

KINGLY SPEECH IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

KINGLY SPEECH IN THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

By

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Abstract

The thesis examines the speech of Yudhiṣṭhira and questions his status as King Dharma and a speaker of truth. I argue that Yudhiṣṭhira has the same ability with speech as an inspired brahmin. Through an exploration of inspired brahminical speech in the Mahābhārata, I argue that brahmins have a special relationship to truth. I also present evidence that the sign of a truthful and inspired speaker is his or her eloquence: an eloquent speaker is considered to be a truthful speaker in the Mahābhārata. Yudhiṣṭhira has eloquent speech and this leads characters in the Epic to assume that he is truthful. There is, however, evidence that questions his apparent allegiance to the truth, especially if Yudhiṣṭhira's use of speech is examined.

The thesis, with its focus on speech, presents a unique way to read the Epic and evaluate kingship. An examination of speech and kingship in the Epic is one that is largely overlooked by scholars. The thesis demonstrates that a reading of Yudhiṣṭhira which examines his ability and use of speech uncovers a more complex characterization of the king and points towards his use of deceit well before the beginning of the Mahābhārata war. The thesis also demonstrates that a portion of the Epic encourages a close examination of the speech of kings, especially Yudhiṣṭhira's speech. The thesis argues that through the Mahābhārata's presentation of speech the Epic subtly encourages the use of deceit and guises by kings to attain their worldly ends.

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Introduction

“In the practice of religious life the importance and decisive power of the spoken word, and especially of the well-formulated word, has always been understood” (Gonda 1975:248).

“Do you not know that `mild as butter is a brahmin’s heart, in his word lies a honed blade -- not so the baron: his word is buttered, but his heart is honed” (1.3.130)

This thesis proposes to explore the character of Yudhiṣṭhira in the Mahābhārata. I will question Yudhiṣṭhira’s status in the first six books of the Epic as King Dharma and as a speaker of truth. I will argue, counter to the insistence of the narrator, Vaiśampāyana, that more than one reading of Yudhiṣṭhira as King Dharma is possible from the evidence in the text. We shall see that Vaiśampāyana portrays Yudhiṣṭhira as a legitimate King Dharma until the beginning of the Mahābhārata war. King Dharma, from the narrator’s perspective, is pristinely moral before the war. It will also become clear that scholars largely accept Vaiśampāyana’s reading of Yudhiṣṭhira as a moral king who briefly deviates from that morality while in the heat of battle. As I will argue, however, this moral reading of Yudhiṣṭhira, especially while the king is living in his forest exile, is an over simplification of the material in the first six books of the Mahābhārata and fails to take into account the multivocal nature of the text.

I will argue that another reading of King Dharma presents itself if we read the text carefully, and this reading suggests that Yudhiṣṭhira uses his title as King Dharma in immoral ways. Often, this alternative reading of Yudhiṣṭhira’s character will present itself in the text in subtle and implicit ways that run counter to Vaiśampāyana’s explicit presentation of Yudhiṣṭhira. While subtle and implicit, I will argue that this reading of Yudhiṣṭhira is valid and that an element of the text promotes such a reading. I will argue that Yudhiṣṭhira’s status as King Dharma and a speaker of truth can be read as more guise than genuine commitment to the ideals of dharma and truth. It is through this guise and Yudhiṣṭhira’s ability to manipulate people with speech that returns Yudhiṣṭhira to power after his exile. I will argue that a portion of the Epic promotes the use of immoral actions. In this reading of

the text Yudhiṣṭhira is a “true” king to be emulated not because he is dharmic, but because he knows how to use deceit to gain power. Yudhiṣṭhira’s deceit on the battlefield has a history that begins in his forest exile. It is only by examining Yudhiṣṭhira’s immorality before the war that we can understand how his actions on the battlefield are successful.

This thesis will not argue that recognizing Yudhiṣṭhira’s immoral actions before the war is the only way to read the text. While my thesis will focus on Yudhiṣṭhira’s adharma, it should not be assumed that I reject other readings of Yudhiṣṭhira. Ultimately, I hope this thesis will lead to a reading of Yudhiṣṭhira that presents his character in all its complexity. I believe the Epic encourages us to read Yudhiṣṭhira’s character as moral at times and at other times immoral. He is a very human character whose ability to make moral decisions and act them out is greatly affected by the circumstances in which he finds himself. He is neither perfectly moral nor immoral in the forest exile, but a mixture of the two. The presence of adharma in Yudhiṣṭhira will, however, cause us to question his title as King Dharma and it is against a single reading of Yudhiṣṭhira as only moral before the war that I will counter in this work.

This thesis will focus on the role speech plays in creating a successful king who is able to use adharma for political gain, but manipulate his speech and appearance in such a way as to appear dharmic. My reading of Yudhiṣṭhira will demonstrate that his success is based on an ability to manipulate truth speech and his appearance in order to gain sovereignty. I will also argue that kings are expected to be, or at least appear to be, dharmic and speakers of truth. Thus, my exploration of kings and speech will reveal a paradox in kingship: success is gained through adharma, but kings must appear to be dharmic.

There are five chapters in this thesis. The topic of the first chapter will be brahminical speech. This chapter will demonstrate that the spoken word can have effective material power in the Epic. I will argue that brahmins wield this power because they are connected to cosmic forces that empower their speech. Among these cosmic powers is *satya* (truth), which ties these brahmins to speaking the

truth. This chapter will establish how brahmins in the Epic understand truth and speech and the chapter will allow for a contrast with kingly speech.

The second chapter will examine the interaction between brahmins and kings. I will argue that among a king's duties are the protection of dharma and truth speech. I will also suggest that kings are unable to understand dharma and are morally flawed, and therefore unable always to speak the truth. I will argue that kings are not able simply to ignore dharma and truth speech because they require the legitimation of brahmins in order to rule, and brahmins insist on a dharmic and truthful king. My examples will demonstrate that brahmins tend to evaluate the truth of kings according to their own understanding of the truth. I will also demonstrate that kings have a different understanding of truth as contextual and not linked to constant cosmic forces. It will become clear that kings use shifts in context to manipulate what the truth is.

The third chapter will focus on the character of Yudhiṣṭhira while in the forest exile as depicted in book three of the Epic. I will demonstrate that Yudhiṣṭhira does not deserve the title of King Dharma for his actions in the dicing hall and does not earn the title while in the forest through kingly actions. Yudhiṣṭhira gains this title through a brahminical guise which convinces brahmins that he is moral and has a brahminical understanding of truth. My presentation of Yudhiṣṭhira's character will suggest that he is not truly devoted to a brahminical understanding of truth and that the character he adopts while in the forest can be read as the deceitful manipulation of brahmins.

The fourth chapter will explore a key element in constructing Yudhiṣṭhira's brahminical guise and that is his ability with speech, an unusual feature for a king to possess. This chapter will demonstrate that Yudhiṣṭhira has a brahmin-like ability with speech that implies he has a genuine link and commitment to speaking the truth. I will then demonstrate that Yudhiṣṭhira's speech does not fit brahminical understandings of truth speech and I will show how his guise and speech make his deceit on the battlefield successful.

The fifth chapter will discuss a story from the Epic called "The Victory of Indra." Throughout the later half of the thesis I will argue that my reading of Yudhiṣṭhira is supported by an element of

the text. "The Victory of Indra" provides explicit evidence of a portion of the Mahābhārata which supports my reading of the text and of kingship in general. Through this thesis it will become clear that Yudhiṣṭhira's status as King Dharma is dubious and that another reading of Yudhiṣṭhira's character and motivations is possible and support by part of the text.

Chapter One: Brahminical Speech

There are three goals in this chapter. The first goal is to illustrate the potential power of speech through an exploration of brahminical curses in the first book of the Mahābhārata. The second goal is to demonstrate that brahmins have a special relationship to powerful speech and speaking the truth. It will become clear that brahmins understand truth to be an ontological reality and that this truth is connected to powerful speech. The third goal is to establish the religious context of speech and truth in the text. I have broken the chapter into four main units. The first discusses the relationship between the special knowledge some brahmins possess and speech. The second discusses brahminical curses and speech as active language. The third has two subsections, one that discusses some of the cosmological connections between brahmins, speech, cosmic order and ritual, and another that discusses the relationship between brahmins, Agni, truth and ritual. The fourth discusses eloquence, praise and brahmins as councillors. To help ground my discussion I will illustrate the points I make primarily through the story of the brahmin Utanka found in the chapter called “Pauṣya” in Book One of the Epic.

My discussion of the Pauṣya chapter will demonstrate the power of a brahmin’s curse by comparing a brahminical curse with a kingly curse. The story makes clear the sacred nature of a brahmin’s word and presents language as action. I shall argue that the brahmin in this story, Utanka, does not physically act so much as he allows his words to act for him. I shall interpret the story of Utanka as an illustration of the general Brahminical and Hindu concept that words, spoken by the right person in the right way, are an active and creative force. The story will also demonstrate the effective power that praise has. Through the story we will also see the importance of brahmins as councillors to kings and the importance speaking has in relation to council.

1.1 Brahminical Speech: Special Forms of Knowledge

The Pauṣya story is the third chapter of Book One. The first 80 verses of the story focus on a “seer” named Dhaumya Āyoda and his three students Upamanyu, Āruṇi (Uddālaka) and Veda (1.3.20). Each student demonstrates his ability to leave his master by keeping the exact wording of a command Dhaumya gives him. For example, Dhaumya tells Āruṇi to “[g]o and repair the breach in the dike” (1.3.20). The only way Āruṇi can stop the leak is to lie down in the breach and stop the flow with his own body. When Āruṇi does not return Dhaumya calls for him and:

Hearing his teacher’s word, Āruṇi at once stood up from the breach in the dike and came up to his teacher. And he said to him, “Here I am! I was lying down in the breach to halt the escaping water, which was not to be stopped. As soon as I heard your voice I came to you at once and opened the same breach again. I greet you, sir. Give me your orders sir. What should I do now?” (1.3.28-29)¹

Āruṇi’s complete devotion to the orders of his master impress Dhaumya so much that he releases his student with these words: “Since you have obeyed my word, you shall obtain the highest good. All the Vedas will be manifest to you and all the books of the Law” (1.3.30). Upamanyu’s and Veda’s stories also stress following the words of their guru and each receives the same reward as Āruṇi. Pauṣya’s story opens with a strong emphasis on keeping the words of one’s master, an important element, according to this story, of brahminical training.

The build up to Utanka’s story places him in a lineage of accomplished “sages”. Utanka is a student of Veda whose status as a sage is implied by the Vedas and Law books being “manifest” to the students of his master, Dhaumya. The story has gone to some length to demonstrate through Veda’s, Upamanyu’s and Āruṇi’s examples that knowledge is gained through devotion to a guru’s command. This knowledge of Vedas and Law books, the very life blood of the brahminical caste, does not appear to be the result of study. This story makes no reference to instruction or study, but the knowledge the students receive appears to come from a mystical gift-giving from guru to student, as the words from Dhaumya to Āruṇi imply: “Since you have obeyed my word, you shall gain the highest good. All the Vedas will be manifest to you and all the books of the Law”. This quote strongly suggests an

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all the translations of the Mahābhārata in this thesis are from J. A. B. van Buitenen’s translation of the critical edition.

extraordinary transmission of knowledge gained through devotion. This mode of transmission gives the knowledge received an other-worldly quality. This knowledge is powerful; it provides brahmins with the ability to perform rituals which hold up the universe. To gain this knowledge through extraordinary transmission implies that the knowledge itself is unusual and lies beyond the mundane knowledge of most brahmins.²

The idea that sacred knowledge can become manifest to certain individuals draws on a Vedic understanding of *ṛṣis* as inspired people, *kavi*, poets inspired by the divine. *Ṛṣis* “‘saw’ and ‘heard’ the Veda, the divine wisdom” in a way ordinary people cannot (Miller 1985:16). An *ṛṣi* became a *kavi* after expressing those visions in beautiful language (Gonda 1963:50). To have the Vedas and Law books become manifest to *Āruṇi* implies that he is like an *ṛṣi*, and as such beyond ordinary brahmins. As we shall see, all brahmins have a special receptivity to divine inspiration, but only some are *ṛṣis* and “know the truth” (Gonda 1963:35). What these stories about Dhaumya’s students also suggest is that students of accomplished brahmins become accomplished brahmins themselves. Utanka’s membership in this lineage implies that he will join their standing as sages.

Utanka’s part of this chapter does not begin until we are almost a third of the way through the chapter. Utanka is a student of the now mature Veda, who has such powerful kings as Pausya and Janamejaya as his patrons (1.3.85). The status of Veda’s patrons suggests that he is an accomplished ritualist which, like his lineage, suggests a deep knowledge of Vedic material and his status as a sage. These references to Veda’s lofty patrons not only legitimate Veda, they also legitimate his student Utanka. As we have noted, one of the messages of the prelude to Utanka’s story is that the students of great brahmins become great brahmins themselves.

At one point Veda must leave to officiate for one of these patrons and he tells his student:

“‘Utanka, whenever anything is lacking in our house, I wish you to make up for it” (1.3.86). Given the focus of the first section of the chapter on complete devotion to the words of one’s guru, we might

² The distinction between brahmins with mundane knowledge and those with a higher knowledge will become clearer later in this chapter. For now, I will differentiate the two groups of brahmins by calling those with extraordinary insight *kavis*, *ṛṣis* or sages.

expect a household problem to arise and Utanka to deal with it by following the words of his guru to an extreme. We are not disappointed, but the solution to Utanka's problem is not as clear as was that of Āruṇi. The women of the house approach Utanka and tell him: "Your teacher's wife has had her period, and the teacher is abroad. See to it that her season be not barren. She is in a bad way now" (1.3.89). If this were a later section of the Epic, or if Utanka were a kṣatriya instead of a brahmin an answer to this problem would come slowly as he struggled with what is the dharmic thing to do.³ However, this story is not about dharmic uncertainty, it is about the brahminical power of words, a power founded in the surety of a brahmin's word, because that word is based on law and truth.⁴ Thus, there is no deliberation for Utanka, he is well aware of what to do and says to the women: "I cannot commit this crime upon some women's word, for my teacher has not charged me to go so far as crime" (1.3.90). When Veda returns he rewards Utanka's demonstration of understanding right from wrong by setting him free, a sign Utanka is ready to begin his work as a ritual specialist.

Utanka takes his devotion to the words of a guru a step further than Dhaumya's students, because he is able to demonstrate an understanding of the unsaid; he demonstrates that true devotion is more than blind devotion to the words of a guru, but devotion to what lies behind those words -- truth and law. Here, the truth is acting in accordance with the law, as Veda suggests when he returns from his trip: "[a]fter a while his teacher returned home from his stay abroad. He heard the entire story from him and was pleased. And he said to him, 'Utanka, my son, what favor can I do for you? For you have shown me obedience in accordance with the Law'" (1.30.93). Veda links obedience, keeping the words of a guru, with keeping the law and Utanka's reward is to leave his master, a graduation of sorts: "I grant you leave to go. You will find complete success. Now go!" (1.3.94). Utanka's knowledge is significant enough to assure his release from his master and his success. Utanka's knowledge was based on recognizing the hidden connection of his master's words to the truth or law. Utanka's ability is a sign of true or deeper knowledge, the type of knowledge indicative of a *kavi*:

³ For an example of the differences between a kṣatriya and a brahmin in this situation see my discussion of the Yayāti story in chapter two of this thesis.

⁴ These points on truth and law will become clearer as we progress through the chapter.

“those who know the truth...It [the title of kavi] may obviously be given to a person who knows causes or origins (RV1, 64, 6; 18; 10, 114, 2), hidden connections (10, 129, 4), or the character of the ritual (1, 164, 5)” (Gonda 1963:48). Recognizing hidden meanings and connections is a sign of a sage who is beyond everyday brahmins. Utanka demonstrates he has this special knowledge and the remainder of the story will show us how this knowledge empowers his speech.

The connections between speech and knowledge are ancient in the Brahminical tradition. To understand how Utanka’s story establishes him as a sage we must explore how knowledge and speech are connected in earlier ritual texts. As early as the ṚgVeda *vāc* (word) and speech play critical roles in cosmogomic speculation and thoughts about magical power (Padoux 1990:1).⁵ The goddess *Vāc* plays a central role in this early speculation. By some, *Vāc* was considered “[a]s the Holy Utterance of the Vedic ritual... the final apotheosis of the power of spells, charms, incantations” (Brown 1978:75). She is a creative goddess from whom the chaotic material of the universe came, but she is also the source of the *akṣara*, the mantric syllable on which that chaos is organized. This creative and ordering principle was passed onto Agni in the form of the first sacrifice and onto humans so that they could perpetuate the universe (Brown 1978:76-77).⁶ *Vāc* is an active principle in the ṚgVedic

⁵ It is not my goal here to demonstrate a direct chain from ṚgVedic concepts of speech to the Mahābhārata. What I am trying to establish is the rich history of speech in Indian culture and to show that certain themes about the power of words in the Epic can be better understood by examining similar themes in ancient texts. It is likely that certain themes that appear in the ṚgVeda continue into the Mahābhārata, but proving this is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶ Norman Brown’s understanding of how the first sacrifice was spread is based on his reading of the ṚgVeda poem 1.164. However, as Wendy O’Flaherty points out: “[t]his long and complex hymn has inspired many elaborate, detailed glosses and still remains largely obscure” (1981:71). *Vāc* is not usually credited with being involved in the first sacrifice, that honour is usually Agni’s. Brown’s comments are not groundless, however, as the obscure verses of 1.164.39-43 suggest: “The undying syllable [*akṣara*] of the song is the final abode where all the gods have taken their seat. What can one who does not know this do with the song? Only those who know it sit together here. Be happy eating good fodder, and then we will be happy too. O inviolable cow [*Vāc*?], eat grass and drink pure water as you graze for ever. The buffalo-cow lowed as she fashioned the flowing waters; she who has a thousand syllables in the final abode become one-footed, two-footed, eight-footed, nine-footed. The quarters of the sky live on the oceans that flow out of her [*Vāc*] in all directions. The whole universe exists though the undying syllable that flows from her [*Vāc*]. In the distance I saw the cowdung smoke midway between what is above and what is below. The heroes roasted the dappled bull [*Soma*]. These were the first ritual laws.

verses dedicated to her, a female energetic and creative force. Certain people can tap this energy, but not everyone is able to “penetrate its [Vāc’s] secret nature and mysteries” (Padoux 1990:xi).

Three quarters of Vāc’s nature are hidden to ordinary people. One quarter of her appears to mortals as speech. The remaining hidden portion is for the immortals and is the locus of true creative and active vocal power: “Speech [Vāc] was divided into four parts that the inspired priests know. Three parts hidden in the deep secret, humans do not stir into action; the fourth part of Speech is what men speak” (RV 1.164.45).⁷ Only those brahmins with a special ritual knowledge and religious insight can gain access to this hidden immortal realm:

Those who acquire this complete knowledge know the ritual in all its minutiae and in its full application; they also know the full metaphysical significance of the separate parts of the ritual. Such a priest, who is rare, is differentiated from ordinary priests, who may know the parts of the ritual and their sequence well enough but have never penetrated to its true transcendental quality and do not understand the full coordination of the separate functions of the different technical priests who officiate at the sacrifice. (Brown 1978:77)

A brahmin with “true” ritual knowledge, an *ṛṣi*, can access the power of speech. As we have seen, Utanka’s pedigree and actions suggests that he has this true knowledge of the Vedas and ritual.

The idea that speech and knowledge go together is a strong element of later Vedic thought in the Upaniṣads. It is important that we explore these Upaniṣadic ideas because during the age when the Mahābhārata was being compiled many of the Upaniṣads were also being composed. In some ways the Epic and Upaniṣads are very different, but as we progress through this thesis we will note that these two bodies of texts share a common intellectual milieu. They present similar ideas on what speech, rituals, brahmins and kings are. As the Upaniṣads are focused on ritual and its hidden meaning, the text is largely directed to brahmins.⁸ The Mahābhārata is not a ritual text, but a

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, I will use Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty’s translation of selected hymns from the RgVeda throughout this thesis.

⁸ Though we should note that many of the teachers in the text are ksatriyas proclaiming a knowledge that is new to brahmins. However, the text is still likely brahminical and Patrick Olivelle presents a useful explanation of the role kings play in the Upaniṣads: “[a]ligning with kings gave their [brahmin’s] doctrines a new status and prestige and served to distinguish them from the old doctrines. What these stories of kings teaching new doctrines to Brahmins point to, I believe, is the divide that existed within the Brahmin tradition between the village Brahmins clinging to the old ritual religion and urbanized Brahmins who were part of an emerging new symbolic world” (1993:62).

warrior's song that was redacted by brahmins (Goldman 1977:2). It bears the mark of that brahminical redaction, but does not present the detailed speculation on rituals and the nature of brahmins in the manner that the Upaniṣads do.⁹ The Epic hints at a number of brahminical issues and presents a number of ideas implicitly in its presentation, but often does not expand on those ideas. Thus, the Upaniṣads can give us some insight into what the Mahābhārata assumes about brahmins and speech.

That knowledge and speech are intertwined is a strong theme in the Upaniṣads. In the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad the self (ātman) is thought to be made of three things: speech, mind and breath (1.5.3). The text then gives a list of correspondences for these three things. Thus, we read:

The three worlds are also these -- this world is speech; the middle world is the mind; and the world above is breath. The three Vedas are also these -- the R̥gveda is speech; the Yajurveda is the mind; and the Sāmaveda is breath.... What one knows, what one seeks to know, and what one does not know are also these. Whatever someone knows is a form of speech.... (BU 1.5.4-8)

This quote demonstrates that speech and knowledge are closely aligned in the Upaniṣads and we will see they are also closely aligned in the Mahābhārata.

The role a knowledge of Vāc played and the R̥gVeda is taken over by a knowledge of Brahman in the Upaniṣads. Vāc is merged into Sarasvatī by the Brahmaṇas (Padoux 1990:11) and Brahman takes over as the source of powerful speech: “*Brahman*, after all, is speech, and it is the lord (*pati*) of speech” (BU 1.3.22). Brahman, in the Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, is the thing or force at the beginning of the universe from which all things develop (1.4.11-15). Brahman is not a clearly recognizable thing in our world and knowing Brahman is largely the occupation of brahmins: “[i]t is he [Brahman] that Brahmins seek to know by means of vedic recitation, sacrifice, gift-giving, austerity, and fasting. It is he, on knowing whom, a man becomes a sage” (BU 4.4.22). The means to knowing Brahman are through a mixture of Vedic utterance [speech], Vedic ritual and personal purification. Being a brahmin and having a special knowledge appear to have always been important elements in obtaining

⁹ I shall explore the effects of this brahminical redaction in more detail in Chapter 3.

powerful speech.¹⁰ The quote also links Vedic ritual and speech, a topic we will investigate later in this chapter, but for now we should note the links between Brahman, speech and knowledge:

“*Brahman* is speech.”... “Speech itself is its [Brahman’s] abode, and space is its foundation. One should venerate it as knowledge.”

“What constitutes knowledge, Yājñavalkya?”

“Speech itself, Your Majesty,” he replied.

“So clearly, Your Majesty, the highest *brahman* is speech. When a man knows and venerates it as such, speech never abandons him, and all beings flock to him; he becomes a god and joins the company of gods.” (4.1.1-2)

Speech and a special knowledge go hand in hand in this quote. As with a complete knowledge of Vāc, the knowledge sought here is inaccessible to ordinary people. As the passage from 4.4.22 suggests, it is a specially trained brahmin who can gain this knowledge. From the earliest Vedas to the Upaniṣads and to the Mahābhārata speech is conceived of as powerful, but those with a special knowledge, a knowledge closely tied to brahmins, have a god-like power -- a power that we will see express itself in brahminical curses.

1.2 Brahminical Speech: Curses and Active Speech

Utanka’s story continues with his not leaving Veda immediately, but with his importuning Veda to accept some *dakṣiṇa*, the ritual gift a student gives his guru. Veda tells Utanka to “[g]o then and visit my wife, and ask her what you should bring. Bring whatever she demands” (1.3.95).

