts. Bāhuka is amazed and requests to learn the skill of counting from Ṛtuparṇa in exchange for his skill with horses. Kali is finally driven out of Nala and enters the *vibhītaka* tree.

After a series of further trials and uncertainties, Nala and Damayantī are reunited. Nala travels to Niṣada, armed with his new mastery at counting, and challenges Puṣkara to a game of dice; the game is to take the form of a single all-or-nothing throw which includes Damayantī as a stake. Nala wins back all that he had lost. Nala and Damayantī live out their lives in comfort and happiness.

After Bṛhadaśva had narrated the tale he comforted Yudhiṣṭhira with exhortations as to the beneficial effects of hearing the *Nalopākhyāna*. He then bestowed upon Yudhiṣṭhira the secret '*heart of the dice*':

The danger you foresee, that a skilful gambler will once more challenge you, I shall remove, I know the whole heart of the dice, O Kaunteya, whose strength is your truth; learn it from me. I am pleased and I shall tell you.

Thus ends the *Nalopākhyāna*.

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