Utanka does this and Veda’s wife tells him: “[g]o to King Pauṣya. Beg from him the earrings that his lady is wearing and bring them here. Four days from now there will be a ceremony, and I wish to receive the brahmins with those earrings on. Make me that day shine with those earrings! You shall indeed fare well if you seize your chance” (1.3.100). After a few complications Utanka is able to get the earrings from Pauṣya’s queen in her quarters, but she cautions him: “Takṣaka, the King of the Snakes, wants to have these earrings. Please take care carrying them” (1.3.120). Utanka assures her that he will be safe and returns to Pauṣya. Pauṣya says he wants to perform a *śrāddha*¹¹ for Utanka,

¹⁰ As we shall see, powerful speech is not completely limited to brahmins, but it is much more likely that a brahmin will wield such power.

¹¹ A *śrāddha* is a ceremony for one’s ancestors. It is likely that the *śrāddha* will be for Pauṣya’s relatives and that Utanka is being offered the opportunity to oversee the rite for which he would have received payment.

but Utanka says he is in a rush: “‘I have little time left. I wish to have the food offered quickly, such as is at hand’” (1.3.120).

The food arrives quickly, but Utanka is not happy with what he receives: “Now Utanka observed that the food was unclean, he said to Pauṣya: ‘Since you have offered me unclean food, you shall go blind!’ Pauṣya rejoined: ‘Since you have spoiled unspoiled food, you shall stay barren!’” (1.3.125). At issue here is a mixture of hospitality rites and purity. Hospitality was an expected rite for any guest of some prominence. The greater the rank, learning or special relationship to the host, the more elaborate these rites are (Jamison 1996:157). Thus, we find Pauṣya offering Utanka a *śrāddha* because of his learning and his connection to Veda, whom Pauṣya sponsors. In the *Mahābhārata* botched hospitality rites or a guest taking undue advantage of a host are common sources of conflict. Food is often the climax of such hospitality tales in the Epic (Jamison 1996:166) and in Utanka’s story the problem is polluted food; the food is not warm and it has a hair in it. This improper hospitality is a significant insult for Utanka and should be a major embarrassment for Pauṣya, but the king assumes the food is fine and attempts to curse the brahmin on the basis that the food is pure.

After they have cursed one another, Pauṣya inspects the food and discovers that it was impure and tries to pacify Utanka:

“Reverend sir, this food, with a hair in it, was cold and offered by mistake. I seek your pardon for this sir. Let me not go blind!” Utanka replied, “I never speak idly. You shall go blind, but soon you will recover your eyesight. Be it also that I have not been cursed by you.” Pauṣya answered, “I cannot take back my curse! Even now my anger has not quieted. And do you not know that ‘mild as butter is a brahmin’s heart, in his word lies a honed blade -- not so the baron: his word is buttered, but his heart is honed?’ This being so, I cannot change my curse, for my heart is honed. Leave.” Utanka rejoined, “I had to make sure that the food was impure and permitted you to appease me. It was before that that you said ‘As you spoil unspoiled food, therefore you shall stay barren.’ Now the food *was* spoiled, so there can be no curse on me. Let us be done now.” (1.3.130-134)

This exchange between Pauṣya and Utanka demonstrates some valuable points about brahminical speech. The first is a common one in all brahminical curse stories: once uttered, the curse cannot be removed. Brahminical curses can be altered and reducing the time span of the effects of a curse, such as we see in the above passage, is a typical alteration. A few more examples from Book One will make these points clearer. We read in the chapter called “The Origins”:

As she [the Ganges] went on her way, she spied the celestial Vasus, crestfallen, their puissance darkened by despair. Seeing them in such a state, the river goddess asked, "Why are you looking so lost? Is there no safety for celestials?" The divine Vasus said, "Great river, we made a small mistake and for that the great-spirited Vasistha cursed us vehemently! We foolishly passed by that strict seer Vasistha when he was sitting at his twilight rites hidden from our eyes. He cursed us angrily, 'Be born in a womb!' And what that scholar of the Veda pronounces cannot be undone. (1.91.9-14)

Another story from Book One in the "Puloman" chapter tells us:

The Lizard said: Long ago I had a friend, a brahmin whose name was Khagama, a man, my friend, exceedingly sharp in his words and possessed of the power of austerities. Once when I was playing, still a child, I made a snake out of straw and frightened him with it,... He fainted. When the ascetic regained consciousness, he fairly burned with rage; and he, always true to his word and strict in his vows, said to me: "As you made a powerless snake in order to frighten me, so by my anger you shall become a powerless reptile."... I said "... Please forgive me, brahmin, turn your curse away!" Seeing how sorely my mind was disturbed, he heaved many deep sighs; very much upset, the ascetic said to me, "What I have said cannot be undone. However it shall be, so shall it be. But hear you, strict in your vows, what I shall tell you.... There shall arise a son of Pramati by the name of Ruru, a pure man and on seeing him you shall almost at once be relieved of your curse." (1.11.1-10)

There are a number of other examples that could be cited just from Book One of the Epic, each emphasizing that a brahmin's words cannot be reversed but they can be altered. The effects of these curses must take place because speech in general, but especially brahminical speech, is seen as action. Utanka's words are as reversible as if he had poked out Pausya's eyes with his fingers. As Frits Staal points out, language in India is "not something with which you name something, but in general something with which you do something" (1979:37). Utanka's words are more than speech, they are actions and as such cannot be taken back.

Utanka's words, as the words of a trained brahmin and sage, fall into a general class of words, such as mantras and ritual speech that have an active energy (Padoux 1990:x-xi). As the Pausya chapter demonstrates, this active and powerful form of speech is largely the domain of brahmins in the Mahābhārata: "'in his [a brahmin's] word lies a honed blade -- not so the baron: his word is buttered.'" Pausya's comments are demonstrated when Utanka reverses the king's curse. Pausya's curse was of a different, less active and less powerful kind.¹² To appreciate these differences we must briefly examine some elements of what makes brahminical speech special, beyond the aspect of knowledge that we have already explored. As we shall see powerful words are connected to truth and

¹² His curse is also based on untruth -- the food was spoilt. Yet, we shall see in the example of other kings that kingly curses are less powerful than brahminical curses.

law, various elements in rituals and the brahminical caste. These words of power are largely spoken by brahmins. Brahmins are a vehicle through which the power of words become manifest, because brahmins are intimately connected with rituals and a Vedic understanding of truth and order (Gonda 1963:14).

1.3 Brahminical Speech: Truth, Law and Order

Ellison Banks Findly argues that the power behind ritual speech and mantras in the early Vedas “is the truth [*satya*] and order [*ṛta*] that stands at the very center of the Vedic universe” (Findly 1989:16-17). We have already noted that the ordering syllable *akṣara* comes from *Vāc* and she passes it on to *Agni* who gives it to humans through the sacrifice. The ordering principle Findly refers to is embodied in the sacrifice and ritual speech. Findly suggests that the truth she refers to is linked to *Agni* and therefore the sacrifice (1989:23). *Agni* is another Vedic deity who is closely related to ritual speech. He is often credited as the locus of poetic inspiration (Kuiper 1960:248). It is through *Agni*'s mediation that ritual specialists are inspired to speak words of power. To *Agni* are coupled *ṛta* (order/law) and *satya* (truthfulness), which also empower mantras and speech acts performed by humans (Findly 1990:23). All of these elements are connected to the sacrifice and we must explore these elements in relation to the sacrifice to completely understand them and their relationship to brahminical speech.

1.3.1 Brahminical Speech and Order

Our discussion of order must begin with a discussion of a complex Vedic term which has largely passed out of use by the time of the *Mahābhārata*: *ṛta*. While the term *ṛta* has dropped out of use by the Epic, many of the ideas it expresses concerning speech and the cosmos can be found in the Epic. The meaning of *ṛta* changes as its context changes. There are three main contexts in which we must consider the term: cosmic, human and sacrificial. At the cosmic level *ṛta* refers to order, a natural law that governs the universe (Miller 1985:2-3). Many of the *ṚgVedic* stories of creation are stories of ordering chaos or darkness into order and light, *ṛta* is that ordering principle. In one *ṚgVedic* version of creation, The One (*Tad Ekam*) begins creation by producing *satya* (truth) and *ṛta* (order) from

tapas (heat) and *kama* (desire) (Miller 1985:55).¹³ *Tapas* and *kama* are the means to the first products of the universe (*satya* and *ṛta*) upon which the rest of creation develops:

Order and truth were born from heat as it blazed up. From that was born night; from that heat was born the billowy ocean.

From the billowy ocean was born the year, that arranges days and nights, ruling over all that blinks its eyes.

The Arranger has set in their proper place the sun and moon, the sky and the earth, the middle realm of space, and finally the sunlight. (RV 10.190)

On a cosmic level order and truth are the first products of creation and are the basis for the rest of creation. Once order is created the rest of the universe develops in accord with that order. Time is created through the separation of day from night and the creation of “year”. Regions are separated and ordered by being put in their “proper place.” Beneath the creation of the many things of the universe is an underlying principle of order; there is a harmony and law underlying the universe and coupled to order is truth (Miller 1985:38-39). One of the important ways this order expresses itself on earth is through speech: “[t]he word is the firstborn syllable of the Order, the mother of the Veda, the navel of immortality” (Tait. Br. 2.8.8.5 quoted in Padoux 1990:14). It is words as the products of *ṛta* that help to order and create the various Vedic rituals. The speakers who create order in the sacrifice through their words are brahmins. Thus we see a connection between brahmins, ritual speech and a power that lies at the heart of existence. It is also *ṛta* that *kavis* see when they have visions of the divine (Gonda 1963:41): “The *kavis* keep deep secrets, observing the place or track of *ṛta*” (RV 10.5.2 quoted in Gonda 1963:48). It is not just any speech that *ṛta* expresses itself with, but the infallible speech of a *kavi* who is imbued with *ṛta*.

In the human context *ṛta* carries a stronger sense of law and truth. *Ṛta* expresses itself in socio-ethical terms in the human realm where people attempt to keep their actions in harmony with the order of the cosmos (Miller 1985:2). As Miller points out:

A human being who is in harmony performs his duty perfectly, fulfills his obligations under the Law, lives in accordance with the inherent law of his being, is at perfect peace with himself and the world, is ‘true’, ‘whole’ and can commit no wrong. He is holy (*ṛtāvan*), he possesses *ṛta*.... *Ṛta*, when it applies to the human moral order, is *truth*. (1985:188, 190)

¹³ Miller is speaking of RV 10.190 quoted below.

To move with order is to be true, to work against it is to be guilty of *anṛta* -- falsehood, wrong, going against order (Miller 1985:56). Thus, the Vedas stress human order and hierarchies, and it should come as no surprise that as *ṛta* falls into disuse it is replaced by *dharman* and the concepts related to *dharma*. From *ṛta* comes the various laws which prescribe the duties and rules of the various castes and subgroups in ancient South Asian society.

To be in complete harmony with the order of the universe was a difficult thing in the Vedas. Those who were able to integrate their human existence with the cosmic order in a complete way shared in the building of a divine order on earth and thus became god-like themselves by taking a share of the divine (Miller 1985:185). *Ṛsis* were largely identified as those who had this divine power, a power gained by receiving visions of the Vedas and what lies at the heart of the universe. Once *ṛsis* have "seen" the eternal Vedas they are filled with what causes these texts to manifest themselves, the eternal word, *Vāc*, "the primeval vibration at the basis of all things" (Miller 1985:3). The power of *ṛta* shows itself on earth as powerful speech. It is the discovery of this eternal sound which makes a *kavi*, but becoming a seer/poet begins with harmonizing oneself to *ṛta* -- recognizing order and being true to it. As we shall see, this dharma-like aspect of *ṛta* greatly influences the Epic. Brahmins in the Epic stress that kings must follow their duty and keep themselves in harmony with the cosmos. The problems faced by kings in following their dharma is an important theme in the Mahābhārata.

A demonstration of the power of speech and truth in relation to living in harmony with the cosmic order can be found in the Indian concept of the Act of Truth.¹⁴ The Truth Act is found in the Indian tradition as early as the RgVeda (10.34) and was an important concept in Brahminism/Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism (Brown 1968:171-172). We find an example of the Act in the Mahābhārata story "Nala". In this story the daughter of King Bhīma, Damayantī, holds a *svayamvara* (bridegroom choice). She already loves King Nala and plans to choose him, but the gods

¹⁴ The Act of Truth has been studied in detail by Norman Brown (1978), Heinrich Luders (1959) and more recently by George Thompson (1998). I have largely relied on Brown in my brief discussion of Truth Acts, but there is more scholarly debate about these Acts than my handling of the term implies. In my presentation I have avoided points about the Act which have spawned scholarly debate and present those points on which scholars generally agree.

Indra, Agni, Varuṇa and Yama also want to win Damayantī as a wife (3.51-52.10). When Damayantī enters the arena to choose her husband, she is shocked to find five men looking just like Nala. The four gods have disguised themselves to appear just like him in the hope that she will pick one of them (3.54.10-11). Damayantī is not sure which Nala is the Nala she wants, so she decides to use an Act of Truth to force the gods to reveal themselves:

... she said trembling, "If it be true that I chose the Niṣadhan to be my husband, when I heard the words of the wild geese, then by this truth the Gods must point him out to me! If it be true that I have never strayed in speech and thought, then by this truth the Gods must point him out to me!... The World Guardians and the Lord must display their own forms, so that I may recognize King Puṇyaśloka!" When they [the gods] heard this piteous plaint of Damayantī, her complete and true decision for the Niṣadhan, her love for him, the purity of her heart, her spirit, devotion, and passion, O Bhārata, the Gods at her summons displayed their ability to wear the marks of divinity.... Now that she could see the Gods and Puṇyaśloka of Niṣadha, O Bharata, the daughter of Bhīma chose him according to the Law. (3.54.16-25)

Norman Brown argues that the effectiveness of the Act is based on the perfection of the speaker (1968:172). This perfection is based on the speaker completely fulfilling his/her assigned role in the world; the speaker is in harmony with *ṛta* (Thompson 1998:136-137). Once married, Damayantī is depicted as a perfect devoted wife, but in this quote her perfection is demonstrated by her "complete and true decision" the "purity of her heart, her spirit, devotion, and passion." Brown theorizes that those who act out their role in a perfect manner are in harmony with the cosmos, and are able to manipulate cosmic forces as we see Damayantī doing in the above passage (1968:172-174). Just as in the case of the perfect Damayantī, a brahmin must perfectly fulfill his role in the universe in order to tap the power of the cosmos. Unlike Damayantī and other non-brahmins, however, brahmins have an added advantage of a special knowledge. Brahmins receive a specific training designed to make them ritual experts and therefore connected to the eternal mantras, order, Brahman, Vāc and truth. Cosmic power seems to be the reward for those connected to *ṛta* and that power is harnessed and directed by speech.

At the sacrificial level *ṛta* is about the recreation or mirroring of the cosmic order. We have already noted the connection between rituals and the creation of order through speech. Another aspect of the sacrifice on the human level is that it recreates the first sacrifice described in the "Puruṣa

Sukta” which ordered the world and created the *varṇas*. In the “Puruṣa Sukta” hymn the gods sacrifice the cosmic giant Puruṣa to create and order the world. From various parts of the giant’s body come the four classes of society: “His mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born” (RV 10.90.12). The general Brahmaṇa theory of ritual is that rituals performed by humans re-enact this original sacrifice. After the sacrifice Puruṣa needs to be strengthened through repeated rituals at the human level (Staal 1983:65, 116). The sacrifice recreates and invigorates the cosmos. Order and ritual find their closest human link in brahmins. Brahmins are the primary force in constructing the sacrifice on earth. It is largely within brahmins, then, that *ṛta*’s power with words lie.

Finally, we must discuss two of the primary gods connected with the ritual and *ṛta*, especially in terms of linking the gods to humans: Agni and Soma (Staal 1983:75). These two gods are the first gods that come from *ṛta* and terms like the “womb of *ṛta*” or the “seat of *ṛta*” are commonly linked to these two gods of the sacrifice. A priest becomes connected to the divine, to *ṛta* and truth through a special knowledge of the sacrifice, and through these two gods known for their inspirational qualities regarding speech. It is through these two gods of the sacrifice that brahmins grasp the hidden secrets of Vāc:

I ask you about the farthest end of the earth; I ask you about the navel of the universe. I ask you about the semen of the stallion bursting with seed; I ask you about the final abode of Speech [Vāc]. This altar is the farthest end of the earth; this sacrifice is the navel of the universe. This Soma is the semen of the stallion bursting with seed; this Brahmin priest is the final abode of Speech.... I do not know just what it is that I am like. I wander about concealed and wrapped in thought. When the first born of Order [Agni or Soma] came to me, I won a share of this Speech. (RV 1.164.34-35, 37)¹⁵

These R̥gVedic verses present brahmins as the resting place of Vāc, but Vāc comes to them through Agni and Soma. It is through the sacrifice that brahmins contact Agni and Soma and ultimately the power of speech. Through the sacrifice, a symbol of *ṛta*, Soma and Agni, the divine links to *ṛta*, come

¹⁵ The context of this quote is a *brahmodya* which will be discussed in Chapter 4. *Brahmodyas* are a series of question and answer riddles that test a brahmin’s special knowledge. This hymn does not explicitly inform us of who the “I” is in the above quote, but if scholars (Kupier 1960:276-280) and (Thompson1997:15) are correct in calling it a *brahmodya* we may assume the speakers to be competing brahmins.

to the appropriate priest to inspire him with Vāc. Once inspired the brahmin is god-like: “[t]he underlying syllable of the song is the final abode where all the gods have taken their seat. What can one who does not know this do with the song? Only those who know it sit together here” (RV 1.164.39). What this verse tells us is that those who know the hidden element of Vāc sit with the gods, they have the power of gods. Without knowledge the words and songs of the sacrifice are impotent. The sacrifice connects one with the divine, to those who are inspired it gives a vision of *ṛta* and links them to Vāc and Brahman. These *ṛsis* of the sacrifice “know” the order of the cosmos; they know what it means on earth to be true.

1.3.2 Brahminical Speech: Truth and Agni

Leaving *ṛta* we must now discuss *satya* and Agni, and their relation to speech. Like *ṛta*, the strongest connection between speech, truth and Agni is found in the sacrifice. We receive a glimpse of these connections in Utanka’s story. Utanka’s connection to the sacrifice, beyond his caste and his studentship under a successful ritualist, becomes clearer towards the end of the story. As the story progresses Takṣaka, the king of the snakes, steals the earrings from Utanka. Seeking revenge, Utanka tells King Janamejaya that Takṣaka is responsible for his father’s death. Once Janamejaya has heard this he “waxed wroth with Takṣaka; and as the fire blazes forth with the offered oblation, he blazed forth with the offering of Utanka’s speech” (1.3.190). Here, Utanka’s words are metaphorically connected to the sacrifice and the ritual fire (Agni). To understand the significance of this metaphor we need to examine the links between Agni, truth, ritual and speech.

Agni is the vehicle through which sacrificial oblations are delivered to the gods; he is an essential element of ritual and speech. As I have already mentioned, in the RgVeda Agni is closely associated with speech and is credited with bringing inspiration to *kavis*: “[y]oung Agni, take your place as our favourite priest with inspirations and shining speech” (RV 1.26.2). Speech and Agni remain closely associated in the Upanisads, as this example from one of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka’s stories of creation demonstrates:

This same deity¹⁶, after it had driven out from the other deities the evil that is death, carried them beyond the reach of death. Speech was the first one that it carried. And when speech was freed from death, it became fire. So, having gone beyond death, the fire now blazes here. (1.3.11-12)

Speech and fire are closely related in this quote, but we have already discussed speech as Brahman in this particular Upaniṣad. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka deals with the problem by suggesting that fire comes directly from Brahman:

Among the gods the priestly power (*brahman*) came into being only in the form of fire, and among humans as a Brahmin.... In the fire, therefore, people seek to find a world for themselves among the gods, and in the Brahmin a world among humans, for *brahman* came into being in these two forms. (1.4.15)

Brahman is speech¹⁷ and its heavenly and earthly representatives are also closely associated with speech. Agni and brahmins are also intimately connected with sacrifice and ritual speech:

“Yājñavalkya,” he said, “tell me -- when this whole world is caught in the grip of death, when it is overwhelmed by death, how can the patron of a sacrifice free himself completely from its grip?” Yājñavalkya replied: “By means of the Hotṛ priest -- that is, by means of the fire, by means of speech. Clearly, the Hotṛ priest of the sacrifice is speech. So this speech -- it is this fire here; it is the Hotṛ priest; it is freedom....” (BU 3.1.3)

The power of the ritual and speech is emphasized here as something that overcomes death. The ritual and a specific brahmin priest associated with fire and speech are given this power, a brahmin who, we are told, is speech. What this passage emphasizes is the power behind the links between priest/brahmin, ritual, speech and Agni. Certain types of speech of some brahmins are different from ordinary words, these brahminical words are powerful and connected to divine forces.

Truth and sacrifice in the Upaniṣads are also closely related:

“On what is the moon founded?”

“On the sacrificial consecration.”

“On what is the sacrificial consecration founded?”

“On truth. For that very reason, they instructed a man consecrated for sacrifice: ‘Speak the truth.’ So the sacrificial consecration is founded on truth.”

“On what is truth founded?”

“On the heart, for one recognizes truth with the heart.” (BU 3.9.23)

¹⁶ “*this same deity*: i.e., the breath within the mouth. The term *devatā*... is used in these texts with a broad range of meanings.... Often, as in this and the following passages (10-18), the term refers to various vital functions of the body” (Olivelle 1996:294).

¹⁷ We have already noted this in BU 1.3.22: “*brahman*, after all, is speech, and it is the lord (*pati*) of speech”.

What “the heart” is in the above quote is obscure. Later Yājñavalkya tells us it is the self (ātman) (3.9.25). To gain a knowledge of ātman is to gain a special knowledge of one’s connection to Brahman. Sacrifice is founded on Brahman and truth. We can see a cosmology expressed here -- from Brahman issues truth and speech and the tools to use these forces via rituals: Agni and brahmins. Given that Agni and brahmins are the heavenly and earthly versions of Brahman, it should come as no surprise that they are strongly associated with truth and speech. The above quote also directly links the sacrifice and brahmin priests with truth and truth speech. The elements of the sacrifice and therefore brahmins are obliged to be truthful. In the Mahābhārata, however, an obligation to be truthful may become an absolute law to be truthful as we will see in the Epic’s treatment of Agni.

The Mahābhārata demonstrates these connections between Agni and truth in the “Puloman” chapter which immediately follows the “Pauṣya” chapter. The Puloman story tells us of a brahmin named Bṛḡu¹⁸ who leaves his pregnant “ever-equable lawful wife” (1.5.13) named Pulomā in order to perform a Royal Consecration. While Bṛḡu is gone a Rākṣasa named Puloman falls in love with Pulomā. Puloman enters the hermitage and questions the ritual fire (Agni) he finds there:

“Tell me, O Fire, whose wife she is for I ask you with an oath. Thou art true, Fire -- tell the truth to me who asks thee! This light-colored woman has first been chosen by me, but her father later married her off to Bṛḡu, who thus broke the troth. If this buxom woman is Bṛḡu’s clandestine wife, say so in truth, and I shall carry her off from the hermitage. For a fury has been burning my heart that Bṛḡu should have got the slim-waisted wife that was mine first!” The Rākṣasa, having thus put his spell¹⁹ on the blazing fire of sacrifice, questioned it doubtingly many a time about Bṛḡu’s wife.... The seven-tongued Fire heard the Rākṣasa’s words and became much distressed. “I am no less fearful of speaking untruth than of Bṛḡu’s curse,” it whispered. *The Bard said:* Having heard the Fire speak, the Rākṣasa assumed the guise of a boar, brahmin, and seized her with the speed of wind and thought. (1.5.16-29, 1.6.1)

¹⁸ The actual story opens with: “I shall now recite, great hermit and brahmin, the Descent of the Bṛḡus with all its attendant stories, as it is found in the ancient lore” (1.5.5). The Bṛḡus are a priestly group who appear in the earliest Vedas through to the latest Puraṇas, and their mythology dominates the priestly tales of the Mahābhārata (Goldman 1977:2-4). Bṛḡu is the first of this family of brahmins. Goldman speculates that there is a deliberate weaving together of Bhārata legend, with Bhārgava legend which he feels indicates a redaction of the warrior epic by Bhārgava redactors (1977:2).

¹⁹ I am not sure exactly what is meant here by spell. It may be an actual spell, but there is no indication of such a spell until this passage. I am inclined to understand spell as part of the association Agni has with ritual and the Rākṣasa’s demand that the fire speak the truth. It is clear from the passage that this form of Agni is a ritual fire. The Rākṣasa may be relying on the magical and mantric associations of rituals to force Agni to speak the truth, thus giving the connotation of a spell.

Puloman is then killed by Cyavana, Pulomā's child, who bursts from her belly and turns the Rākṣasa to dust. In the above quote, the Rākṣasa relies on Agni's reputation as a speaker of truth in order to force him to speak the name of Bhr̥gu. The story Puloman gives that he was originally betrothed to Pulomā is likely a lie to force Agni to reveal the name of Pulomā's husband. The Rākṣasa is not sure that Pulomā is Bhr̥gu's wife and he cannot take her until he is sure.²⁰ This point is made clear when Bhr̥gu returns and tries to discover how Pulomā was taken: "[a]nd the Bhr̥gu wrathfully questioned his wife Pulomā: 'Who told that Rākṣasa here about you that he wanted to abduct you? For that Rākṣasa knew not for sure that you, sweet-smiling woman, were my wife'" (1.6.10). In Agni's rather obscure answer to Puloman in 1.5.29 is all the information the demon needs. Puloman asks "[i]f this buxom woman is Bhr̥gu's clandestine wife, say so in truth". Agni's answer tries to walk between lying and directly revealing Bhr̥gu's identity, but implicit in his words is the identity of Pulomā's husband and the demon takes the woman. Agni is more than simply linked to the truth, Puloman is sure that he will speak truthfully. Agni is well aware that his answer will meet with Bhr̥gu's anger, but he answers truthfully, for he must speak the truth, a point the story stresses as it continues.

While Agni does not directly answer Puloman, he is blamed for the incident:

the Bhr̥gu wrathfully questioned his wife Pulomā: "Who told that Rākṣasa here about you that he wanted to abduct you? For that Rākṣasa knew not for sure that you, sweet-smiling woman, were my wife..." *Pulomā said: My lord, it was the Fire that betrayed me to that Rākṣasa. It was on the Fire's account that the Rākṣasa took me.... When he heard this from Pulomā the greatest fury took possession of the Bhr̥gu, and in a rage he cursed the Fire, "Thou shalt eat anything!" ... But the Fire was outraged at the Bhr̥gu's curse and said, "What new rashness hast thou wrought today, brahmin? While I keep striving for the Law and speak the truth whatever comes? I was questioned and I spoke the truth -- where did I go wrong?"* (1.6.10-14, 1.7.1-3)

The power of brahminical curses is again stressed here; even the gods are not free from the effects of a brahmin's curse, especially if that brahmin is a renowned seer. Agni's response is to point out that he did nothing wrong. He links truth and law and claims to have spoken the truth, how can he be punished for keeping his truth? An important element raised by the Puloman story is the problem that

²⁰ The Rākṣasa must be sure that Pulomā is worth stealing. He must be sure that she is the woman of status that he thinks she is; he does not want to steal a bride unworthy of him. Van Buitenen does not appear to agree with me and argues that Puloman's story should be taken at its face value (1973:441). I feel my own explanation makes a better account of Bhr̥gu's words to his wife that follow and fits the general pattern of wife abduction found in the tradition.

speaking the truth can entail. While being truthful is often depicted as a great virtue, the Rākṣasa is able to manipulate Agni's truthfulness to commit a crime. Being truthful also results in punishment for Agni. This story tells us early on in the Epic that being truthful is not a guarantee of earthly success nor is it without its own complicating moral ambiguities.

Bṛghu's curse is a serious one, a point Agni tries to stress as the story continues. Agni tells the brahmin that he separates himself to enter each ritual fire and "[w]hatever oblation is offered into me according to the precepts that have been ordained by the Veda, the deities and the ancestors will be satisfied" (1.7.7). Not only is Agni needed to preserve the gods and ancestors, but he depicts himself as their mouth: "[t]hrough this mouth of mine are the ancestors given their offerings on new moon day, and the Gods on full moon day, and do they eat the offered oblation. How then should I, *their* mouth, become omnivorous" (1.7.11). The pollution problem if the mouth of gods and ancestors eats anything is clear. To force the issue Agni leaves the ritual fires of the brahmins, leaving them without "the OM̐s and Vaṣaṭs, devoid of the svāhās and svadhās, all creatures thereupon became most miserable" (1.7.12). This quote is significant, because it links Agni with mantras and the power of ritual speech. Without Agni the OM̐ is lost, the *akṣara* or ordering principle is lost and the priests of the sacrifice are unable to perform their rituals. As we saw in some Upaniṣads, Agni, ritual, brahmins and powerful speech are intimately connected. In the human realm it is brahmins who have the closest connection to ritual and Agni, and therefore the power of ritual speech, but that power is bound by the same force that binds Agni: truth. We must recall that behind Agni, speech and ritual are *ṛta* and *satya*. The vocal power brahmins gain through their special knowledge and connection to Agni and Brahman is imbued with order and truth.

It is the brahmins who approach the gods to encourage them to solve the problem: "[m]uch disturbed, the seers approached the gods and spoke their word. 'By losing the Fire the innocent three worlds have lost their rites and lost the way. Lay down what is to be done now so that no time be lost'" (1.7.14). The problem is solved by having Agni's fire purify everything he eats, resolving the issue. What we take from this story is the close link between Agni, rituals, truth speech and brahmins.

It is through Agni that the *akṣara* is available to brahmins and like him brahmins are bound to truth speech. Agni inspires the speech of *kavis* and his speech is linked to truth. Ritual knowledge and a connection to truth are what empower a brahmin seer's words. Through Agni brahmins are tied to ritual and the powerful speech of rituals, which suggests that brahminical speech is different from the speech of other castes. We have seen this power demonstrated in the stories we have examined so far. Utanka's words are empowered by two main things: his connection to ritual²¹ and his connection to a truth or law that underlies rituals and cosmos.

As we have seen, Utanka is connected to the truth in the form of moral law, but Pauṣya is not. Utanka is able to reverse Pauṣya's curse by pointing out that it was based in falsity: "Utanka rejoined, 'I had to make sure that the food was impure and permitted you to appease me. It was before that that you said, 'As you spoil unspoiled food, therefore you shall stay barren.' Now the food was spoiled, so there can be no curse on me" (1.3.130-133). However, we should also note that their speech is quantitatively different. Utanka cannot remove his word, his speech is active. Pauṣya's, however, can be reversed. Unlike Utanka who seems to have a direct connection to the hidden power of speech, Pauṣya's words are dependent on his less than reliable judgement. Pauṣya's link to the truth is based on his perfection as a king, a perfection that is marred by his inability to present suitable hospitality to his guest and his error in initially judging the food "clean". The perfection implied in one's ability to curse, to effectively manipulate eternal forces through speech, is largely the domain of brahmins in the Epic.

It is possible that Pauṣya's inability to curse is due to his basing that curse on an untruth and not his status as a king. If we look to the curses of other kings, however, it will become clear that kingly curses are of a less powerful kind than brahminical curses. What we discover of kingly curses is that they are more like oaths than curses. Kings do not bend the cosmos to their will in a magical way when they curse, but simply point out physical actions they intend to carry out or have already carried out. We find one example in the Book One story "The Burning of the Khāṇḍava Forest." In this grisly

²¹ That is, ritual and all its connections to knowledge, Agni, brahminhood and Utanka's lineage.

story Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are helping Agni kill everything in the Khāṇḍava Forest. Agni moves through the forest burning everything in his path and those animals that try to escape the flames are cut down by the warriors' arrows. At one point a snake which is aided by Indra almost escapes Arjuna, but the warrior does manage to kill it. After the snake's death Arjuna "cursed the Snake... 'Thou shalt never find shelter'" (1.218.11). The curse is meaningless, the snake is already dead. Arjuna does not bent the cosmos to his will in killing the snake, but simply cuts it in three with his arrows²²; an impressive skill, but not the magical ability of brahminical curses.

A form of speech that is often incorrectly placed with curses are kingly oaths, such as the one Bhīma speaks to Duryodhana in the dicing hall: "I shall kill Duryodhana, Arjuna shall kill Karṇa, and Sahadeva shall kill Śakuni, crook with the dice. And this grave word I shall once more solemnly utter in the middle of the hall -- the Gods shall make it true when there will be war between: I shall kill this Suyodhana with my club in the fight" (2.68.26-28). While statements like this may sound like curses the term curse is not used with them and they are little more than statements of intent, an oath to carry out a physical deed. Actual curses are much more explicit in identifying themselves as curses: "Maitreya [a brahmin] touched water²³ and cursed the evil minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra:..." "Through your offence a great war will flare up and during it the brawny Bhīma will smash your thigh with the blows of his club" (3.11.33-34). There are clear differences between these words of Maitreya and Bhīma's above. This curse is explicitly referred to and involves the bending of the cosmos to Maitreya's will and not the carrying out of an action he could physically do himself. On the rare occasion that kings curse they are simply not of the same stuff as brahminical curses.

What we have gathered so far from the Pausya story is that brahminical speech is different than kingly speech. Some brahminical speech is imbued with a cosmic power based in order, law and truth. Certain brahmins have a special knowledge that gives them access to hidden elements of the universe. This hidden element was Vāc in the early Vedas and Brahman in the Mahābhārata and

²² By magic I mean the ability to manipulate the cosmos through one's extraordinary power and speech.

²³ An act used to ritually purify himself implying that cursing has a ritual element.

Upaniṣads. Closely associated with these hidden elements is speech; we have seen both Brahman and Vāc identified with speech. While a brahmin's speech is powerful and by extension the brahmin himself is powerful, he must keep his own law and be truthful. Being true to one's words and law are not inconsequential ideals. Being true implies a great deal about one's personal power both in this world and in the cosmos.

1.4 Brahminical Speech: Eloquence and Council

Eloquence is also an important idea when discussing brahminical speech. Implicit in the Vedic understanding of mantras is the role priests/brahmins play in speaking especially in ritual situations. A "true" seer when speaking in a ritual setting re-enacts the "primal creative principle itself" (Padoux 1990:4). During the Vedic period there was no distinction between religion and poetics, between sage and poet (Gonda 1963:14). A *kavi* who has a vision of *ṛta* is imbued with a divine knowledge that is considered to be infinite and free from errors (Gonda 1963:20). This knowledge is expressed in a poetic form which is considered to be an elevated form of language or "the language of the gods" (Thompson 1997:15). Truth and eloquence are interchangeable terms in the Vedas and Mahābhārata. Where there is truth there is thought to be eloquence and where there is eloquence there is thought to be truth.

Given the pre-eminent role of speech and mantras in ritual and the connection of brahmins to speaking those words, much of a priest's identity is bound up with his ability with a specialized type of speech (Findly 1989:23). A sign of a singer with revelatory insight (a *kavi*) is eloquence in speech and the ability to consistently use the correct form and pronunciation of words in rituals. The form and pronunciation of mantras were regarded as more significant than their meaning; thus brahmins were praised for their ability with words (Findly 1989:30). Speaking well and demonstrating an ability or power with ritual speech was central to a brahmin's identity. People with powerful words, be they brahmins or ordinary people like Damayanti, had external signs of that power. They spoke well and it was assumed that they could be relied on to speak the truth and keep their word.

Part of eloquence in the Mahābhārata is an ability to praise things in an effective way. Utanka uses praise to regain the earrings once they have been stolen by Takṣaka, king of the snakes. At first Utanka tries to praise Takṣaka to get the earrings back:

Utanka followed him [Takṣaka] through that same chasm; and upon entering he praised the Snakes with these verses:
“Takṣaka do I praise, scion of Kadrū, for the sake of the earrings, him I praise who has always dwelled in the hand of the Kurus and the Khāṇḍava Forest.... (1.3.139,144)

In a rare turn of events Utanka’s praise does not work. Usually praise in the Mahābhārata garners immediate positive results. Utanka does not, however, give up. In the realm of the snakes he sees two women weaving with white and black threads, a wheel being turned by six boys and a handsome man (1.3.147-149).²⁴ Utanka decides to praise these people with “verses from the Recitation of Spells”

(1.3.149) after which the man tells Utanka: “‘I am pleased with this your song of praise. What favor can I do for you?’ He [Utanka] said to him, ‘The Snakes shall be in my power!’” (1.3.155). The man tells Utanka how to get the snakes under his power and Takṣaka returns the earrings (1.3.155-159).

There are two intriguing elements of this part of the story that I wish to discuss. The first is that Utanka uses his speech, his praise, to act for him. Unlike a kṣatriya, who would have charged after Takṣaka with a stream of arrows, Utanka pursues his end through words. He relies on his words to act for him. He is not void of physical action, he does act when putting the snakes under his power,²⁵ but it is his words that he relies upon to bring about the occasion to act. The second intriguing element is the effective power of praise. Utanka’s praise of the handsome man results in an immediate boon.

This example is not isolated; another clear example is found in Book One in the chapter called “Āstika”.

²⁴ We are told later in the story that the two women are “One-that-Places and the One-that-Disposes” (1.3.173). The black and white threads are night and day, the six boys are the seasons and the wheel is a year, and the man is Indra (1.3.173-174).

²⁵ Specifically, the man tells Utanka to blow in the ass of a horse (Agni) who is with them. Utanka does so and smoke billows out of the horse, choking the snakes and forcing their King to give up the earrings.

Āstīka is the brahmin who stops King Janamejaya's snake sacrifice that Utanka helps initiate when he tells the king that Takṣaka killed his father. We join the story when the young Āstīka is trying to gain entrance to Janamejaya's sacrifice:

When the brahmin wanted to enter, he was stopped by the keepers of the gate; but to gain his entrance the great brahmin lifted his voice in praise of the sacrifice.

Āstīka said:

As Soma's rite, as Varuṇa's rite,
As at Prayāga the rite of Prajāpati,
So is thy sacrifice, son of Parikṣit,
Best of the Bharatas, hail to our friends!...
These priests that sit here, their splendor matching
The Sun's and the Fire's, as at Indra's rite,
No knowledge is still hidden from them,
No fee given them will come to nought.
In none of the worlds can a priest be found
Who equals Dvaipāyana, this I know.
His pupils now roam all over this earth,
All expert priests in their proper parts.
Great-spirited Fire, the Many-Splendored,
The Widely Radiant, the Golden-Spermed,
All-Eating, South-Crested, whose Trail is Blackened,
Now longs for the offering, to eat it, the God....

The Bard said:

Thus praised they all sat serene, the king,
The *sadasyas*, the priests, and the offering fire;
And observing the gestures they all displayed,
King Janamejaya began to speak.

Janamejaya said:

A child he is, but he speaks like the old;
No child do I deem him, but a man of age.
I wish to bestow a boon upon him,...
(1.49.29; 1.50.1,9-10, 17; 1.51.1)

The boon Āstīka chooses is to end the sacrifice. It is ultimately through Āstīka's use of praise that the snake sacrifice comes to an end. Āstīka uses his speech to act for him. What we need to take note of is the effectiveness of speech; both Utanka and Āstīka meet their ends primarily through speech. Āstīka gains his boon and his words signal that he is learned well beyond his years. Even though Āstīka brings a premature end to Janamejaya's sacrifice, the king recognizes Āstīka's ability with words and interprets it as a sign that he is an exceptional ritualist. The king tells Āstīka after the sacrifice has been brought to a halt: "[y]ou must come back," the king said to him. "You must be a *sadasya* at the grand celebration of my Horse Sacrifice." "So be it," he [Āstīka] said" (1.53.15). A horse sacrifice is

one of the major rituals a king can perform and to be asked to be a *sadasya* at it is an honour for Āstīka. To bring about all of this Āstīka has done little but speak, but that is all he needs to do, for his words are active. His eloquence and ability with praise reveal him as a learned brahmin, a sage or seer. His identity and the identity of brahmins like him is closely attached to his ability with words.

The use and effectiveness of praise is well established in the Vedic tradition. A large number of the ṚgVedic hymns are hymns of praise to the various gods. This ṚgVedic hymn is a brief example of a hymn of praise to all the gods:

Not one of you, gods, is small, not one a little child; all of you are truly great.
Therefore you are worthy of praise and of sacrifice, you thirty-three gods of Manu, arrogant and powerful.
Protect us, help us and speak for us; do not lead us into the distance far away from the path of our father Manu.
You gods who are all here and who belong to all men, give far-reaching shelter to us and to our cows and horses. (8.30.1-4)

The sacrifice would have resonated with these songs of praise and they had a number of clear purposes. One such purpose was to attract the gods to the sacrifice. Agni played a significant role in such songs as he was the primary link between sacrificer and the divine:

I pray to Agni, the household priest who is the god of the sacrifice, the one who chants and invokes and brings most treasure.
Agni earned the prayers of the ancient sages, and of those of the present, too; he will bring the gods here....
Agni, the priest with the sharp sight of a poet, the true and most brilliant, the god will come with the gods....
To you, Agni, who shine upon darkness, we come day after day, bringing our thoughts and homage to you, the king over sacrifices, the shining guardian of the Order, growing in your own house.
Be easy for us to reach, like a father to his son. Abide with us, Agni, for our happiness.
(RV 1.1.1-2,5,7-9)

These verses mix praise with a simple request for Agni's presence because he is the mediator between gods and humans. As the poem suggests, if Agni comes the other gods will follow. As with all songs of praise the praise is not given freely, there is a clear expectation of a return on these words. We should also consider that these Vedic hymns of praise were sung in a sacrificial context. They were sung by priests trained for that specific purpose. Given the sacrificial milieu of these hymns of praise fit into the general pattern of powerful brahminical speech that we have seen so far in this chapter. The effectiveness of praise may be due in part to the inherent effect praise has on people, but also,

when spoken by brahmins, praise has the same power that is associated with ritual speech, mantras and curses.

A second purpose of praise was to get favours from the gods once they were at the sacrifice. We can see this element in the above quoted ṚgVedic hymn 8.30.4 to all the gods: “[y]ou gods who are all here and who belong to all men, give far-reaching shelter to us and to our cows and horses.” Again, a return is expected on the praises given. There is a pragmatic economy surrounding the sacrifice in that the sacrificer, the kṣatriya sponsor of the event, expected and asked for a material return on his sacrifice. The request for this quid pro quo from the gods was delivered by the priests on behalf of the sponsor in the form of the praises. The praise of Āstīka and Utanka belong to this context. Āstīka and Utanka both expect a material return on their words and receive what they desire.

Returning to Utanka’s story, we find he has gained the earrings back and after a few complications he presents them to Veda’s wife (1.3.160-175). Having received the gift, Veda releases Utanka: “my good friend, you must go now. I give you my leave to depart -- you shall attain to good fortune” (1.3.177). Utanka travels to Hāstinapura, the realm of King Janamejaya, with the explicit purpose of “wreak[ing] vengeance on Takṣaka” (1.3.178).

Once Utanka is fully released from Veda his status in the story subtly changes. These verses demonstrate this change:

Reaching Hāstinapura after a short spell, that eminent brahmin Utanka met with King Janamejaya who himself had earlier arrived undefeated from Takṣaśila. He found the monarch entirely surrounded by his councillors. He first, as was proper, pronounced blessings of victory for him, then addressed him with this speech in accomplished language: “While another duty fell due to be duly done by you, most eminent king, you well-nigh childishly satisfied yourself with some other sport, most prominent prince!” Thus addressed by the brahmin, King Janamejaya himself replied graciously with full respect for the hermit:

“I guard my own baronial Law
By guarding these people of mine.
Tell, brahmin, what should I have done?
I obediently wait on thy word.”
(1.3.178-183)

What we notice at first is that Utanka is now “that eminent brahmin Utanka”; before this point he was always simply Utanka. We are also told more about how Utanka speaks -- his speech is now “in

accomplished language". We have seen that Utanka was a man of considerable ability when he sought out his guru's gift, but now that he is truly released from his master he seems to carry the additional prestige associated with a *kavi* and not the lesser authority of the student of a sage.

While Utanka's words to the king are veiled in praise, they are still insults in that the brahmin claims that the king has failed in his duty. Janamejaya does not respond with hostility, but accepts him as though he were one of his own councillors and allows him to correct him. Much of Janamejaya's belief that Utanka should be heeded to and not punished is based on Utanka's speech. Utanka is a virtual stranger to the king. The brahmin's only qualifications are his lineage, Veda is sponsored by Janamejaya, and his ability with speech. It is Utanka's "accomplished language" which signifies him as a learned brahmin worthy of attention. No demonstration of action is required of Utanka to prove his position, his identity as a speaker of truth, as someone who knows the law, as someone whose speech carries power is revealed in his ability with language. Eloquence is an unquestioned sign of an individual's spiritual purity, a purity that assumes truth speech. It never occurs to Janamejaya to question the truth of Utanka's words -- his eloquence means he is imbued with the truth.

The Pausya chapter ends with Utanka telling Janamejaya how his father died. Janamejaya's father was killed by Takṣaka, a story the king's councillors seem to know, but have failed to tell the king: "[m]ost aggrieved, the king thereupon interrogated in Utanka's presence his councillors concerning his father's journey to heaven. Then indeed did the king become flooded with grief and sorrow, when he learned from Utanka about his father's fate" (1.3.194-195). This passage tells us a great deal about a king's reliance on his councillors. Janamejaya relies on his councillors to advise him and keep him informed to such a degree that he does not even know his own family history, because they have not told him of it. The councillors in this position have a great deal of power. This power is focused on controlling the information that a king hears. A king who allows himself to become out of touch with his realm risks becoming the puppet of councillors who can feed a king what ever misinformation they please. The control of information and the subsequent control of a

king are described in this story with the visual image of the king being separated from the world by the physical barrier of his councillors: “He [Utanka] found the monarch entirely surrounded by his councillors” (1.3.180).

The King also appears to rely on his councillors to tell him his duty -- to keep him lawful. We do not see Janamejaya’s councillors directly advising the king on duty, but the King’s assumption that Utanka can advise him on duty implies that he relies on others to decide what is lawful:

Tell brahmin, what should I have done?
I obediently wait on thy word. (1.3.183)

Janamejaya treats Utanka as a councillor and asks for his advice on kingly duty. The king appears to assume that he needs correction and he turns to brahmins to provide that correction. The role of councillors and a king’s reliance on them present an important addition to one of the issues we must constantly return to in this thesis: whose dharma is being followed? Each *varṇa* has its own law. What is unlawful for a brahmin may be lawful for a *kṣatriya*. With brahminical councillors, however, we must be cautious. When a brahminical councillor gives advise to a king we must decide if that advice is true to *kṣatriya* or brahminical law -- what is true or what is lawful action can have two different right answers. That the Epic evades presenting one truth is one of the intriguing elements of the Mahābhārata that we will investigate when we address kingly speech.

What we have learned in this chapter of the thesis is that the speech of certain brahmins, of *kavis*, has an active power beyond that of ordinary speech. This powerful speech is hidden from most people and requires a special knowledge to attain. This special knowledge recognizes the hidden elements of the cosmos and is linked to cosmic order and truth. This knowledge is also associated with the exclusive knowledge of ritual that brahmins have. We have seen that the sacrifice is closely associated with speech, truth, order, Agni and Brahman and that brahmins can gain access to these elements and therefore the power of speech because they are the earthly controllers of the sacrifice. It is through the brahmin’s special knowledge and a connection to truth/order that he has the power to curse others through speech. We have also noted the importance that eloquence plays in creating a

truth speaker's identity. Finally we have begun to explore some of the interrelations between brahmins and kṣatriyas by briefly exploring the role of councillors.

Chapter Two: The Standard by which a King is Measured

An issue I must deal with in this thesis is what it means to be a moral or dharmic king and why kings find it important to be dharmic. An essential part of the description of Yudhiṣṭhira's character is the constant references to his moral excellence. At the king's birth we are told: "and scarcely was he born when a disembodied voice spoke: 'He shall of a certainty be the greatest of the upholders of the Law, Pāṇḍu's firstborn son, who shall be named Yudhiṣṭhira. He shall be a celebrated king, widely renowned in all three worlds, glorious, lustrous, and moral'" (1.114.5). Undoubtedly, our narrator wants us to look favourably on Yudhiṣṭhira, but what we must question is why these qualities are of value to a king and if Yudhiṣṭhira truly possesses them. If he does not, which I argue is the case, why do the narrators of the story and the king himself continually claim that his key characteristic is his protection of the truth? How do these qualities function in the Epic? This chapter deals primarily with the first part of these questions: why is it important for kings to be dharmic.

This chapter will pick up where chapter one left off: the relationship between kings and brahmins. It has two central goals: the first is to establish that kings are depicted in the Epic as needing the support of brahmins in order to rule effectively, and the second is to establish that it is primarily the kingly virtue of truth speech which brahmins use to judge kings and not the other aspects of kṣatriya dharma or rāja dharma. In the course of the discussion it will become clear why it is important for kings to be considered upholders of dharma. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section will present the basics of kṣatriya and rāja dharma so that we are aware of the expectations people have of kings. The second section explores the problem of dharma, particularly the immense difficulty involved in determining dharma from adharma. This section also explores the inability of kings to determine what dharma is even though they are the protectors of order or dharma on earth. The third section will demonstrate that kings are dependent on brahmins to tell them what is dharmic action and kings are dependent on brahmins to legitimate their rule. The fourth section

will discuss a tendency of brahmins to judge kings only on their adherence to the truth and in so doing they ignore the majority of other laws a king must follow. The final section will discuss the need kings have for the support of the general population.

2.1 Kṣatriya and Rāja Dharma

2.1.1 Kṣatriya Dharma

As is largely known, kṣatriyas are the warrior and ruling caste of the four *varṇas* and second only to brahmins in honour and prestige. The primary duty of warriors is the protection of others.

Protection takes two basic forms. The first, and by far the most emphasized in the Mahābhārata, is physical protection. The second is economic protection in the form of *dāna* (gift giving) (Trautmann 1981:284). Given the value attached to physical protection we often hear of a warrior's brute strength and ability with weapons. We find the kṣatriya virtue of strength exemplified in Bhīma:

Pāṇḍu again said to Kuntī, "They declare that the baronage triumphs through strength: choose a son of triumphant strength!" After her husband's word she called up the Wind; and by him she bore the strong-armed Bhīma whose prowess was terrifying. And over this most forceful unbeatable child the voice spoke, O Bhārata: "He is born to be strong over all that is strong!" (1.114.8-11)

It is clear from this quote that strength is a great virtue in a kṣatriya. The Pāṇḍavas also excel in weapons, but Arjuna is beyond them all as Droṇa, his guru, demonstrates when he promises him: "I shall do anything to see that no archer on earth shall ever be your equal, I promise you....' and Droṇa's word was proved true: no one bested Arjuna" (1.123.5, .39). Skill in weapons is an essential virtue for a kṣatriya and the virtues of strength and skill in arms are common to all kṣatriyas in the Epic (Hara 1974:297-298) and, as the above quotes demonstrate, some of the Pāṇḍava brothers excel in these virtues.

Warriors are to live by fighting for the protection and expansion of the realm in which they live (Trautmann 1981:283). Engaging in battle is a warrior's highest duty leading to fame and heaven (Hara 1974:300). In battle a warrior could kill anyone so long as the death could be justified with kṣatriya dharma. Even relatives and teachers could be killed in battle, as Kṛṣṇa tells Yudhiṣṭhira: "[d]o not be compassionate, thinking he is my uncle. Honouring kṣatra-dharma first, kill Śalya" (9.6.35 quoted in Hara 1974:301). It is largely the indiscriminate nature of killing on the battlefield

that places kṣatriya dharma outside of the bounds of regular morality or dharma. Kṣatriya dharma is often called sinful and cruel; there is an inherent association with adharma and this caste. Kṣatriyas are bound by some rules on the battlefield, one of which is they cannot employ deceit in battle. A warrior may kill whomever he wants in battle and he may gain possessions through conquest, but he must carry out these actions fairly in strict adherence to the rules of battle which forbade any trickery (Hara 1974:301). True kṣatriya honour lay in defeating one's enemies on the battlefield through strength and ability and not through deceit.

A final aspect of the strength a warrior is expected to possess is a spiritual strength. This spiritual value expresses a warrior's attitude or inner disposition. He is always expected to pursue glory and heroism and to such a warrior comes Lakṣmī¹ (the goddess of fortune and royal glory) and *tejas* (heroic lustre): "[t]he goddess of fortune [Lakṣmī] seeks a hero for her dwelling place, who is endowed with fighting spirit, quick in action, conversant with what to do, not indulging in vices, grateful and trustworthy in friendship" (Hara 1974:298). Before Lakṣmī comes to a warrior, however, a kṣatriya must demonstrate his heroic nature in battle. Battle is an essential element of kṣatriya dharma; it is the proving ground for strength. Ability with arms and success in battle brought fortune and glory while failure brought heaven.

Finally, kṣatriyas are expected to give *dāna*. Warriors are to be great givers and never to accept gifts from others (Trautmann 1981:283). The primary recipients of these gifts are brahmins and the act of giving creates a strong bond between giver and receiver. Later in this chapter we will discover that kṣatriyas have a need of brahminical legitimation. Part of what brahmins get in return for bestowing legitimation on kṣatriyas is material support, here in the form of gifts.

2.1.2 Rāja Dharma

The vast majority of kings in the Epic are kṣatriyas and many aspects of kṣatriya dharma find their way into rāja dharma. Rāja dharma has been the subject of discussion and instruction since ancient times in South Asia and there is no shortage of material on the subject in the oldest

¹ Lakṣmī is also called Śrī at times. I will use Lakṣmī, Śrī and Śrī-Lakṣmī interchangeably.

Dharmaśāstras and both Epics (Kane 1973 3:1). Yet, even with all of this material on kingship, there is little agreement on what kingship is both on a practical level and theoretical level (Heesterman 1985:108). We shall not dwell on the points of disagreement about kingship in either the ancient texts or in modern scholarly works. Instead, we shall focus on general aspects of agreement as to the duties of a king, with special attention to those duties found in the Epic.

The primary duty of kings, and largely why kings are *ksatriyas*, is the protection of people through the maintenance of moral order or *dharma* (Heesterman 1985:108). Kings are expected to defend a realm and expand it. The warrior norms of strength, military ability, heroism and *dāna* are all expected of a king. Kings are expected to excel in these virtues and often a famous king is depicted as the strongest and best warrior in a realm: “[f]amous kings are described as exceeding all beings in strength, outshining all in lustre (*tejas*), transcending all in majesty” (Gonda 1969:5). These expectations are also directed at Yudhiṣṭhira, a point which is made to him by a brahmin early in the Epic:

What use is a baron born in a heroic lineage who does not show his prowess? A baron’s living is always conquest. For were he to lack all virtue, a man of prowess still routs his enemies; where he to possess all virtues, what use is he without prowess? All virtues indeed have their being in power. (2.15.10-12)

The brahmin in this scene is trying to encourage Yudhiṣṭhira to carry out the Royal Consecration, which will include the conquest of a number of kingdoms. This brahminical speaker uses the warrior virtues of heroism and battle to motivate the king. Clearly, *ksatriya dharma* is a large part of kingship in the Epic.

Closely associated with protection is *daṇḍa* -- both the staff of a king and the king’s power to punish (Kane 1973 3:5). *Daṇḍa* as the staff of a king symbolizes his authority, power to punish and his outward reach in performing both of these functions (Gonda 1969:22). Part of protection is to punish wrong doers in the kingdom such as thieves, but another part of protection is the maintenance of order through *daṇḍa*, through authority and the fear of punishment. Keeping order is conceived as both a social and moral duty. The king is to protect *dharma* as both a social hierarchy of *varṇas* and a moral law at all costs (Gonda 1969:17-18). An ideal king is to be a *dharmātman*: “an embodiment of

dharmā, of order, truth, norm and justice” (Gonda 1969:18). Yudhiṣṭhira is presented as a *dharmātman*, he is the son of Dharma and as such the embodiment of dharma on earth, thus his title - King Dharma. Part of being a *dharmātman* and the responsibility of maintaining moral order is that a king himself must be moral. He is to be associated with *satya*; he is to keep the truth especially when he speaks.

Having said this much, however, there seems to be an assumption that kings will not live up to this truthful and dharmic ideal. Many of the kings in Brahminical mythology are known more for their royal unrighteousness than as protectors of dharma (Heesterman 1985:109). There are even aspects of the Dharmaśāstras and the Mahābhārata that insist kings keep people on the path of dharma, while at the same time supporting the use of immoral actions by kings to meet their ends (Kane 1973 3:10).² We receive an ambivalent image of kingship which presents the king as both the embodiment of dharma and the embodiment of adharma. This ambivalent image demonstrates, I think, an assumed gap between an ideal king and the kings represented in mythology. The inherent adharma of kṣatriyas does not mix well with the truth and dharma a king is supposed to live by.

The Mahābhārata demonstrates these points to us by comparing brahmins and kṣatriyas. We have seen in chapter one that brahmins have a special relationship to truth and truth speech. While it is theoretically possible for a king to speak the truth and to have powerful speech, the kṣatriya caste is not imbued with these qualities in the way brahmins are. However, from an ideal perspective, both kings and brahmins are expected to be truthful. For these two groups to share qualities is unusual in the Epic. As Madeleine Biardeau points out “[a]lmost all the terms that define their duties are opposed by pairs.... the epic seems to especially emphasise the striking contrast between kings and Brahmins” (1981:78-79). An example comes to us early in the Epic:

Noninjury is the highest Law known to all breathing creatures; therefore a brahmin gifted with breath shall nowhere kill any living creatures. A brahmin -- so a most important scripture asserts -- is born in this world to be friendly, erudite in the Vedas and auxiliaries.... Not to inflict hurt, to speak the truth, and to be forgiving is assuredly for the brahmin a Law even higher than preserving the Veda. The Law of the baron, however, that does not become you -- to wield the staff, to be dreaded, and to protect the people. (1.11.12-15)

² In particular there is the Arthaśāstra attributed to Kauṭilya and the *apaddharma* section of the Santiparvan of the Epic.

This verse states clearly that many of the brahminical virtues, especially noninjury, are antithetical to the basic premiss of kings, who belong to the warrior caste and have the protection of dharma and a realm as their duty. The above quote opposes brahminical law and kingly law. Given this opposition displayed in the quote, we might question the legitimacy of calling truth speech a kingly virtue.

However, what this example suggests, I think, is not a rejection of the widely held view that truth speech is a kingly virtue, but that the duties of brahmins lead more easily to the truth, while the duties of kings do not inherently lead towards the truth. The quote suggests that kings are bound to fail morally, especially when faced with kṣatriya-like duties.

We must also appreciate that kings have no connection to truth, order and dharma in the way brahmins have. As we have seen in chapter one, some brahmins have “seen” the truth and order that regulate the universe. They are imbued with these cosmic powers which gives them powerful speech and a real commitment to speaking the truth. Kings have not seen these realities and are not imbued with truth and dharma; they have only heard of them from brahmins. While kings are expected to be truthful, they have not “experienced” that truth and cannot be said to have the same commitment to and understanding of truth that brahmins have. We shall see examples of this difference as the thesis continues.

Another aspect of kingship we need to explore is the relationship between royalty and Śrī-Lakṣmī. As Hara has pointed out, Śrī-Lakṣmī comes to the heroic warrior, but she has a special relationship with kings. In Hindu mythology, Śrī-Lakṣmī is the goddess of fortune and royal glory who dwells in a victorious king. In the Śatapatha Brahmana (2.4.4.6) we read of Śrī selecting a mighty king as her husband and dwelling in him, bringing material welfare to king and realm (Gonda 1969:46). We see this mythology acted out in the Mahābhārata in the persons of Draupadī and the five Pāṇḍava brothers. In the Epic story “The Five Indras” (1.189.1-49),³ we learn that Draupadī is an incarnation of Śrī and, as we know, she is married to the Pāṇḍava brothers. Alf Hiltebeitel argues that Śrī bestows sovereignty onto a king when she picks him over others (1974:156). He also suggests that

³ A more detailed account of this story is presented on page 60.

Śrī transfers royal virtues to a king such as truth, strength, *tejas* and dharma (Hiltebeitel 1974:157). The connection between Śrī and kingship is a strong one. Her presence in a king acts as a form of legitimation -- her presence points towards a true king, but for Śrī a true king is a victorious king, one imbued with a warrior's spirit. Connected to Śrī is the giving of gifts by a king, another *kṣatriya* virtue. The ability to give large amounts of *dāna* is a sign of material prosperity and a connection to Śrī. Thus, kings distribute their wealth and make their material prosperity and power visible in the form of their possessions, homes and gifts (Gonda 1969:13-14).

As we have seen, kingship is closely related to warrior-like attributes, but kingship has an added moral element of the expectation of truth and dharmic conduct. We have seen that this dharmic conduct is not something that kings are always capable of, a point we shall investigate as this chapter proceeds.

2.2 The Problem of Dharma

The concept that the king is dharma incarnate does not imply that kings are true to dharma or that they know dharma. The problem of kings as upholders of dharma in the Epic is two fold: it is not clear in the Epic what dharma is, and kings do not seem to be able to determine the difference between dharma and adharma. Dharma is a complex idea that is relative according to caste and situation; its meaning changes as contexts change (Krishan 1989:54). Even those texts devoted to explicating dharma can only acknowledge the uncertainty of determining the law: “[d]harma and adharma do not go about saying: here we are; nor do gods, gandharvas, or manes say: this is dharma, that is adharma” (ApDhS 1.7.20.6 quoted in Heesterman 1985:115). Part of what complicates the meaning of dharma is that the word covers so many different obligations. Dharma refers to religious practices and rites, ethics, morality, social systems, political systems and economic institutions (Krishan 1989:53). Given the vast array of topics and entities that fall under the title of dharma, it is small wonder that defining it is so problematic. Most people also had more than one dharma to follow. A king, for instance, would have to follow his *varṇadharmā*, that is follow the laws appropriate for a *kṣatriya*; he would also have to follow his *guṇadharmā*, that is the specific duties of

kingship; he would also have to follow *naimittakadharmā*, that is the performance of periodic rites; he would also have to follow *āśramadharmā*, that is the duties specific to his stage in life; and finally he would have to follow *sadharamadharmā*, that is rules common to all of humanity. This list represents only the principle dharmas a king might have to follow. Often, these various dharmas conflict; it is these conflicting dharmic obligations that forms the moral sub-plot of the Epic.

The difficulty of determining dharma is a key theme in the Mahābhārata where we are often told of “the subtlety of the Law” (3.200.4) when the difference between dharma and adharma is unclear.

This example has Mārkaṇḍeya, a learned brahmin, teaching the slippery edge of dharma to Yudhiṣṭhira through the story “The Colloquy of the Brahmin and the Hunter”:

Mārkaṇḍeya said:

The pious hunter, best of the upholders of all the Laws, once more sagely addressed that bull among brahmins, O Yudhiṣṭhira, and said, “As the elders say, ‘What is Law depends on whether Revelation authorizes it.’ For the course of the Law is subtle, greatly ramified, and without end. One may voice a lie when about to expire, or when about to marry: then the lie becomes truth and the truth a lie. It is generally held that that word that is entirely beneficial is the truth, and that the opposite creates an Unlaw: notice the subtlety of the Law!” (3.200.1-4)

While what is in Revelation seems clear, the size and variety of sacred texts in South Asia leads to a number of contradictory statements about dharma and leaves the power of determining law in the hands of those who control these vast texts: brahmins. In the end, the Hunter has only succeeded in pointing out that the law is fluid, it changes with each new context making what was once law unlawful. He tries to put us on solid ground by suggesting that something is true if it benefits everyone.⁴ Yet, we have already seen that Agni in the Puloman chapter⁵ speaks the truth, but by so doing he causes Bhṛgu’s wife to be stolen and himself to be cursed. Being truthful and receiving some benefit are not linked in the way the Hunter claims. Absent from the Hunter’s depiction of dharma is any surety as to what is true or what dharma is.⁶

⁴ The list of what is dharma that the Hunter presents is not unlike those presented in the Dharmaśāstras. Manu tells us that the sources of dharma are revelation, the example of virtuous people and reason. Eventually, however, Manu is forced to add another source to his list: “that which is pleasing to oneself” (Manusmṛti quoted in Rukmani 1989:26).

⁵ My discussion of the Puloman chapter in relation to Agni is found in pages 16-18 of chapter one.

⁶ One might argue that this lack of surety on the part of the Hunter is due to his caste, he is not a brahmin. Certainly, we could make such an argument on the basis of the stories presented in chapter

While determining dharma from adharma is generally considered to be difficult, kings are depicted as being particularly poor at making this distinction. An example of a king's inability to decide what is dharmic action can be found in the story "Yayāti". In this story King Yayāti is convinced by Śarmiṣṭhā, a servant of his wife Devayānī, that sleeping with her is lawful:

[Śarmiṣṭhā said] "You [King Yayāti] have always known me for my beauty, birth, and manners; therefore, I seek your grace and beg you to grant me my season,⁷ king of men!"

Yayāti said:

... But Uśanas Kāvya said when I married Devayānī that I was never to call Vṛṣaparvan's daughter [Śarmiṣṭhā] to my bed.

Śarmiṣṭhā said:

A lie spoken in jest does not hurt,
Nor a lie to women, or at marriage time,
Or on pain of life, or of all property --
These five lies are said to be no sins....

Yayāti said:

The king is the measure of all for his people. If he is proven to have lied, he is lost. Even if I come to the lowest fortune, I cannot afford to break my word.⁸

Śarmiṣṭhā said:

King, these two are held to be closely related, one's own husband and one's friend's. A friend's wedding is one's own, they say; I have chosen you, my friend's husband, for my husband.⁹

Yayāti said:

"The beggar is worthy of the gift"; that is the rule I have made my own. And now you are begging my favor -- tell me what I should do.

Śarmiṣṭhā said:

Save me from breaking the Law, king, and teach me the Law. If I have a child by you, I shall practice in this world the purest Law! "There are three who own no property, O king -- a wife, a slave, and a son: what they acquire belongs to him who owns them." I am Devayānī's slave, and Bhārgava's daughter [Devayānī]¹⁰ is your serf. She and I are equally your dependants, king -- pleasure me!

Vaiśampāyana said:

At these words of hers the king saw the truth of them. He paid honor to Śarmiṣṭhā and had his pleasure of her.... (1.77.14-24)

one. However, we will discover in later chapters that a new Upanisadic concept allows for non-brahmins to attain brahminical knowledge. This does not refute what I have claimed in chapter one, which is the dominant depiction in the Mahābhārata, it simply points out that there are various views depicted in the text.

⁷ Śarmiṣṭhā is asking the king to sleep with her during the most fertile time in her monthly cycle or what is here her "season". Her objective of conceiving a child with the king would be clear to him.

⁸ As these words of Yayāti imply and as this chapter will later argue, kings in the Epic are in some ways bound to dharma due to their relationship to the general population.

⁹ While Śarmiṣṭhā is the servant of Devayānī, they are good friends.

¹⁰ Devayānī is part of the Bhārgava line of brahmins which was started by Bhṛgu whom we met in chapter one.

The story demonstrates the ease with which the truth or law can be manipulated by someone skilled with words.¹¹ The “truth” Yayāti sees in Śarmiṣṭhā’s words is full of irony, what a lie, or a wife or the truth are is lost in their discussion of law. What this sequence also demonstrates is the king’s lack of grounding in what dharma actually is and his inability to debate, a sign of his inability with words. It is Yayāti’s incapacity independently to differentiate dharma from adharma that allows Śarmiṣṭhā to manipulate him by playing with various ideas of dharma. His understanding of right action is formed by others. He is simply a central cog in a large network of relationships that tell him what to do. It is Uśanas Kavya¹² who has told the king not to sleep with Śarmiṣṭhā. The next relationship that directs the king is one between himself and his people. It is the influence of his own people that prompts Yayāti to reject Śarmiṣṭhā’s argument that breaking one’s word at marriage is not a lie. Finally, the king defers his own decision making ability to Śarmiṣṭhā, “tell me what I should do.” Throughout Yayāti demonstrates a minimal level of independent decision making on dharma. He lacks an authoritative knowledge of dharma and relies on others to inform him. Śarmiṣṭhā easily refutes each of the king’s arguments. We shall see that such a weakness with words is a sign of a weak king; a king who is unable to manipulate words in a sophisticated manner is marked for defeat in the Mahābhārata.

¹¹ If we have not accepted Śarmiṣṭhā’s ability with words from her manipulation of Yayāti, we see it clearly when she tries to explain to Devayānī who the father of her child is: *Śarmiṣṭhā said*: A law-minded seer came by, who was a master of the *Veda*. He granted me a boon, and I asked him my wish that obeyed the Law. I did not fall to indecent lust, sweet-smiling friend. From that seer I got the child; I tell you the truth. *Devayānī said*: It would be well, my bashful friend, if you knew that twiceborn. I should like to know that twiceborn by name, family, and birth. *Śarmiṣṭhā said*: He blazed like the sun with power and heat! When I saw him I was not capable of interrogating him, sweet-smiling friend. *Devayānī said*: If all this is true, I bear you no grudge.... *Vaiśampāyana said*: So they talked together and laughed gaily at each other. Bhārgava’s daughter went home, having learned the literal truth. (1.78.3-10) Vaiśampāyana tells us that Devayānī has learnt the literal truth because of a word play Śarmiṣṭhā has used that does not come through in the translation. In the notes to his translation van Buitenen points this out to us: “78.1-5. *Seer ... Twiceborn*: wordplay: Devayānī takes the words in their usual sense of ‘brahmin,’ Śarmiṣṭhā in the literal sense of ‘seer’ (e.g., ‘royal seer’ = learned king)” (1973:452). Śarmiṣṭhā is a skilled manipulator of words and connected to her ability with words is her ability to manipulate Yayāti’s understanding of dharma.

¹² Uśanas Kavya is the brahmin father of Devayānī who is also called Śukra.

2.3 The Relationship between Kings and Brahmins

Given the obscure nature of dharma and the difficulty kings have in determining dharma, those who have a direct connection to truth are invaluable to a king who wishes to act out his title of dharma incarnate.¹³ One might question why a king in the Epic would care if he lived up to his title, yet a king's power was not absolute. Kings in the Mahābhārata do not monopolize power, but rely on "a web of intersecting relationships" (Heesterman 1985:113) which includes family members, brahmins and the popular support of his people to effectively rule. We have already seen such a web in the example of Yayāti. This king relied on a web of relationships to inform him of what dharma is; unfortunately without that web the king is helpless. As with Janamejaya in the previous chapter, Yayāti does not rule alone, but is the central piece in a large network of information, information that can be controlled by others in order to control the king.¹⁴ Kings are dependent on these relationships and the people involved in these relationships expect something back from the king. One of the things they expect, I think, is dharma.¹⁵ They expect a king to be truthful and lawful, and in return the people of a realm and the brahmins of a realm will tell the king what dharma is and legitimate his rule.

As I have already stated, due to their connection to truth, it is largely brahmins who decide when a king has acted according to dharma or adharma (Kane 1973 2:139). The brahminical ability in determining dharma can be seen if we contrast Utanka and Yayāti. Yayāti's situation should remind us of Utanka's in chapter one of this thesis. Utanka was faced with a similar situation when the women of Veda's household begged him to have sex with Veda's wife while she was in her season.

¹³ This dependence on brahmins is largely true for the whole Epic. The Mahābhārata presents two modes of brahminical and kingly relations. One presents both castes as mutually dependent (1.37.20-24) and the other presents brahmins as superior to kings (1.165.41-42 and 3.190.63-66). Both models clearly assert that kings need brahmins.

¹⁴ Not all kings could be controlled in this way. Yudhiṣṭhira is never manipulated verbally, his counsellors do not control him. As later chapters in this thesis will point out, the essential difference between Yudhiṣṭhira and kings like Janamejaya and Yayāti is his ability with words. Unlike Yayāti, Yudhiṣṭhira can debate, he is able to control information through his powers of speech and does not have information controlled by others. These points will become clearer in later chapters.

¹⁵ We have already seen that brahmins also expect material support in the form of *dāna* from kings in return for their support.

The women in Veda's household use the same basic argument with Utanka that Yayāti hears from Śarmiṣṭhā: it is lawful to sleep with a woman who begs you in her season. Yet, as we have already noted, Utanka quickly delivers an answer to Veda's household that the women instantly accept and no debate develops. The difference between Utanka and Yayāti is the brahmin's spiritual authority and ability with words. Yayāti lacks this authority and ability with speech allowing Śarmiṣṭhā to manipulate the situation. The brahminical hold on truth becomes a hold on kings especially when a brahmin is a king's counsellor. What a brahmin counsellor does for a king is to provide spiritual authority, a legitimisation of sorts, to the king's claim that he is lawful, that he is dharma's representative on earth.

The need of kings for brahminical legitimation is not just found in the Epic but is general to Indian kingship. J. C. Heesterman argues that South Asian kingship as an institution lacks its own source of authority and legitimacy (1985:112). As we have already seen, to be legitimate kingly power required the validation of the priesthood. Kings represented temporal power which, according to brahminical redactors, needed the spiritual authority of brahmins to sanction their rule (Heesterman 1985:141-142). A primary means for this sanctioning is brahminical judgements on royal morality.

As the Yayāti story continues it demonstrates the power brahmins had over kings as judges of their deeds. Over time Yayāti has three children with Śarmiṣṭhā and eventually Devayānī discovers her husband's secret affair. In a rage Devayānī leaves the king and returns to her father. She is followed by Yayāti, who proclaims that his actions were dharmic. The two present their case to Śukra, Devayānī's brahmin father:

Devayānī said:

Lawlessness has won over Law, the world is upside down! I have been overreached by Śarmiṣṭhā, the daughter of Vṛṣaparvan! This King Yayāti has fathered three sons on that ill-fated woman, and only two on me, I tell you, father! This king is reputed to know the Law, scion of the Bhṛgu! He has transgressed the limit, Kāvya, I tell you that!

Śukra said:

Great king, since you who know the Law have broken the Law for your pleasure, invincible decrepitude shall ravage you this instant!

Yayāti said:

Sir, she begged me for her season.... A man who refuses to lie by the Law with an available lusting woman who begs him in secret is called an aborticide by the wise. Those were the reasons I weighed, and it was for fear of breaking the Law that I lay with Śarmiṣṭhā.

Śukra said:

Should I not have been consulted? You are my dependent, king. Duplicity in matters of Law makes one a thief, Nāhuṣa!

Vaiśampāyana said:

So it befell that Usanas in anger cursed Yayāti Nāhuṣa. And he lost his previous youth and fell instantly to senility. (1.79.23-36)

All the characters in this scene assume that Śukra is to judge the case. His authority as the person who will decide the case is never questioned and his authority is based on his being a brahmin. Śukra also calls the king his dependent, a statement that I read as Yayāti being dependent on the authority of a brahmin in matters of dharma and counsel as well as because of the father-in-law and son-in-law relationship the two share. Śukra is angry because the king did not seek out a legitimate authority when dealing with Śarmiṣṭhā, and has had the audacity to try and tell a brahmin what is dharma and adharma. From Śukra's perspective, his authority cannot be questioned. The brahmin feels his verdict is clear and Yayāti has no choice but to submit. The story continues, but the point I wish to make is clear and echoed in numerous other Epic stories: in matters of dharma, kings are expected to submit to the counsel of brahmins and that brahminical power is ultimately higher than kingly power.

Even the Pāṇḍavas are not excluded from this dependence on brahmins. It is a Gandharva who tells the Pāṇḍavas that they must obtain a priest to win worldly success:

The Gandharva said:

.... Therefore, search for a brahmin whose spirit is directed to the Law, who knows both *Veda* and Law, a desirable brahmin of virtue, to serve as your priest. For he who, born a baron, wishes to conquer the earth must first take a priest, Pārtha, for the prospering of his kingship. A king aspiring to the conquest of the world must set a brahmin before him; therefore, let a brahmin of virtue be your priest. (1.164.9-14)

The brothers take the Gandharva's advice and select the brahmin Dhaumya as their priest after which we are told:

The Pāṇḍavas upon having put a brahmin ahead of themselves, now had high hopes of winning wealth, a kingdom, and the bridegroom choice of the daughter of the Pāñcālas. The bulls of the Bhāratas -- with their mother the sixth in their company -- deemed themselves well protected, now that they had been joined with a guru. For the noble-minded guru knew the facts of the sense of the *Veda*; and the Pārthas became the ritual patrons of the Law-wise, and all-wise brahmin. (1.174.7-11)

No king in the Mahābhārata, no matter how divine, can hope to rule without a brahmin. The kingly reliance on brahmins is a central fact of the Epic.

The primary means of brahminical judgements of kings in the Epic is through counsel. The value of counsel is stressed in both the Epic and Dharmaśāstras (Kane 1973 3:25). There are a number of moments in the Mahābhārata where a person stands before a king and describes how to be a good king. An important aspect in these lists is that a king must take counsel. A few examples will make the Epic's emphasis on counsel clear. Near the beginning of Book Two the Pāṇḍava brothers are instructed by "the exalted seer Nārada" (2.5.1) in the ways of kingship. Nārada tells the brothers: "[a]re your councillors like yourself -- pure in their thinking, capable of living, well-born and loyal, O hero? For the victory of kings, Bhārata, is rooted in their counsel, which is kept well hidden by ministers who are rich in advice and expert in the sciences" (2.5.16-18). The following words are placed in the mouth of "the bull-like ape Hanūmān" (3.149.17):

Yours, Kaunteya [Hanūmān is speaking to Bhīma], is the baron's Law: protection by the Law. Attend to your own Law, restrained in conduct and passions. He who is well established after having consulted with the elders, the strict, the wise, and the learned rules with the staff.... All policies are rooted in counsel, and so are the spies, bull of the Bharatas; well-counselled policies lead to success, and one should consult with those who know how to counsel. (3.149.38, 44-45)

Ideally, a king's counsellors were to come from a variety of castes (Heesterman 1985:114), but in the Epic it is primarily brahmins and near relatives who give counsel to kings and judge their actions.

2.4 Brahminical Judgement of Kings

A logical conclusion should follow from the discussion I have presented so far: if kings are supposed to be dharmic and truthful but have no inherent connection to either, then it falls to brahmins, as a king's counsel, to tell kings about dharma and to remind kings of their duty to be truthful. Indeed, it appears to be a general assumption in the Dharmaśāstras that a brahmin counsellor would decide issues of dharma and correct a king when necessary (Biardeau 1981:76). Yet, as we have seen, the brahminical connection to truth is far beyond any other caste's connection to this cosmic principle, and the brahminical connection to this truth invariably colours the advice they give to kings.

An essential difference we shall see between brahmins and kings is their differing understanding of how context affects certain aspects of dharma. We have seen that determining dharma is difficult

because the law is fluid; the law changes with changing contexts. Brahmins are proponents of the law as fluid, but there are some laws which brahmins regard as higher laws which are not context sensitive. An element of this concept is illustrated by *sadharanadharmas*, which refers to laws common to all castes. These laws are thought of as binding to all castes in all situations. They are also closely associated with brahmanical virtues especially the *sadharanadharmas* of truth speech¹⁶ and nonviolence. The fluidity of certain parts of dharma and the constancy of other parts of dharma is not contradictory if we appreciate the brahminical logic that lies behind it. *Kavis* have “seen” and “experienced” the cosmos and present dharma as a mirror of that cosmos. Thus, the order and hierarchy of the cosmos are mirrored in the caste system. Maintaining this order requires various laws for each group and differing laws in differing contexts. Thus, this fluidity of law is designed to help maintain the sense of *ṛta* brahmins have detected at the heart of the cosmos. Likewise, *satya* is at the heart of the cosmos, but it implies no hierarchies or systems in the way *ṛta* does; it is simply its own inviolable self. The truth’s cosmic nature is reflected in its dharmic nature. It is not context sensitive, but, from a brahminical perspective, truth should lie at the heart of all action and speech. Thus, being truthful is depicted as a general law for all castes in all situations. Kings, however, simply do not grasp these subtleties. They do not have the benefit of having “experienced” these cosmic forces. What most kings only seem to be able to appreciate is the fluidity of dharma. Truth, for kings, shifts with context; it is relative and subject to a king’s personal interests and not universal forces. Part of what this thesis will demonstrate are the claims that I have made in this paragraph and the constant conflicts that arise between brahmins and kings concerning the truth.

The result of brahminical closeness to the truth in the Epic is the tendency of brahmins to judge and counsel kings on the standards of ultimate truth and dharma as opposed to giving counsel that would result in material benefit, or other worldly concerns. Brahmins expect and at times demand kings to live by higher ideals especially the *rāja dharma* of truth.

¹⁶ While truth speech is a general law for all of society, it receives special attention with regards to brahmins and kings.

An example comes from the Book One chapter “Śakuntalā”. In this chapter King Duḥṣanta has seduced the brahmin woman Śakuntalā and she has forced him to promise that their child will be king (1.67.1-22). A son is born to Śakuntalā and she leaves her hermitage to present Duḥṣanta with their son. When Śakuntalā sees the king she reminds him of his promise and demands that he consecrate the child, but “[w]hen the king heard these words of hers, he remembered very well, yet he said, ‘I do not remember’” (1.68.17). The king refuses to accept the child and denies any relationship with her. The king is clearly lying and demonstrates no allegiance to the raja dharma law of truth speech. Seized with anger Śakuntalā reminds the king of this law and demands that he follow it:

The lesson I shall teach you is the truth, impeccable prince, to instruct you, not to spite you, so listen and forbear.... Tiger among kings, do not forsake your son, as you protect yourself; your word, and your Law, O lord of the earth. Do not stoop to deceit, lion among kings.... A thousand Horse Sacrifices and truth were held in a balance, and truth outweighed all thousand.... There is no Law higher than truth, nothing excels truth; and no evil is bitterer on earth than a lie. Truth, O king, is the supreme Brahman, truth is the sovereign covenant. Do not forsake your covenant, king, the truth shall be your alliance. (1.69.5-25)

Śakuntalā validates her words by demonstrating her knowledge of brahminical lore and texts. She is able to cite from scripture: “Manu cites six kinds of sons -- the one begotten on one’s wife; and these five: obtained as gift, bought, reared, adopted, and begotten on other women” (1.69.17-18). She also demonstrates a Upaniṣadic-like learning in explaining *ātman* to the king: “[y]ou think you are alone with yourself, but don’t you know the ancient seer who dwells in your heart? Him who knows your evil deeds? It is before him that you speak your lie” (1.68.26-27). Her emphasis on truth speech is backed by her special brahminical knowledge. Her argument does not affect Duḥṣanta who continues to reject her until she leaves. As Śakuntalā is leaving, however, a heavenly voice confirms her story and the king admits the child is his. This story demonstrates the brahminical tendency to demand that kings submit to the law of truth. She speaks of Brahman and truth’s connection to these eternal cosmic forces. Speaking the truth for Śakuntalā is something her brahminical background insists upon, and when she comes across a king who does not follow the same law she does her utmost to correct him.

King Duḥṣanta's perception of the truth and his commitment to it are radically different from Śakuntalā's. Once the truth of Śakuntalā's words have been established Duḥṣanta claims he lied because without external confirmation the people would not have accepted the child: "if I had taken him as my son on her word alone, suspicion would have been rife among the people and he would never have been cleared of it" (1.69.37). While the truth ultimately wins out, a strict adherence to truth is not in the king's best interests even when a brahmin insists upon it. Duḥṣanta has weighed speaking the truth and lying and decides that lying best suits his needs in this context. The king clearly has a different understanding of truth speech than Śakuntalā even though it is part of his rāja dharma.

What we have seen is that brahmins and kings have different commitments to the truth. While speaking the truth is part of rāja dharma, it is largely up to brahmins to ensure that kings live out this law. Thus, brahmins play a significant role in creating a king's moral reputation. It is also clear that brahmins have a special connection to truth speech and favour it over some of the more practical aspects of kingship that Duḥṣanta demonstrates.¹⁷

The conflict speaking the truth causes for kings can also be found in the pivotal chapter in Book Two, "The Dicing". It is in "The Dicing" that Yudhiṣṭhira gambles away everything he possess including his brothers, himself and finally Draupadī. The dice game takes place in a special hall Dhṛtarāṣṭra has built and it is full of other kings. Once Draupadī has been won, in a very abusive way she is dragged into the hall where the queen claims she has not truly been won by the Kurus. She

¹⁷ It may seem odd that I have chosen a woman as a spokes person for brahmins. Such a choice may seem unbrahminical. Certain aspects of the story do question the legitimacy of her speech, especially King Duḥṣanta: "I do not know that this is my son you have born, Śakuntalā. Women are liars -- who will trust your word?... Everything you say is obscure to me, ascetic. I do not know you" (1.68.73-80). The idea that women are liars is shared by the *Dharmaśāstra* writers and may have been a general assumption in Brahmanism and Hinduism (Kane 1973 3:108-109). Yet, this story about Śakuntalā and a number of other female characters (Damayāntī and Kuntī) in the Epic question the assumption that women are liars. Śakuntalā clearly demonstrates that she is truthful and the cosmos backs her truth: "[h]aving said all this to the king, Śakuntalā departed. Then, a disembodied voice spoke from the sky to Duḥṣanta.... You have planted this child. Śakuntalā has spoken the truth.... Paurava, keep this great-spirited scion of Duḥṣanta and Śakuntalā; for he is yours to keep, and so is our behest" (1.69.28-34). Śakuntalā is without question a speaker of truth and Duḥṣanta's charge that women are liars is discredited. It appears from this story that Śakuntalā's gender does not negatively affect her ability with speech or her status as a knowledgeable brahmin.

argues that Yudhiṣṭhira could not have wagered her because he had already wagered and lost himself -- he was not his own person at that point, so how could he have wagered anything. She also claims that the dice match is unfair: Yudhiṣṭhira is not used to playing and is unaware of the trickery involved in the game. She ends her argument by demanding that the kings decide if she has truly been lost to the Kurus (2.60.24-45). Yet, most of the kings, the supposed upholders of dharma on earth, remain silent or like Bhīṣma claim the question of dharma she presents is too subtle for them to answer: “[a]s the Law is subtle, my dear, I fail/ To resolve your riddle the proper way” (2.60.40). The kings remain silent, not because they claim to lack an opinion as Bhīṣma does; they grasp that a wrong has been done, but if they speak they are obliged as protectors of dharma to defend Draupadī. In silence they hope to find the best of both worlds -- they are not forced to defend Draupadī, which would anger their powerful host Duryodhana, and they are not forced to agree to the adharmic treatment of Draupadī.

That the kings in the hall do fear Duryodhana is clear:

Upon witnessing all those many events
 And Draupadī screeching, a winged osprey,
 The kings said nought, neither good nor bad,
 For they feared for Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s son.
 And seeing the sons and grandsons of kings
 Keep silent, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra
 Began to smile.... (2.62.22-23)

Duryodhana interprets the silence as agreement that Draupadī is won (2.61.25) and continues to abuse her. It is clear that speaking the truth here (or saying anything) is against the kings’ interests. Duryodhana has effectively defeated the most powerful family in the hall. The other kings cannot oppose him, and they do the pragmatic thing given the context -- they side with Duryodhana in such a way as not to be directly involved in the adharmic surrounding Draupadī’s treatment. There is some concern for dharma on the part of the kings, but it is a pragmatic concern to save themselves that motivates their actions in this context, not an obligation to the truth.

Vidura, however, will not accept inaction from the kings, even if that inaction is the wise thing to do in practical terms. Vidura is an interesting example of a royal persona who obeys higher laws and

maintains his truth. Vidura is a brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and thus belongs to the royal family. He is not, however, a kṣatriya because his father is a brahmin and his mother a sudra -- Vidura is a kṣattar. Yet, even as a kṣattar, he is considered one of the wisest characters in the Epic and is also considered an incarnation of Dharma (Biardeau 1981:94). Vidura's closeness to the truth and his ability to understand dharma make him a primary counsellor in the Kuru court and his influence on both warring families is significant. The dharma Vidura preaches, however, is that of the renunciate, closer to brahminical dharma than kṣatriya dharma (Biardeau 1981:94). Vidura understands that kings and brahmins are not the same and live by different rules, but in critical situations he acts like a brahmin and instructs kings to be truthful, not because the truth will be of benefit to the king, but because the truth is a higher principle to which a king's own interests must give way. He is a clear example of someone in the royal circle who lives by truth, and he will show us how this form of dharma conflicts with a king's interests.

In the dicing hall Vidura attempts to prompt the kings towards action by stating that Draupadī's question must be answered or "the Law will be offended" and she must be appeased "with true Law" (2.61.53, 55). Vidura demands that the kings keep their rāja dharma law of truth speech. The brahmin-like Vidura continues by giving the story of "Prahāda and the Hermit, Angira's son." In this story King Prahāda's son Virocana and the Hermit Angira's son Sudhanvan both desire the same girl and argue over who is the better man. Ultimately, they bet their lives on the issue and present the question to Prahāda. Prahāda does not immediately respond, implying that he knows his son is the inferior of the two and must decide between lying, telling the truth or simply not answering. Sudhanvan senses what the king's indecision implies and warns him: "[i]f you speak falsely, Prahāda, or if you fail to speak, the Thunderbolt-wielder shall blow your head to a hundred pieces with his bolt!" (2.61.63). Prahāda goes to the brahmin Kāśyapa to find out the consequences of silence and lying when questioned. Kāśyapa responds:

"He who knows the answer but either from love, anger, or fear fails to resolve the question lets loose on himself a thousand of Varuṇa's nooses; and for every noose to be loosened takes a year. Therefore say the truth straightaway, if you know the truth! Where a Law comes to the hall pierced by Unlaw and they do not pull out the thorn, there it will pierce the men in the hall. The leader takes half, the

culprit has a quarter, and the last quarter goes to those in the hall who do not condemn the culprit.... A witness who speaks the truth is not hurt in his Law or his Profit.” (2.61.65-75)

Kaśyapa’s speech causes Prahlaḍa to tell the truth that Sudhanvan is better than Virocana, and Sudhanvan rewards the king’s allegiance to the truth by freeing Virocana. Vidura ends his speech with: “[t]hus you have heard the ultimate Law, ye all who are sitting in the hall. Now ponder what should be done in response to Kṛṣṇa’s question” (2.61.80). Again, we see truth as the ultimate law, something so powerful that not following it results in spiritual harm. Vidura wants the kings to be bound to the truth, but as chapter one of my thesis demonstrates, it is brahmins who are imbued with the truth. Kings view the truth as only one of several options and do not recognize the brahminical universality of truth and act out of self interest. Vidura is not wrong in demanding the truth from the kings, truth speech is part of raja dharma, but what the silence of the kings indicates is that kings are morally flawed. Kings are expected to be truthful, but from their own perspective they only keep that law when it is in their best interests to do so.

The most important element of the story for us is the brahminical understanding that kings are subject to the truth even though kings tend not to keep the truth. The inevitable dharmic conflicts pervade the Epic as kings try to balance earthly success with the higher law of truth under the watchful eye of brahmins and characters like Vidura. Due to the need kings have of brahmins to legitimate their rule, a king cannot ignore dharma, especially that element of their own dharma that is shared by brahmins: speaking the truth.

There are consequences for the adharma that occurs in the dicing hall. Kings are still expected to be dharmic. As we will see in the next chapter, Heesterman’s idea that kings need legitimation from brahmins and my idea that in return for legitimation brahmins expect a dharmic rule imply that Duryodhana will pay for his adharma by seeing a removal of brahminical support for his rule. That this brahminical support can have real material effects on kings will become clear in the next chapter where we will explore the consequences of Duryodhana’s apparent allegiance to adharma and Yudhiṣṭhira’s apparent allegiance to dharma. We will see that the allegiance of brahmins to one king over another is a sign of true power.

2.5 The King's Relation to the Populace

Another reason for a king to be dharmic in the Epic is to appease another group that is part of the king's web of relations and that is the general population. In the Epic the general populace do not appear much, but we should not take that as a sign that they were not considered to be important to a king or to the plot of the Epic itself. For instance, one way of reading the build up to the crucial dicing match is to recognize that the citizens of the realm instigate the entire process. This process and the importance of the web of relations between king and people are made clear in the chapter called "The Fire in the Lacquer House" in Book One:

The citizens observed how Pāṇḍu's sons prospered with virtues, and as they met in squares and at assemblies spoke of them: "The lord of the people Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who has but the eyesight of wisdom, did not inherit the kingdom at the time because he was blind -- then how can he be king now? Likewise, Bhīṣma Śāmtanava, of great vows and true to his promise, once declined the kingdom and he will never take it now. Then it is now up to ourselves properly to anoint the eldest Pāṇḍava, who, young as he is, has the conduct of the old -- he is a truthful man who knows the value of compassion. For he, as he knows the Laws, will surely honor Bhīṣma Śāmtanava and Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons, and provide them with various privileges." Evil-minded Duryodhana heard the citizens, who were loyal to Yudhiṣṭhira, speak such words, and they burned him. The ill-spirited prince, burning, could not forgive such talk and, consumed with envy, approached Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Finding his father alone, he paid homage and, burned by the preferences of the townspeople, he then spoke as follows: "I hear the townfolk babble in ominous ways, father. Disregarding yourself and Bhīṣma, they want the Pāṇḍava for their king...." (1.129.5-15)

This quote shows us an aspect of speech we have yet to see and that is the influence of rumour. It is speech in the form of rumour that motivates Duryodhana to begin the sequence of events that culminates in the dicing match and ultimately in war. The factors that draw the people to Yudhiṣṭhira are his truthfulness, knowledge of law and compassion. As this thesis continues we will begin to question Yudhiṣṭhira's allegiance to the truth, law and compassion, but an important element of this passage is not what Yudhiṣṭhira actually is, but what the people believe him to be. It is Yudhiṣṭhira's reputation as King Dharma that motivate the people to hand the kingdom over to him. Being dharmic or maintaining the appearance of being dharmic has a tangible value for a king.

We should also recognize that the elements the people praise in Yudhiṣṭhira are more brahminical than kṣatriya. It is not the king's strength or ability with arms that the people cherish, but the same brahminical ideals that we find brahmin counsellors encouraging kings to follow. These

brahminical and public judgements do affect kings. They are pushed toward fulfilling their title as the upholders of dharma by these groups and if they fail to do so disaster lurks in their future, a point the next chapter will make.

In this chapter we have discovered a number of things about kings and their relationship to truth and brahmins. We have noted that a part of rāja dharma is truth speech and an adherence to dharma. We have also noted that these moral values do not fit well with other kṣatriya and kingly virtues which tend to be associated with adharma. Brahmins more fully represent these moral ideals a king is supposed to live by and defend. Thus, kings must seek out a relationship with brahmins as counsellors to legitimate their rule and instruct them on dharma and truth. We have also seen that brahmins tend to judge kings on the basis of keeping the truth, which for brahmins is more than a law written in the Dharmaśāstras, and has the stature of a cosmic force. We have also seen that kings do not have the same understanding and commitment to truth and dharma as brahmins. In giving up the truth and dharma, however, a king risks giving up his legitimation. We shall see the consequences of this in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: The Making of a Dharmic King

In this chapter we will turn our attention away from some of the general ideas in the Epic and begin to focus in on the specifics of the Pāṇḍava Kaurava war and Yudhiṣṭhira's role in these events. This chapter will explore Yudhiṣṭhira from the beginning of his forest exile to the end of it. The main goal in this chapter is to demonstrate Yudhiṣṭhira's deceitfulness and the way he manipulates events and stories to make himself appear dharmic. We have already noted that it is very hard for kings to be dharmic, but Yudhiṣṭhira has added support in this chapter to make himself appear dharmic and that is the support of our narrator who colours events to promote Yudhiṣṭhira and his cause. We will have to work against the editorializing of Vaiśampāyana to discover a different reading of Yudhiṣṭhira in this chapter.

It is not my intent in this section to argue that Yudhiṣṭhira only acts in an immoral manner. Like most of the characters in the Epic, Yudhiṣṭhira is neither all good nor all bad, but acts morally in certain situations and immorally in others. I think that Yudhiṣṭhira's immoral actions increase dramatically when he is faced with a crisis such as being in exile or when his troops are losing the war. As we shall see through this chapter and the one to follow, most scholars recognize Yudhiṣṭhira's immorality on the battlefield, but see it as irregular, something atypical for this moral champion. What I am trying to prove is not that Yudhiṣṭhira is evil incarnate, but that the explicit immorality we see on the battlefield is not atypical of Yudhiṣṭhira when he is faced with a crisis. His immorality has a history, but it is not something that he or the narrator explicitly deal with before the battlefield. While I will argue strongly that Yudhiṣṭhira's title as King Dharma should be questioned and an alternate reading of that character can be explored, I do not wish to promote the idea that Yudhiṣṭhira never acts morally. Ultimately, what I hope my thesis will demonstrate is that Yudhiṣṭhira's character is much more complex than the stereotypical picture of a completely good character with a brief, but forgiveable, moment of deceit while in battle.

The chapter is split into four sections. The first section reviews some scholarly work on the Mahābhārata in order to demonstrate that our narrator and text redactors had agendas in shaping the text in the way they did, but that alternative readings of the text are possible. It is an alternative reading of Yudhiṣṭhira in the forest that we will be exploring. The second section explores how the Pāṇḍavas appear to have convinced the general public that Yudhiṣṭhira is dharmic and was cheated at the dicing game even though such claims are not substantiated by the actual episode in the text. The third section explores the same theme as section two, but with regards to brahmins. This section will develop ideas that came up in chapter two. The final section will explore how Yudhiṣṭhira creates a brahminical guise for himself in the forest and points to the deceit of Yudhiṣṭhira in doing so and in his actions immediately following the exile.

3.1 The Effect of Brahminical Redaction

It is worth our while to raise the question of how the Epic was put together and how brahminical redaction may have influenced the text. It has been claimed by many early western scholars of the Epic that it originally had a core story to which was added material to form the full Epic we have today (Hopkins 1901).¹ It was assumed by these scholars that this core story was a warrior's song praising the physical exploits of the Pāṇḍavas. The idea of a core in the Epic is strongly supported by the work of Mary Carroll Smith. She argues that a Vedic core in the Epic is found where *triṣṭubh* poetic meter (four lines with eleven syllables each) is used. She demonstrates that *triṣṭubh* meter was standard for Vedic poets, but by the historical period when the Mahābhārata is being redacted *triṣṭubh* meter was replaced by *ślokas* (four lines of eight syllables each) as the dominant verse form (Smith 1992:13-18).² Smith argues that those verses in *triṣṭubh* meter which survived the redaction are a direct link to the oldest parts of the Epic. Smith's argument is strengthened by the coherent story these *triṣṭubh* verses present. As a group, these verses present a warrior text about the dynastic

¹ I speak of one Epic for the sake of convenience. There are many versions of the Epic, but this thesis is primarily based on van Buitenen's translation of the BORI critical edition of the Epic. I have also consulted P. C. Roy's translation of The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa.

² Of the Poona edition's 74 900 verses 94% are in *ślokas* and 6% (4500 verses) are mainly in *triṣṭubh* (Smith 1992:16).

struggle between the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, a struggle which is largely devoted to ethical concerns: “[t]he essential and prevailing motif to be gathered from the Framework, and then throughout the tristubh epic, is the preservation of the Dharma” (Smith 1992:30). Primary, the core Epic is concerned with issues of conflicting dharma which are resolved in the *tristubh* verses of the Bhagavadgītā (Smith 1992:7). Largely absent from the *tristubh* meter sections are references to brahmins, a situation that is remarkably reversed once the text has been redacted by brahmins and presented largely in *śloka* verses (Smith 1992:13, 54). There is much more to Smith’s argument, but what concerns us here is the significant brahminical changes to the Epic which she postulates. In Smith’s understanding, brahminical redactors changed the Epic from a warrior’s song to a heavily brahminized tale.

What I think this brahminical redaction should suggest to us is that our redactors and narrators may have various agendas. Robert Goldman has demonstrated that one of these brahminical redactors may have been the Bhṛgu (1977:2). The Bhṛgu wove their own Bhārgava legends into the structure of the Epic. Goldman argues that we can see a mythic representation of the shift from warrior tale to the current brahminized Epic in the story of the Bhṛgu Rāma who, in killing the warrior class, personifies this shift: “[t]hrough Rāma’s mythical extermination of the warrior class, the Bhārgavas have proclaimed themselves the masters of the epic” (1992:140). We do not have to accept all of Goldman’s argument, but he does demonstrate that the Bhṛgu tales continuously assert the superiority of brahmins over kings (1992:105, 139). These Bhṛgu redactors had a clear agenda of presenting themselves as superior to kṣatriyas.

What this manipulation of the Epic means for us is we must closely read the stories in the text with an eye for differing voices. The Epic was collected over centuries, which has allowed for a number of different ideas and opinions about various characters and themes to remain in the text. The dominant views expressed by the narrator and main characters may not be consistent throughout the text and we may find other perspectives. These various voices remain in the text and, as Alf Hiltebeitel suggests, we must take the Mahābhārata’s multivalent nature into account when we

examine it (1976:18-19). What our redactors have tried to do is cover some of these differing voices with statements by characters, including the narrator. A good example of scholarship that successfully uncovers the unreliability of the narrator and redactors is David Shulman's "Devana and Daiva". In this article Shulman argues that the Pāṇḍava brothers and at times Kṛṣṇa legitimate revenging the Kurus on the basis that Yudhiṣṭhira was cheated by Śakuni in the dicing match (1992:350). The idea that deceit was used in the game was steadily adopted by writers until it became the dominant view by the time of the medieval versions of the Epic (Shulman 1992:350-351). Shulman argues that there was no cheating in the match and alerts us to the role *daiva* (fate) and Śakuni's skill play in deciding the outcome of the match (1992:352-358). He argues that the Mahābhārata's original concept of dicing did not allow for cheating, but that this view was distorted over time. It was a later version of dicing that allowed for cheating and led to the promotion of the idea that Yudhiṣṭhira was cheated (Shulman 1992:352). Shulman successfully demonstrates that the Pāṇḍavas claim that they were cheated is not supported by the text and cautions us: "[w]e need not simply adopt the Pāṇḍavas' own reading of their history" (1992:350). What we need to remember is that it is not the Pāṇḍavas' reading that we are presented with, but our redactors' reading. The notion of cheating in the game is a construction of the Pāṇḍava characters in the Epic. After the dicing chapters the Pāṇḍava reading of the event is adopted by Vaiśampāyana as he and various other characters promote and justify the Pāṇḍava cause. Again, the point we must take from Shulman's article is to be suspicious of what we read. Vaiśampāyana, the Pāṇḍavas and other characters will relate events to us to further their own agendas, but what they relate may not be supported by the actual events in the Mahābhārata.

I think another good example of this type of scholarship is David Gitomer's article "King Duryodhana: The *Mahābhārata* Discourse of Sinning and Virtue in Epic and Drama". In this article Gitomer argues that the apparent evil of Duryodhana is actually legitimate warrior dharma that wins him a hero's place in heaven after he is killed by Bhīma (1992:228). The chief sin of Duryodhana is the violation of Draupadī; "[t]he Pāṇḍavas themselves, however, are also authors of vicious misdeeds, largely tricks committed in battle through the urgings of their cousin, the warrior-hero Krishna. This

is, strikingly, a kind of evil less frequently practised by Duryodhana and his allies” (Gitomer 1992:224). What makes Duryodhana evil, according to Gitomer, is not adharma, of which the Pāṇḍavas are also guilty, but his opposition to Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva. Duryodhana refuses to recognize Kṛṣṇa’s divinity. Both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurus are guilty of sin, but what makes Duryodhana evil and Yudhiṣṭhira good is the judgement of medieval Vaiṣṇava editors (Gitomer 1992:224). Again, the agenda of the redactors has strongly affected the Epic, but we can still find elements in the story that point to alternative readings of the text.

That our narrator sides with the Pāṇḍavas is clear from the text. We constantly hear from the narrator and other characters of the goodness of the Pāṇḍavas especially Yudhiṣṭhira, and the evil of Duryodhana. We find instances of Yudhiṣṭhira proclaiming his own good: “My voice does not tell a lie, nor does my mind dwell on lawlessness” (1.188.12). We find other characters proclaiming the good of Yudhiṣṭhira: “*Kuntī* said: ‘It is as the law-obeying Yudhiṣṭhira says’” (1.88.21) and “‘He shall of a certainty be the greatest of the upholders of the Law, Pāṇḍu’s firstborn son, who shall be named Yudhiṣṭhira. He shall be a celebrated king, widely renowned in all three worlds, glorious, lustrous, and moral’” (1.114.5). And, we also find the voice of Vaiśampāyana: “[o]n obtaining the kingdom, the lustrous and truthful Yudhiṣṭhira reigned over the country with his brothers according to the Law. Their enemies defeated, and ever-devoted to truth and Law, the sagacious scions of Pāṇḍu lived there in happiness sublime” (1.200.5). Not all of this praise is untrue, but, as we shall see, many of Yudhiṣṭhira’s actions are far from truthful and cause us to question his status as “greatest of the upholders of the Law”. We should not blindly accept these words of Yudhiṣṭhira, his allies and the narrator, we must check them against his actions in the Epic. It is not what we are told about people, but what these people actually do that will determine the “truth” of people in the Mahābhārata.

Unlike his depiction of Yudhiṣṭhira, Vaiśampāyana constantly depicts Duryodhana as evil:

[w]hen he [Duryodhana] had got to know Bhīma’s well-publicized strength, the high and mighty Duryodhana revealed his evil nature. Out of folly and ambition an ugly thought occurred to Duryodhana, who was loath of Law and looking for evil: ‘This Wolf-Belly, strong among the strong, the middle son of Pāṇḍu by Kuntī, must be brought down by trickery’ (1.119.25-27).

In this quote, Duryodhana is accused of ambition, but it is nothing more than the same ambition to rule that drives Yudhiṣṭhira to the horror that is the war in the Epic. Duryodhana also appears to show his evil in his decision to use trickery against Bhīma. Eventually, however, Bhīma will kill Duryodhana by breaking his thighs, a violation of battle code that Kṛṣṇa urges him to do. It is against kṣatriya dharma to hit below the belt; such an act is regarded as dishonourable. As Gitomer points out (1992:224), what makes Duryodhana's trickery evil and Bhīma's trickery acceptable is Kṛṣṇa's support of Bhīma. But, for those who do not acknowledge Kṛṣṇa's divinity the act remains adharmic, a point made by Duryodhana as he dies:

I saw you [Kṛṣṇa] instigated Bhīma to aim his blow at my thigh. Do you think I did not see you making as though casually talking to Arjuna pointing at your thigh but really indicating to Bhīma that he should strike me on the thighs disregarding the laws of single combat. (Rukmani 1989:21)

The judgement that Duryodhana is evil is simply a subjective judgement made by our redactors, who impose their own reading of the text on us through Vaiśampāyana and other characters. It is wisest, I think, not to accept Vaiśampāyana's assumed authority that the title narrator carries. We must approach him as though he were another character in the Epic, part of the fiction of the text and an ally of the Pāṇḍavas. We must now re-enter the Mahābhārata with a suspicion that what we are told about characters in the Epic and what they say about themselves may not be the entire picture.

3.2 Forming Opinion: The General Population

The Aranyakaparvan opens with the Pāṇḍavas leaving Indraprastha for the forest. As they leave we see a clear sign that the citizens of the realm will not support the apparently adharmic

Duryodhana and wish to remain with the apparently dharmic Pāṇḍavas:

Upon learning that they [the Pāṇḍavas] were leaving, the townspeople, smarting with grief, reviled Bhīṣma, Vidura, Droṇa and Gautama [Kṛpa] many times, and without fear they banded together and said to one another, "This dynasty is not secure, nor are we, nor are our houses, if the evil Duryodhana, abetted by Saubala [Sakuni], Karṇa, and Duṣṣāsana, aspires to the kingdom! If there be no dynasty, no morality, no Law, how can there be happiness, with that ruffian, abetted by ruffians, pretending to the kingdom? Duryodhana hates his betters, he abandons both morality and his kinsmen, he is greedy and arrogant, mean and by nature cruel. This earth is not whole as long as Duryodhana is king! We all better go where the Pāṇḍavas are going. They are compassionate, of great spirit, masters of their senses as well as their enemies, modest and famous, and bent upon the practice of the Law." So they spoke, and all together they followed after the Pāṇḍavas. (3.1.11-16)

The people go to Yudhiṣṭhira and beg him to allow them to go with him. They tell King Dharma that they must go with him because associating with the evil Duryodhana will make them evil and associating with the good Pāṇḍavas will make them good (3.1.25-30). The people's concern that Duryodhana's adharma will lead to adharma in themselves holds with traditional South Asian views on kingship. It is generally understood in ancient South Asia that a king is the maker of his age, that is, an evil king brought about an evil age (Kane 1973 3:3). We have already seen that the people of the realm regard Yudhiṣṭhira as their king because of his allegiance to the truth, and now we can see a rejection of Duryodhana due to his untruth.

The untruth the people seem to be aware of comes from the dicing match: “[w]e [the people] have heard that you [the Pāṇḍavas] have been defeated by pitiless enemies in a lawless way” (3.1.19). Yet, what is clear from this quote is that these people did not witness the apparent adharma of Duryodhana -- they have only heard about the events. We have already seen that the issue of cheating in the dice game is largely a construct of the Pāṇḍavas' narrative of their own history and our pro-Pāṇḍava narrator. There is no evidence in the story of the dicing itself that the Pāṇḍavas are “defeated... in a lawless way”. The kingdom was won fairly; the only adharma is directed towards Draupadī, something these people do not directly cite.

Yet, the people have heard otherwise. Our awareness of our narrator's unreliability and his bias favouring the Pāṇḍavas, should make us aware that he is already building a case for the illegality of the dicing match and the justification for revenge. However, we must also question how the people heard of these events. Whoever narrated these events to the people clearly coloured them in such a way as to make Duryodhana adharmic and Yudhiṣṭhira dharmic. I think the colouring of the event discounts the possibility that the source of this information is a supporter of Duryodhana or that our silent kings have suddenly found their tongues. Clearly, it is supporters of the Pāṇḍavas and perhaps the Pāṇḍavas themselves who begin this rumour, which ends in Yudhiṣṭhira maintaining the popular support of the people and his title of “King Dharma” (3.1.37).

Yet, Yudhiṣṭhira's actions do not support his title because he has failed in his prime duty as a king: protection. Once Yudhiṣṭhira has lost everything in the dicing match and Draupadī has been humiliated, he and his family are saved by Dhṛtarāṣṭra who gives Draupadī a series of boons that free her and her husbands (2.63.26-37). But, a second challenge to dice comes from Dhṛtarāṣṭra which Yudhiṣṭhira accepts (2.67.1-5). Yudhiṣṭhira seems well aware that he will lose, but cites fate and an obedience to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's word in deciding to gamble again: "[i]t is at the disposing of the Placer [fate] 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" (2.67.3-4). That Yudhiṣṭhira's subjects will be ruled by an adharmic king is his own fault, because he failed to protect them by refusing the second request to gamble. Throughout the Second Book Yudhiṣṭhira has told us that he has made an oath not to refuse a challenge and thus he must gamble (2.52.16). Kingly vows are a serious issue for kings and they are bound to keep them (Matilal 1989:8-9), but his vow appears to be one he has made to himself. In accepting the challenge to dice in a game he cannot win, he has demonstrated concern only for his own appearance as a promise-keeper and in doing so turns his back on his primary duty as a king: protecting his realm (Kane 1973 3:56).

Perhaps, what is worse is Yudhiṣṭhira's failure to protect Draupadī as she is molested before his silent gaze:

Duḥśāsana, stroking her, lead her and brought her,
That Kṛṣṇa of deep black hair, to the hall,
As though unprotected amidst her protectors,
And tossed her as wind tosses a plantain tree....

Prince Duryodhana said to Yudhiṣṭhira, who was sitting silent and mindless, "Bhīma and Arjuna and the twins follow your orders, king. Answer the question, whether you think she has been won!" This he said to the Kaunteya, and crazed by his ascendancy, he took his cloth and looked invitingly at Pāñcālī [Draupadī]. Then, smiling up at Rādheya, and taunting Bhīma, he exposed to Draupadī who was watching him his left thigh.... (2.60.24, 2.63.9-12)

Yudhiṣṭhira does not respond even though he is Draupadī's protector and as a ksatriya he is obliged to do battle here (Kane 1973 3:57). Yudhiṣṭhira has failed to protect his realm, family and possessions and has lost them all without even challenging Duryodhana to a fight. The only dharma the king has kept is his vow not to refuse a challenge. Yet, in Duryodhana's abuse of Draupadī there is an implicit

challenge to fight: “[t]hen, smiling up at Rādheya, and taunting Bhīma, he exposed to Draupadī who was watching him his left thigh”. There is nothing in Yudhiṣṭhira’s actions or lack of them in the dicing match that legitimates his title of King Dharma, and yet the people consider him as their dharmic king and are prepared to leave their homes for him. All of this shows the power of rumour and the Pāṇḍavas’ ability to use words to change their own history. We shall see confirmation that the Pāṇḍavas are spreading a story about the dicing hall and that there are other versions of this story as the chapter proceeds. Yudhiṣṭhira seems to be aware that what is important is what people think he is, and not what he actually does.

3.3 Forming Opinion: The Brahmins

Yudhiṣṭhira does not allow these people to follow him, citing the protection of his family still in Hastināpura: “Bhīṣma the grandfather, the king, Vidura, and my mother, as well as my friends in general, live here in the City of the Elephant. If you have our well-being at heart, you must, all of you, protect them with your best effort.... You have come far, pray return now; we swear that we shall meet again” (3.1.33-35). The people return to the city at Yudhiṣṭhira’s request, but one group stays with the Pāṇḍavas -- the brahmins:

Some brahmins had followed them that far out of love for them, some with their fires, others without, in the company of pupils and kinsmen; the king shone bright in the midst of these priests, who held forth on the Brahman. At the hour that is both lovely and fearful they brought out their fires, and a discussion began that was preceded by the sounds of the Brahman. Consoling the king, best of the Kurus, with voices sweet as the wild goose’s, those eminent priests passed away the whole night. (3.1.41-44)

The narrator’s point here is a powerful one. These are no ordinary brahmins, they are *kavis* who know Brahman. Like the support of the citizens of Indraprastha, the support of the priests is based on the assumption that Yudhiṣṭhira is dharmic and as such they are willing to use their power to support the king. We may assume that like the people of Indraprastha the brahmins have heard a version of the dicing hall story that presents the Pāṇḍavas as lawful.³ While Yudhiṣṭhira is without a realm, he remains a legitimate king because the brahmins support his rule over them, a support that depends on his dharmic reputation. That Yudhiṣṭhira has not lived up to his dharmic appearance has even been

³ I present evidence of this on pages 66-67.

missed by the brahmins. The faults of Yudhiṣṭhira are quickly being covered as we enter Book Three. Vaiśampāyana and Yudhiṣṭhira together seem intent on reclaiming Yudhiṣṭhira's status as King Dharma in this Parvan.

The narrator's praise of Yudhiṣṭhira and the accompaniment of the brahmins continues as the Pāṇḍavas enter into the forest. The Pāṇḍavas have to decide which part of the wilderness they will stay in. Vaiśampāyana introduces this section in the following way:

When they had departed, Yudhiṣṭhira Kaunteya, ever true to his word and Law-minded, said to his brothers.... When he had spoken, Dhanamjaya paid honor to that strong-minded guru of men, as though to a guru, and said in reply,

Arjuna said:

You have sat at the feet of ancient seers and nought in the world of men is unknown to you. You have always attended on the brahmins, bull of the Bharatas, on Dvaipāyana and others, and the austere Nārada.... Without misdoubting, you know all the ways of the brahmins and you know the powers of all of them, king.... (3.25.1-10)

The Pāṇḍavas decide to settle near Lake Dvaitavana and Vaiśampāyana tells us:

Thereupon they departed, all the Pāṇḍavas who strode by the Law, accompanied by numerous brahmins, for Lake Dvaitavana. There were brahmins who had kept up the *agnihotra* and others who did not keep the fires, others who studied the *Veda*, or begged for their food, or recited prayers, or lived in the forest. The brahmins who accompanied Yudhiṣṭhira were many, hundreds of ascetic brahmins avowed to truth and strict in their vows. Thus, travelling with these many brahmins, the Pāṇḍavas, bulls of the Bharatas, came to the lovely and holy Lake Dvaitavana. (3.25.13-16)

These quotes illustrate that Vaiśampāyana's promotion of Yudhiṣṭhira has continued and, if anything, intensified as King Dharma enters the forest. In these quotes, Yudhiṣṭhira's name is not brought up without a glowing list of moral attributes: "Yudhiṣṭhira Kaunteya, ever true to his word and Law-minded", "that strong-minded guru of men," "[y]ou have always attended on the brahmins," "he first of the bearers of Law," "[t]o the truthful king". Yet, if we look back to "The Sequel to the Dicing" which ended Book Two and compare it with this chapter, "The Forest Teaching" which opens Book Three, a very different tone is taken by Vaiśampāyana: "an usher spoke to Yudhiṣṭhira Pārtha" (2.67.1), "[s]peaking thus, the Pāṇḍava turned back with his brothers (2.67.5); "[t]he Pārtha accepted him" (2.67.21). The only time we see references to Yudhiṣṭhira as lawful is when he attempts to justify his return to the dicing hall: "[t]he Pārtha, king of his people, heard the many speeches of the people, but, compelled by his shame and his love for the Law, again had to go to the game" (2.67.25).

I have argued that, in fact, Yudhiṣṭhira's return to the dicing breaks one of the primary laws of kingship: protection. In the beginning of the Aranyakaparvan Vaiśampāyana seems to be concerned to present Yudhiṣṭhira as lawful and truthful after his, at best, dharmically ambiguous actions in the dicing hall. Yudhiṣṭhira is presented without embellishments in the dicing hall because references to his dharma would resonate with irony, placing attention on his adharmic actions. The Aranyakaparvan begins an attempt by Vaiśampāyana and Yudhiṣṭhira to remake King Dharma after the practical and dharmic disaster that was the dicing match.

There is another reason the text gives us for the brahminical support of Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, we are shown that Yudhiṣṭhira follows the advice of brahmins and submits to their spiritual authority. From a brahminical perspective, he plays the role of a perfect king. We find examples of brahminical advice to Yudhiṣṭhira when the brothers receive visits from a number of eminent brahmins who offer encouragement and support to the exiled princes. An example can be found in their first eminent visitor, Mārkaṇḍeya:

While they lived there in exile from their kingdom,
 The ancient seer Mārkaṇḍeya,
 Of severe and abundant luster, arrived
 As a guest of the illustrious Pāṇḍavas....
Mārkaṇḍeya said:
 In might the like of a Śakra, majestic,
 Daśaratha's son, undefeated in battles,
 Gave up his comforts and roamed in the woods --
 So practice no Unlaw, thinking "Power is mine!"
 Nābhāga, Bhagiratha and other kings
 Had conquered this earth to the bounds of the seas,
 And they won their worlds with their truth, my son --
 So practice no Unlaw, thinking "Power is mine!"
 The truthful king of the Kāśis and Kāruṣas,
 A strict man, O best of men, they called a mad dog,
 When he gave up his domains and his riches --
 So practice no Unlaw, thinking "Power is mine!"
 Surpassing all creatures in truth and Law,
 In becoming conduct and modesty,
 You too shall shine with glory and splendor,
 O Pārtha, a glorious, light-making sun!
 Live out this hardshipful term in the forest
 As you have promised, majestic prince;
 You shall then recoup from the Kauravas
 With your own splendor your blazing fortune! (3.26.4, 10-13, 16-17)

Mārkaṇḍeya, an “ancient seer,” has two main points he impresses on Yudhiṣṭhira. The first is that regardless of the circumstances Yudhiṣṭhira must be dharmic -- to the truthful will come power and glory. The second thing the seer stresses is that Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers must live out the twelve years in the forest and one year in disguise as they promised they would.⁴ Yudhiṣṭhira agreed to live up to the conditions of the second dicing and this brahmin makes it clear that maintaining brahminical support hinges on his allegiance to this vow -- King Dharma must demonstrate that he is a speaker of truth. Also implicit in Mārkaṇḍeya’s instructions is a positive attitude towards renunciation. We see this suggestion in the brahmin’s comments about the king of the Kāśis and Kāruṣas, who appears to have renounced his kingdom. While the king seems to have gained the name “mad dog” for these actions, the tone of Mārkaṇḍeya’s presentation of famous kings is positive, leaving us to assume that mad dog is to be imitated.

Another brahminical lesson is delivered by Baka Dālbhya, who tells Yudhiṣṭhira:

“Brahmindom joined by baronage and baronage joined by brahmindom elevate each other and burn down the enemies as fire and wind burn down the woods.
Do not wish to remain without brahmins, son,
If you wish to win this world and the next;
With a brahmin learned in Profit and Law,
Who has shed his confusion, a king removes rivals
.... As of an elephant in battle that is out of its mahout’s control the might of the baronage fades if it lack in brahmins. In brahminhood there is unequaled insight, in baronage matchless strength; when the two go together, the world is serene.... Your conduct with brahmins, Yudhiṣṭhira, has always been the best, and therefore your fame shines wide in all the worlds!” (3.27.10-11, 15, 20)

Dālbhya’s message is one that we have seen before in the Epic, but there is value in knowing that Yudhiṣṭhira has been instructed in this matter in such a direct way: success is only gained if one has the support of brahmins. The end of Dālbhya’s instructions make it clear that Yudhiṣṭhira has always been good to brahmins and that is likely part of the reason why Yudhiṣṭhira receives their current support.

⁴ The agreement at the second dicing and Yudhiṣṭhira’s acceptance of it are found on (2.67.9-18). In short, the loser of the second dicing match would leave Indraprastha giving up kingdom and wealth and live in the forest for twelve years. After this twelve year period another year must be spent in disguise in another city.

There are a number of other brahminical visitors who reiterate Mārkaṇḍeya's and Dālbhya's message: be truthful, live out your term in the forest and seek the support of brahmins. We have already seen that brahmins in the Epic insist that kings be truthful; the truth is a primary means of brahminical evaluation of kingship and it is part of rāja dharma. True to brahminical form, these brahmins do not promote kṣatriya and rāja dharma as a whole to Yudhiṣṭhira, but they support the part they find the most like themselves and an aspect of kingship that fits any context-- truth speech. The elements of the brahminical message are all interconnected -- the evidence of the king's truth will be his ability to keep his promise to stay in the forest, if he keeps this truth he will keep the support of his only allies the brahmins.

We should not take the support of brahmins casually. Yudhiṣṭhira's position is very weak while he is in the forest. His only allies are these brahmins, and Yudhiṣṭhira must also be aware that he has disgraced himself in the dicing hall by not protecting his wife, family and realm. I think that if King Dharma is to return to power in thirteen years he must remove the stigma of disgrace and defeat from himself. People do not want a weak king, but more importantly kings do not want to ally themselves with a weak, disgraced king. The dicing hall was full of kings and potential allies who, after witnessing the Paṇḍavas' humiliation, have become Duryodhana's allies. Once the Paṇḍavas have ended their thirteen year banishment they will begin massing allies to fight the Kauravas. As we shall see later in this chapter, the Paṇḍavas attract allies by pointing to their own dharmic reputation and Duryodhana's adharma. The Paṇḍavas are able to turn the disgrace of the dicing hall into moral indignation at the alleged cheating that went on in the hall. Yudhiṣṭhira enters the forest under a cloud of ambiguous dharmic action, but he leaves as Dharma incarnate, a transformation which is primarily achieved through taking on a dharmic guise and a reworking of the history of the dicing. While in the forest and without kṣatriya allies, Yudhiṣṭhira has little choice but to rebuild his tarnished image so that after the exile he can present a moral alternative to the adharmic Duryodhana to prospective military allies. But, as we shall see, Yudhiṣṭhira's efforts will centre on creating reputation through words and deceit. His apparent allegiance to truth and dharma can be questioned.

3.4 The Recreation of King Dharma

Yudhiṣṭhira achieves this transformation of personality not so much through his actions as a dharmic king, but through non-action, through asceticism. Yudhiṣṭhira does not regain his status as King Dharma through kingly actions, but through his words and the support of brahmins. While in the forest Yudhiṣṭhira has no population to rule over, no treasury to build up and no battles to fight for his people. He has been freed of those kingly duties that are inherently dharmically ambiguous. Yudhiṣṭhira is able to live the life of a renunciate freeing him from the adharmic associations of kingship and helping to purify himself and validate his status as King Dharma.

Maintaining a dharmic appearance has not always been so easy for Yudhiṣṭhira. Bimal Krishna Matilal argues that the Mahābhārata is full of moral dilemmas (1989:1-2). Matilal defines moral dilemmas as:

when the agent is committed to two or more moral obligations, but circumstances are such that an obligation to do x cannot be fulfilled without violating an obligation to do y . Dilemmas present irreconcilable alternatives, and the actual choice among them becomes either irrational or is based upon grounds other than moral. (1989:6)

Before the dicing when he was a ruler, King Dharma was often presented with such dilemmas and asked to decide them. Any decision he took, however, could not solve the dilemma and tended to carry an air of adharma.

An example is found in Book One where the five Pāṇḍava brothers each marry Draupadī. The Pārthas have won Draupadī at her *svayamvara* and they go home to present her to their mother, Kuntī:

....“Look what we found!”
 She was inside the house without seeing her sons
 And she merely said, “Now you share that together!”
 Later on did Kuntī set eyes on the girl
 And cried out, “Woe! O what have I said!” (1.182.1-2)

In South Asia, one's parents carry the status of a guru. Kuntī's command to share Draupadī must be carried out by her sons. Kuntī cannot take back her word because she is a speaker of truth: “as always she spoke the truth” (1.156.1). Kuntī, trapped by her words, approaches Yudhiṣṭhira as a king and as King Dharma, to solve the dharmic dilemma:

Afraid to prove lawless and much ashamed
 -- While Draupadī was exceedingly trustful --
 She took the girl by the hand and went in
 And spoke this word to Yudhiṣṭhira:
 “Now tell me, bull of the Kurus, how
 This word of mine is not made a lie,
 Or how the girl of the king of Pāñcālā
 Incurs not an Unlaw such as never has been!” (1.182.3,5)

The dilemma is clear: if Draupadī marries only one of the brothers Kuntī’s words are made untrue, if Draupadī marries all the brothers she will be unchaste. Yudhiṣṭhira’s first response is to have Arjuna marry Draupadī, it was actually Arjuna who won her at the *svayamvara*. But, Arjuna rejects this idea as unlawful because Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma are both older than Arjuna and they must marry before he does (1.182.7). Yudhiṣṭhira’s first decision is adharmic and his next choice is also adharmic, he decides that Draupadī will be the common wife of the five brothers.

All goes well until King Draupada, Draupadī’s father, learns of the polyandrous marriage and accuses the Pāñdavas of breaking the law: “[i]t is laid down that one man may have many queens, scion of Kuru, but *never* that one woman may have many men! Law-minded and pure as you are, you may not perpetrate such a breach of the Law that runs counter to *Veda* and world, Kaunteya!” (1.187.26-28). The point of dharma seems clear, polyandry was never among the eight types of marriage approved of by Dharmaśāstra writers (Jani 1989:73).

Yudhiṣṭhira appears to be guilty of unlaw, but instead of admitting to such he relies on the obscure nature of dharma to blur the difference between dharma and adharma:

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

The Law is subtle, great king, and we do not know its course. We follow one after the other the path that was traveled by the Ancient.... My voice does not tell a lie, nor does my mind dwell on lawlessness! As my thoughts favor it, it cannot be a breach of Law at all!.... They also say, most law-wise sage, that the word of a guru is Law, and of all gurus the mother is the first. And she has said the word: “Share as you share the alms.” Hence, greatest of brahmins [Vyāsa is being addressed], I hold it is Law. (1.187.29; 1.188.11-13)

Yudhiṣṭhira claims that the point of dharma is not clear, but because he and his mother always speak the truth the marriage must be lawful. Yudhiṣṭhira argues for the lawfulness of his act by referring to his own reputation and not on the basis of the act itself or any well known law. He tries to make his

appearance and words turn an adharmic situation into a dharmic one. Naturally, we should be suspicious of Yudhiṣṭhira here, and we will see this type of suspect behavior from him again.

But, Yudhiṣṭhira's attempt is not enough to satisfy Draupada and Vyāsa pulls him aside and relates the story of "The Five Indras" to him to justify the wedding (1.189.1-45). In short, the story gives an account of the Pāṇḍavas previous lives where they were Indras and Draupadī was the goddess Śrī. Śiva grants Śrī a boon and she asks five times for a husband. Śiva gives her five husbands claiming that is what she asked for. Śrī is to receive the husbands when they are reborn as the Pāṇḍavas and herself as Draupadī. Draupada accepts this story and the wedding saying:

Since Kṛṣṇa has said in the days of yore
 "May the blessed Lord give me many a husband,"
 He pronounced his boon in the way she asked.
 The God surely knows the best of it,
 As Samkara has ordained it so,
 Whether lawful or lawless, I bear no guilt.
 Let them take her hand in the ritual way,
 As they please, for to them is Kṛṣṇa ordained! (1.190.2-3)

In theory, the marriage remains adharmic, but the divine legitimization of Śiva releases the parties from guilt. However, we need to note the inherent problems Yudhiṣṭhira is faced with when he is actively ruling. As King Dharma, he is asked to decide these dilemmas and cannot help but incur some adharma in the process. Together with this special duty, Yudhiṣṭhira must carry out those duties particular to a warrior and king which we have already seen are adharmic in nature. In ruling and protecting his realm Yudhiṣṭhira is trapped into committing some adharma, though he seems skilled at trying to talk his way out of an accusation of adharma. We should also note the extent to which our redactors go in order to free Yudhiṣṭhira from adharma. They are quite willing to employ a story of divine intervention to keep Yudhiṣṭhira dharmic.

While in the forest Yudhiṣṭhira is largely freed from these adharmic kingly duties. The only people in his realm are his family and the brahmins. His brothers are quite capable of fending for themselves and King Dharma has done his utmost to free himself of kingly obligations to the brahmins. When he entered the forest Yudhiṣṭhira made the brahmins promise that they would support themselves and not rely on the Pāṇḍavas to feed and shelter them (3.2.6-11). Taking care of

these brahmins would normally be the duty of a king (Kane 1973 3:59). All of this suggests the inherently adharmic aspect of kingship, and it is only by being a virtual non-king that Yudhiṣṭhira reclaims his dharmic reputation.

The evidence of Yudhiṣṭhira's adoption of a dharmic appearance is found in his speech in the forest. A revealing moment comes one night when the Pāṇḍavas are engaged in conversation. Draupadī begins by telling Yudhiṣṭhira how evil Duryodhana has been and she reminds King Dharma of his opulent palace in Indraprastha (3.28.1-20). She speaks of the discomfort of the forest life and how unhappy she and her husbands are (3.28.20-31). We should remember here that Draupadī is Śrī-Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune and royal glory. Draupadī is not aware of her divine identity, but she acts out Śrī's concerns here for wealth and status. She reminds Yudhiṣṭhira of how she should live -- surrounded by comfort and wealth. She then turns on Yudhiṣṭhira and demands he fight to return them to honor and wealth:

“You have seen me gone to the forest, me who was born in the lineage of Drupada, daughter-in-law of the great spirited Pāṇḍu, so why didn't your anger soar? Surely there is no anger left in you, you the best of the Bharatas, if you can look at your brothers and at me, and your heart feels no qualms! But there is no baron known in the world without anger, without challenge; in you, a baron, I now see the opposite. A baron who does not show his authority when the moment comes all creatures will despise forever after.... Therefore, I think, king of men, that it has become time to use your authority on the greedy Dhārtarāṣṭras who are always offensive. There is no more time to ply the Kurus with forgiveness; and when the time for authority has come, authority must be employed. The meek are despised, but people shrink from the severe: he is a king who knows both, when their time has come.” (3.28.31-36, 3.29.34-36)

Draupadī demands action from her husband and her demands are largely based on her idea of what it means to be a kṣatriya. She reminds Yudhiṣṭhira that he has failed to protect his family and that a warrior is supposed to fight in these situations. In speaking of authority, Draupadī is referring to *daṇḍa*: a king's duty to punish. She demands that Yudhiṣṭhira act like a sovereign and punish those who do wrong in his realm. Draupadī encourages King Dharma to exhibit the kṣatriya virtues most adored by Śrī: heroism and battle.

In Yudhiṣṭhira's response to Draupadī it becomes clear that he has adopted the ascetic's attitude that is of the brahmins who have advised him:

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

Anger kills men, anger prospers them: know, wise woman, that well-being and ill fortune are rooted in anger; for he who always controls anger reaps well-being, but, beautiful Kṛṣṇa, for a man who never controls anger this terrifying anger leads to his downfall.... For when angered, a man does not even distinguish between what may be said and what not; he is capable of doing and saying anything.... Truth prevails over falsehood, mildness over cruelty; how can a man like me indulge in anger with its many vices that the good avoid, were it to kill Suyodhana [Duryodhana] ?... Therefore, if authority is to be maintained, anger must be kept far away.... On this they quote these verses of the patient man, Kṛṣṇa, which were sung by the great-spirited and patient Kaśyapa:

“Patience is Law and rite, *Vedas* and learning,
He who knows patience thus can bear anything.
Patience is brahman, the truth, the past and the future,
Austerity and purity: patience upholds the world.
Beyond the worlds of the brahman-wise and ascetic,
Beyond those of the knowers of rites, go the patient to theirs.
The might of the mighty is patience, the brahman of hermits,
The truth of the truthful is patience, the gift and the glory.” (3.30.1,5, 15, 20, 35-39)

There is little doubt from Yudhiṣṭhira’s words that he has adopted the values of an ascetic. He promotes himself as a well trained renunciate able to control his emotions and as a self-proclaimed follower of dharma. Implicit in his argument is that acting in the way Draupadī suggests is adharmic, true dharma is found in the patience of an ascetic -- this, says Yudhiṣṭhira, is truth. Yet, these are not the words of a ruling king, nor are they the actions prescribed to kṣatriyas as the Kaśyapa quote indicates: [t]he might of the mighty is patience, the brahman of hermits.” Yudhiṣṭhira has taken in the instructions Mārkaṇḍeya and others have given him and adopted the guise of a hermit because it is appropriate for his current context and helps him gain the favour of the renunciate brahmins who visit him.⁵ From what we have seen in chapter two of kṣatriya and rāja dharma, Yudhiṣṭhira is not operating in accepted royal and warrior dharma. His actions are more typical of brahmins as they are represented in the Mahābhārata:

it is a fact that the Brahman is mainly defined as a renouncer, the one who practises the virtues of the yogin or the sannyāsin. Actually almost all the epic Brahmins are rsis, living in the forest, rather than householders. Some of them are with wives, most of them without, but all are instances of the third āśrama, they are vānaprastha. (Biardeau 1981:79)

Yudhiṣṭhira is not only following the advice of brahmins, he is trying to act like a brahmin, something that confuses and enrages Draupadī, but gains the support of brahmins.

⁵ That Yudhiṣṭhira’s disposition is more guise than honest adherence to truth will become clearer as we proceed through the chapter.

Draupadī does not end the argument; she replies by claiming that Yudhiṣṭhira's devotion to the law has not served him well:

While you should carry on in the way of your father and grandfather, your mind has gone another way! In this world a man never obtains virtue with Law and gentleness, or patience and uprightness, or tenderness, if this insufferable disaster overtook you, Bhārata, which neither you did deserve nor these august brothers of yours! Then as now they knew that to you nothing was dearer than the Law, your life was for the Law, and the brahmins, elders, and Gods knew it well.... The Law, when well protected, protects the king who guards the Law, so I hear from the noble ones, but I find it does not protect *you*. (3.31.1-7)

Here, Draupadī questions the effectiveness of a king completely devoted to dharma. She says that kingship is not a function of observance of the law, there are aspects of rāja dharma that are inherently adharmic. Draupadī seems to agree with the point I made in the last chapter: kings cannot truly be kings and be dharmic. She suggests that Yudhiṣṭhira's apparent allegiance to the law has only resulted in disaster. Draupadī is convinced that a true king would regain the thrown at any cost and worry about dharma once his position as king is re-established.

Draupadī does not argue alone, she is joined by Bhīma who argues for war:

You have eyesight and capacity, in yourself you see manliness, but, prone to gentility, you do not realize the trouble we are in, king! Those Dhārtarāṣṭras regard us, who indeed have been patient enough, as plainly incompetent; and that is more galling than to die in battle! It would be better if we were to give battle there, straightforwardly, without turning away, even if we were all slaughtered: after the battle we would gain our worlds. And it surely would be better for us if we killed them off, bull of the Bharatas, and take back all of earth. If we are to observe our own Law, if we wish to win plentiful fame, if we are to counter enmity, it is in war that our task clearly lies. (3.34.15-20)

Bhīma's argument is solidly rooted in accepted kṣatriya virtues. As we have already noted, the highest duty of the warrior caste is to fight on the battlefield and death on that field brings a heavenly reward (Kane 1973 3:57). Bhīma continues his attack on Yudhiṣṭhira on the basis that the king is not acting within his *varṇadharmā*:

Begging is not enjoined on the baron, nor is the livelihood of commoner and serf: for the baron the Law is first of all the might of his chest. Wise people declare that the Law is a noble Law, so strive for that which is noble and do not pause below it. Wake up, you know the eternal Laws, Indra among kings; you have been born to savage deeds, from which other people shrink. The reward you reap by protecting your subjects will not be condemned, for it is the eternal Law, O king, that the Placer has enjoined upon you.... No king has ever won the earth by being solely law-minded, nor have they thus won prosperity and fortune. It is by using a sweet tongue with the many lowly people whose minds are greedy that one gains a kingdom with trickery as the fowler gains his meal. The Asuras, elder brothers of the Gods, very prosperous in all respects, were defeated by the Gods with trickery.... Just as the sun protects and devours all creatures with its rays, O king, so you must become equal to the sun. For this is the ancient austerity of which we have heard, king, to protect the land by decree, as

our grandfathers did....What is more, when brahmins and elders assemble, king, they talk joyfully of the strength of your promises, how neither confusion, baseness, greed, nor fear prompt you to lie, nor love or selfishness. Whatever guilt a king incurs in winning his country he wipes off later with richly paid-for sacrifices. (3.34.50-60, 70-75)

Bhīma's reference to the Asuras is based on a story we find in the Mahābhārata. It is a story narrated to the Pāṇḍavas by Mārkaṇḍeya in the "Dhundhūmāra" chapter of Book Three. In the story two

asuras named Madhu and Kaitabha run into Viṣṇu who tells them he will give them a boon

(3.194.19). The two asuras reject Viṣṇu's offer and tell him: "[a]sk us for a boon, God, we are your benefactors, best of celestials; we shall surely give you a boon, ask without hesitation!" (3.194.20).

The boon Viṣṇu requests is "that the two of you, who are strong in the truth, may be killed by my hand!" (3.194.23). The asuras are both speakers of the truth and are held to their promise:

"[n]ot even in jest have we ever spoken a lie before, let alone in fact. Know, best of persons, that we are devoted to truth and Law. No one is our equal in strength, beauty, bravery, serenity, Law, austerity, generosity, and in character, mettle, and self-control. A great calamity looms before us, Keśava. But carry out your word, for Time is unavoidable." (3.194.24-25)

This story's point and Bhīma's point are clear: speaking the truth and being dharmic do not lead to prosperity, but result in the loss of power for a king. Kingdoms are not won through truth, but through war and deception. For Bhīma, lying is a tool a king uses to defend himself and his kingdom. From Bhīma's perspective, the role of brahmins is to purify kings after they have used adharma to meet their ends, not to praise a king for acting like them. Like Draupadī, Bhīma sees a total allegiance to the truth as impractical for a king and he also pushes Yudhiṣṭhira to honour his kṣatriya dharma.

As with Draupadī's attack, Yudhiṣṭhira defends himself with principles of non-kṣatriya law. Yudhiṣṭhira argues that losing the kingdom must have been "fated to be" (3.35.5) and that he cannot break his twelve year banishment because "[i]n the midst of the Kurus I gave my word" (3.35.11). He claims to have vowed to choose law over life and "[n]either kingdom nor sons, neither glory nor wealth, can ever come up to a fraction of Truth!" (3.35.21). Yudhiṣṭhira's response mimics Mārkaṇḍeya's advice and a brahminical attitude towards the truth. King Dharma is trying to present himself as loyal to the brahminical understanding of truth and not the rāja contextually sensitive

understanding. The king must be truthful and the test of that truth is his ability to hold onto the agreement made in the dicing hall regardless of his current context. Even when presented with arguments of traditional kṣatriya dharma, Yudhiṣṭhira clings to the brahminical advice he has been given and, in so doing, presents a brahmin-like guise.

Bhīma is not finished; he continues by claiming that all the brothers except Yudhiṣṭhira want to fight, and he finally accuses Yudhiṣṭhira of being more like a brahmin than a kṣatriya:

[o]ut of fear to soil your character, gripped by warm feelings and moved by your gentleness, enemy-burner, you endure your troubles, king -- no one praises you! Meek like a brahmin, how have you been born to the baronage? Though-minded men are usually born in baronial wombs. You have heard of the baronial Laws as Manu has pronounced them -- tough ones, full of deceit, are enjoined, informed by no serenity. There is work to be done, tiger among men; why sit there like a lazy python? (3.36.19-21)

Bhīma's accusations are not completely off the mark. In accepting a renunciate life and by living by the words of brahmins Yudhiṣṭhira has become more brahmin renunciate than ksatriya in his actions. Unlike Draupadī and Bhīma, however, we should not assume that Yudhiṣṭhira has given up re-acquiring the throne, nor has he forgotten that deceit is a valuable tool of kingship. Yudhiṣṭhira has been pushed by Draupadī and Bhīma and risks losing control of the situation. It is under this pressure that Yudhiṣṭhira drops his brahminical appearance for a moment and explains to Bhīma that he has no choice but to act in this way for now:

It is as you say, Bhārata of the strong arms, but now take to heart this other word of mine, you master of words. Evil deeds that are undertaken out of sheer violence only bring hurt, Bhīmasena Bhārata! When an act is well-counseled, well-wrought, well-done, well-planned, it succeeds in its purpose and fate is right-handed. Now you, stretching with the insolence of your strength, out of sheer wantonness think on your own account that this is the thing to do, but listen to me about that! Bhūriśravas, Śala, mighty Jalasandha, Bhiṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Droṇa's powerful son, the unassailable Dhārtaraṣṭras led by Duryodhana, all have their weapons ready and lie in ambush all the time. The kings and princes whom we chastised have taken the Kauravas' side and love them now. They are now loyal to Duryodhana, Bhārata, not to us. And with their coffers full and forces aplenty, they will do their best to keep it so. All of them in the Kaurava army, with their sons ministers, and officers, have been apportioned riches and privileges all around.... You cannot kill Duryodhana without allies, before you have defeated all those notables in battle, too.... Bhīmasena, indignant though he was, understood the truth of what he was saying and became upset and alarmed; and he had no reply to make. (3.37.2-14, 17-20)

Yudhiṣṭhira's patience is not the true patience of an ascetic, but a pragmatic way to impress brahmins because Duryodhana is too powerful to fight right now. Yudhiṣṭhira's high talk about dharma and

truth have suddenly disappeared to reveal a pragmatic minded king who is well aware of his present situation and that of Duryodhana. There is an abrupt change in tone and topic from King Dharma when he is pressured; this suggests that a different meaning lies beneath his previous brahminical words. In this quote Yudhiṣṭhira demonstrates that he is not without a plan of regaining the throne: “[w]hen an act is well-counseled, well-wrought, well-done, well-planned, it succeeds”. There is much more in this quote than its isolated reading may imply and we must fill in what the passage assumes from what we have already gathered from the Forest Parvan. It is clear that Yudhiṣṭhira fears Duryodhana’s monopolization of allies in the Pāṇḍavas’ absence, yet he is powerless to gain military allies while in the forest. His visitors are all brahmins and not kṣatriyas, and he does not have the money to buy allies as Duryodhana can. His only resource in countering the alliances of Duryodhana is to present a legitimate alternative to Duryodhana when his exile ends, a legitimation that is dependent on brahmins. He acts as he does to fool the brahmins into believing that he is dharmic, so that when the exile ends there will be more than his own voice arguing for his morality. He depicts Duryodhana as adharmic and himself as dharmic in the hope that he will be able to convince other kings to form an alliance with him.⁶

We see this type of alliance making immediately after the thirteen year exile is over. On behalf of the Pāṇḍavas, Kṛṣṇa calls together a number of kings and presents them with his argument for helping Yudhiṣṭhira regain the throne. We shall go through Kṛṣṇa’s argument step by step:

Kṛṣṇa said:
 It is known to you all, my lords, how this
 Yudhiṣṭhira was defeated with tricks
 By Subala’s son, and his kingdom taken,
 And a covenant made to live exiled. (5.1.10)

Immediately, we see the dubious accusation that Śakuni cheated at the dice game. This is the Pāṇḍava version of the dicing, which has become authoritative, in part, because it has been repeated by brahmins, the speakers of truth. As we shall see, these brahmins did not see the events of the dicing

⁶ While kings are not particularly moral, they do take the vows involved in forming alliances seriously and a king’s reputation as dharmic or adharmic affects his ability to make alliances. As we shall see, a wise king always tries to present himself as truthful to prospective allies.

hall first hand, but have heard the story from the Pāṇḍavas and have accepted it as true, trusting in Yudhiṣṭhira's adoption of ascetical values and brahminical advice. We see a prime example in the visit of Maitreya to the Kaurava court.

Maitreya is a famed brahmin hermit who visits Dhṛtarāṣṭra after he has seen the Pāṇḍavas. He is introduced at the Kaurava court by the brahmin Vyāsa:

Vyāsa said:

Here comes the blessed seer Maitreya, king, to visit you after his journey with the Pāṇḍava brothers. This great seer shall lecture your son Duryodhana as it is fitting, king, to pacify this family of yours. Whatever he may say, eminent king, carry it out regardlessly. For if the task is not done, he shall in anger put a curse on your son....

Maitreya said:

While on a tour of the places of pilgrimage I came to the Jungle of the Kurus, and perchance I saw Yudhiṣṭhira and the King Dharma in the Kāmyaka Forest. Crowds of hermits had arrived together to visit the great-spirited man, who was garbed in deerskin and hairtuft, while he lived in the wilderness of austerities, my lord. (3.11.4-6, 11-12)

Maitreya gives us the brahminical perspective on Yudhiṣṭhira. He depicts Yudhiṣṭhira as an ascetic: "garbed in deerskin and hairtuft" and this appearance seems to justify the brahmin's presentation of the king as "great-spirited" and "King Dharma". Yudhiṣṭhira's appearance has left such an impression that Maitreya accepts the Pāṇḍava version of history without question: "[t]here I heard, great king, of the frivolousness of your son and the wicked course of action he had undertaken by way of a dicing match. That was like the behavior of dasyus, what happened in your hall, scion of Kuru" (3.11.15-16). This quote demonstrates that the Pāṇḍavas have been spreading a story about the dicing hall. It also appears that this version of the dicing match has spread quickly: "[i]t [the story of the dicing] does not add to your splendor, king, when ascetics meet" (3.11.18). These claims of cheating and adharma are largely a later Pāṇḍava invention, but they are backed by brahmins -- the speakers of truth, which gives the story a great deal of power.

The Kauravas have no response to these claims of Maitreya. Some of this reluctance to counter the brahmin may be based on Vyāsa's warning that Duryodhana will be cursed if Maitreya's words are not respected. Yet, it also appears that the Kauravas have not tried to spread their own version of the events in the dicing hall. They have failed to acknowledge the power of words to affect people's perception of individuals and events.

Maitreya continues by directly addressing Duryodhana, but the king ignores him. True to Vyāsa's warning Maitreya becomes angry and curses Duryodhana: "[e]yes bloodshot from his rage, Maitreya touched water and cursed the evil-minded son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra: 'Because you ignore me and refuse to obey my word, you shall soon reap the reward of your insolence! Through your offence a great war will flare up and during it the brawny Bhīma will smash your thigh with the blows of his club'" (3.11.32-34). Thus, while Yudhiṣṭhira is being encouraged by brahmins, Duryodhana is being cursed. Clearly, Yudhiṣṭhira's strategy has been effective.

Kṛṣṇa's argument to support the Pāṇḍavas continues with:

They [the Pāṇḍavas] were capable fiercely to conquer the earth,
But they stood by their truth and carried it out,
These sons of Pāṇḍu and Bhārata chiefs --
That abominable vow of thirteen years. (5.1.11)

Here, Kṛṣṇa presents the evidence of Yudhiṣṭhira's and his brothers' "truth." Kṛṣṇa argues that even though they were cheated they still kept the oath they made -- they are true to their word. The king has lost any sense of adharmic action he may have gained in the dicing hall through brahminical support, through the spreading of the Pāṇḍava version of the dicing hall story and through keeping the vow he made in the dicing hall.

Keeping this vow is also of particular importance in the current context of gaining allies.

Yudhiṣṭhira agreed to the dicing hall vow in front of his fellow kṣatriyas and such a vow is considered unbreakable in warrior dharma (Matilal 1989:8-9). As Matilal points out, however, various kings in the Mahābhārata find ways out of their vows (1989:9-10), but because Yudhiṣṭhira is looking for allies he cannot break the vow. An ally will expect a vow of mutual support from Yudhiṣṭhira, such a vow and the assurance on both sides that the vow will be held up are the corner stones of military alliances. Thus, a king must be true to his word, but, from a kṣatriya perspective, only in this specialized arena of promises made to fellow kṣatriyas. Thus, we see the dual importance of keeping the vow for Yudhiṣṭhira: gaining the support of brahmins and presenting an image of a reliable ally, especially in contrast with Duryodhana whom he has cast as deceitful. We should not be so naive as to assume that Yudhiṣṭhira has kept this vow simply because it is the dharmic thing to do. Clearly,

keeping this vow has a material return for Yudhiṣṭhira. It is here, as Yudhiṣṭhira addresses his concern for allies, that we see his brahminical guise bear fruit, but it also becomes clear that his brahminical adherence to truth is more guise than reality.

Kṛṣṇa continues by giving a description of both families highlighting the dharma of the Pāṇḍavas and the adharma of Duryodhana:

King Dharma is not one to covet the realm
 Of even the Gods, if it were under Unlaw;
 He would strive for lordship in even some village
 If it were consistent with Law and Profit.
 We know that the kings' ancestral domain
 Was plundered by Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons
 In a manner deceitful, but nevertheless
 Submitted to great, unendurable hardship.
 Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons did not vanquish the Pārtha
 In battle by virtue of their own splendor;
 But still the king as well as his brothers
 Desires to see them hale and hearty.
 The sons of Kuntī, the sons of Mādri,
 These heroes of men have only the wish
 To regain what the Pāṇḍavas won for themselves
 By defeating and forcing the kings of the earth.
 You know how they [the Kauravas] tried by various means
 To kill these foe-endurers when children,
 Unholy and fearful, they sought to seize
 Their domain -- it's a matter of common knowledge.
 They have always been avowed to the truth,
 And accomplished correctly the covenant.... (5.1.14-20)

Kṛṣṇa restates the basic idea that Duryodhana gained the kingdom through deceit and that the Pāṇḍavas are truthful. We have already seen that both Duryodhana and Yudhiṣṭhira are guilty of some adharma, but through King Dharma's use of rumour and an ascetic posture a distinct moral difference has been created between the two kings. We are beginning to see the possibility that Yudhiṣṭhira understood that he must become King Dharma not because it is morally good, but because he must create the perception of a moral difference between himself and Duryodhana. If these two kings are morally the same, allies will go to Duryodhana simply because he has more wealth and power. We have cause to question Yudhiṣṭhira's apparent devotion to the truth while in the forest and

his motivation for acting as he does in the forest. A second reading of the text is opening itself up⁷ and we must acknowledge the possibility that Yudhiṣṭhira keeps his vow in the forest because it is the pragmatic thing to do given his context and not because of a concern for the truth.

Finally, Kṛṣṇa delivers the message his rhetoric is building towards, supporting the Pāṇḍavas as they try to reclaim their kingdom:

On learning of the king's [Yudhiṣṭhira's] mistreatment by them,
 Their friends will all rally to their side,
 Engage them in battle and bring them down,
 And while being killed, kill off the embattled.
 If it is your view nonetheless that they
 Are too few to be able to vanquish them,
 Still, banding together and joined by their friends,
 They will yet strive to destroy them all. (5.1.21-22)

That Yudhiṣṭhira's actions in the forest are motivated out of a concern for allies is clear and appears to have worked. As Kṛṣṇa presents it, there is a clear moral difference between the two kings and based on that difference other kings should ally themselves with the Pāṇḍavas. Yet, not all of the kings in the meeting accept the Pāṇḍavas' version of history. Baladeva appears to support the Pāṇḍavas, but makes it clear that he does not accept that Yudhiṣṭhira was cheated in the dicing match:

Baladeva said:

... He [the Pāṇḍavas' negotiator] must greet the Kaurava hero Bhiṣma,
 The majestic son of Vicitravīrya [Dhṛtarāṣṭra],
 And Droṇa and son, and Yidura, Kṛpa,
 The prince of Gandhara [Śakuni], and the son of the *sūta*,
 And all Dhṛtarāṣṭra's other sons
 With their prominent strength and eminent learning'
 Who all abide by their personal Laws,
 World heroes who've aged in wisdom and years.
 When they have all foregathered there
 And the elders and citizens are assembled,
 He must speak his word in most humble fashion
 To suit the cause of the son of Kuntī.
 Under no condition should they be hectored:
 They have grasped their profit while resting on strength.
 Yudhiṣṭhira was approached like a friend,
 And lost his domain while distracted by dicing.
 Yudhiṣṭhira had been warned by his friends,
 The Kāurava heroes, for he *could* not dice;

⁷ The first reading is that presented by Vaiśampāyana which only acknowledges a morally perfect Yudhiṣṭhira before the Mahābhārata war.

Yet he challenged the son of the king of Gandhara
 Who himself was a master at playing the dice.
 He was being played by his counter-player
 And the dice were always hostile to him;
 He lost his head and was soundly defended,
 And for that is Śakuni not to blame. (5.2.5-9, 11)

These ideas of Baladeva are quickly put down by the other kings beginning with Sātyaki:

Vaiśampāyana said:
 While the Mādhava hero [Baladeva] was thus holding forth
 The champion Sātyaki flew in a rage
 And berating those words of his thoroughly,
 Himself raised his voice in wrathful speech. (5.2.13)

However, Baladeva's rendition of the dicing story is important. He says that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons have followed their personal laws and that they gained profit "while resting on strength." Baladeva implies that while Duryodhana has not followed brahminical values, he has followed his *varṇadharmā* and has relied on one of that caste's greatest virtues: strength. This king suggests that Duryodhana has done nothing wrong in practicing his own dharma. He also states that Śakuni did not cheat and places the responsibility of the loss squarely on Yudhiṣṭhira's shoulders. The Pāṇḍava version of the dicing is not the only version circulating and Baladeva's rendition is more in keeping with the actual events of the dicing and the nature of the dicing game as described in Book Two. Baladeva's words encourage the notion that there are other voices in the text which counter the Pāṇḍavas' version of the dicing and of Duryodhana's morality.⁸ The immediate and aggressive response of the other kings to Baladeva suggests that his view is in the minority. It also suggests just how much the Pāṇḍavas' hopes rest on their version of history. In seeking allies and in trying to dethrone Duryodhana, Yudhiṣṭhira depends on artifice, something he and his allies will defend as though it is the "Truth".

Before we leave this section I must account for an apparent weakness in my argument. There is no explicit admission from Yudhiṣṭhira or any character that Yudhiṣṭhira's actions in the forest are a pragmatic guise and not motivated by a genuine devotion to truth and asceticism. Much of my argument is based on connecting together elements of the Forest Parvan and Book Five that our

⁸ As a point of clarification, when I speak of voices in the text I understand them all to be fictional voices.

redactors have not explicitly connected and on pointing to the potential significance that brahminical support and keeping the vow of exile hold beyond their possible connections to “Truth”.

We should not be surprised that our redactors and Vaiśampāyana do not make these connections. Our narrator has attempted to purify Yudhiṣṭhira after his disgrace in the dicing hall. Vaiśampāyana tells us again and again of King Dharma’s protection of the truth. Yet, we have already seen in the story of Draupadī’s polyandrous marriage that Yudhiṣṭhira’s allegiance to the truth is not to be found in his actions, but in his reputation and words. In the forest he is freed from action and can use his reputation and words to convince others that his past deeds were, in fact, dharmic. His title as King Dharma while in the forest has in itself an element of fraud. As we have seen, he does not act like a king and he does not earn the title *King Dharma* through kingly action.

We must also consider that our brahminical redactors have allowed brahmins to support Yudhiṣṭhira’s truth claims and his version of the dicing story. If all of this has been artifice on Yudhiṣṭhira’s part and he admits to such, then he has played all these eminent brahmins that support him for fools and he has made a mockery of the dharma to which these brahmins seem so attached. Clearly, our brahminical redactors have an interest in presenting Yudhiṣṭhira as authentic during his forest exile. Yet, I think, we have seen the proof of Yudhiṣṭhira’s manipulation of the brahmins and his pretence in the forest in the eventual way these things are used for his cause.

We are also not privy to Yudhiṣṭhira’s thoughts in the Epic. There are no soliloquies or internal monologues, all we know of Yudhiṣṭhira is what he says in public. It is for us to figure out what lies behind this public appearance. Some scholars might argue that the deceit and guise I have attributed to Yudhiṣṭhira is simply not part of his nature or in line with the general morality of the Epic before the *Mahābhārata* war.⁹ Such scholars look on the promotion of adharma in the Epic as an aberration which “cannot be supposed to be the real teaching of the *Mahābhārata* which is generally in line with the higher code of dharma-śāstra” (Kane 1973 3:11).¹⁰ Those who look towards the “real teaching” of

⁹ As I have mentioned before Yudhiṣṭhira does have his moments of moral action. What I am arguing against here is that he is never immoral until the battlefield.

¹⁰ My criticism of Kane here does not indicate a general criticism of his work. His *History of the Dharmaśāstra* has been invaluable to me in writing this thesis.

the Epic only acknowledge King Dharma's deceit while in battle and do not allow that adharma to be Yudhiṣṭhira's own conscious plan, but present his misdeeds as the invention of other characters or as part of Kṛṣṇa's divine plan, and therefore in accord with a higher truth. Some scholars are as intent on maintaining Yudhiṣṭhira's moral purity before the war as the brahminical redactors of the text.¹¹ There is, however, explicit evidence in the Epic which demonstrates that Yudhiṣṭhira is capable of planning and acting out the deceit and disguise that I have attributed to him in the forest.

This evidence comes well before the exile and is found in the Book One section called "The Fire in the Lacquer House."¹² In this story the Pāṇḍavas have left Hāstinapura to live in Vāraṇāvata. Upon arrival the Pāṇḍavas realize that they have been tricked by Duryodhana. Vāraṇāvata is full of Duryodhana's spies and there is a plot to kill the Pāṇḍavas by burning down their new home. Bhīma suggests that they travel back to Hāstinapura, but the astute Yudhiṣṭhira rejects this plan:

I think that we should stay here, eager and guileless, and seemingly doomed, while we look about for a sure way to escape from here.... if we were to run away from fear of being burned, Suyodhana [Duryodhana], who is greedy for the kingdom, would have us all assassinated by spies. He has rank, we none, he has allies, we none, he has a large treasury, we are penniless -- no doubt he has ways of having us killed! Therefore we must deceive this crook [Purocana, an agent of Duryodhana] and his crooked master Suyodhana and lie low and stay hidden wherever we go. We shall roam over the country like hunters,... Let us spare no effort to see that neither Purocana nor the townspeople find us out. (1.134.19, .23-27)

Here we find a clear plan from Yudhiṣṭhira to use deceit and disguise while in a parallel situation to the forest exile. Once the Pāṇḍavas have escaped the immediate threat of Vāraṇāvata they continue to evade Duryodhana by disguising themselves as brahmins at Draupadī's *svayaṃvara*. Contrary to the views of some scholars, my presentation of Yudhiṣṭhira is not antithetical to his basic nature, but illustrates a side of Yudhiṣṭhira before the Mahābhārata war that is frequently over looked. The above quote demonstrates that when without allies and wealth Yudhiṣṭhira quickly adopts deceit and guises in order to survive a crisis. We see him repeat these actions while in the forest. We have now seen examples of Yudhiṣṭhira's deceit and guises before and during the exile. Now let us look at King

¹¹ Examples are found in A. N. Bhattacharya's Dharma-Adharma and Morality in Mahābhārata and M. R. Verma's Ethical Elements of Mahābhārata.

¹² A fuller description of this section will be given in chapter four.

Dharma immediately following the exile to see if we have a consistent picture of immorality in King Dharma.

After the exile we also find explicit evidence of adharma from Yudhiṣṭhira suggesting that some of his actions in the forest were fraudulent and not devotion to the truth. The incident comes at the end of the first chapter in Book Five. An uncle of the Pāṇḍavas, King Śalya, has learnt of the Pāṇḍavas' call for allies and marches with his army to join them (5.8.1-5). Duryodhana learns that Śalya is marching and has extravagant resting lodges built along the route for the king. Śalya assumes that these lodges were built by Yudhiṣṭhira for him and asks to see the servant who built them so that he can receive a reward (5.8.6-10). At this point Duryodhana appears out of the shadows and says:

"[b]e true to your word, honest man! Let a veritable boon be granted to me: pray be the commander of my entire army!..." "Done!" said Śalya, "What else can I do?" "Done!" answered Duryodhana and repeated it. He took leave from Śalya and returned to his own city. Śalya went to the Kaunteyas to tell them what he had done. (5.8.12-14)

Śalya goes to the Pāṇḍavas and explains to Yudhiṣṭhira what has happened, to which King Dharma responds:

You did well, heroic king, to carry out cheerfully what you had promised Duryodhana in so many words. But, bless you, there is one thing I wish you to do, lord of the earth. Surely you are the equal of Vāsudeva in battle, great king, and when the chariot duel of Karṇa and Arjuna befalls, you will no doubt have to act as Karṇa's charioteer, best of princes. If you wish to do me the favor, king, protect Arjuna. Obscure the splendor of the *sūta*'s son, which will bring us victory. It is not a proper thing to do; still agree to do it, uncle! (5.8.25-28)

Yudhiṣṭhira's words here are a far cry from his allegiance to the truth that he professed in the Aranyakaparvan. If Yudhiṣṭhira's commitment to the truth and asceticism were as brahminical as he depicted while in the forest would he not have maintained them beyond his exile? Brahmin truth, after all, is universal and inviolate. He must be able to act like King Dharma when in a real kingly role for many of his words in the forest to be anything more than artifice and the deliberate manipulation of brahmins for his own ends. It was not hard for Yudhiṣṭhira to act like King Dharma in the forest because he had no kingly duties to follow. Now that the period of exile is over his very

first actions are full of deceit and adharmā.¹³ He is well aware that his request is unlawful, but does not allow considerations of dharma and truth to interfere with his quest to destroy Duryodhana. As it turns out, both Yudhiṣṭhira and Duryodhana are guilty of not following dharma. The difference between them is that Yudhiṣṭhira understands the effective power that words have to change reality, to create a fiction more powerful than actual events, to make himself appear dharmic to others.

We should also consider what it is Yudhiṣṭhira asks Śalya to do. When Duryodhana asks Śalya to be the leader of his army he is in effect making an alliance with him. There is, I think, an assumed vow like those I have already discussed made between kṣatriyas for military alliances. Certainly, Duryodhana expects him to be true to his word: “[b]e true to your word, honest man! Let a veritable boon be granted to me...” (5.8.13). In some ways Śalya will be true to his word. He will be called upon to lead Duryodhana’s army and is, ironically, killed by Yudhiṣṭhira in battle. Yet, Śalya is only true to the very wording of his agreement with Duryodhana, he leads Duryodhana’s army, but nothing more. He does not live up to the contract with and support of Duryodhana that the Kaurava king assumes goes with being the general of his army.

We are also witnessing a significant shift in the way truth speech is used. As I have suggested, for brahmins speech leads towards the truth; speech connects the knowledgeable to righteous cosmic forces. For Śalya, speech and vows (a form of truth speech) are tools of deceit. For Śalya, speech does not connect him to constant cosmic forces or clarify the truth. Śalya is held to his vow, the words themselves still have power, but he only respects the exact wording of it. He even prompts Duryodhana to say more, to provide more restrictions and to clearly define his expectations: “‘Done!’ said Śalya, ‘What else can I do?’” but Duryodhana does not grasp the potential for deceit; he assumes loyalty to himself goes with generalship. Śalya’s speech blurs the truth and connects him to the context in which he speaks. Outside of that context¹⁴ Śalya feels no connection to his vow. Śalya’s views demonstrate a reversal of brahminical assumptions about speech and truth speakers. It is also

¹³ These words to Śalya are the first words Yudhiṣṭhira speaks in Book Five.

¹⁴ Here, the context is being Duryodhana’s general. The context is created by the specific wording of the promise.

clear from Yudhiṣṭhira's support of Śalya's deceit that his commitment to truth speech is questionable even before the Mahābhārata war. We have seen Yudhiṣṭhira's previous commitment to the vow he made in the dicing hall, but that vow worked in his favour. This vow of Śalya's could work against him, so King Dharma encourages deceit. Yudhiṣṭhira is not truly committed to vows and dharma, but only follows these principles when it serves his interests to do so. Like most kings, he sees the truth as subject to context and his interests. As a brahmin Vaiśampāyana does not share Yudhiṣṭhira's understanding of the truth, and this brahmin voice attempts to depict a completely truthful Yudhiṣṭhira something we have seen to be questionable.

Finally, even with the dissenting voice of Baladeva, Yudhiṣṭhira's media campaign to clear his name has been immensely effective. We have seen brahmins arrive at Dhṛtarāṣṭra's court praising the Pāṇḍavas' virtue and cursing Duryodhana. Even Karṇa, Vidura and Śakuni seem to believe that Yudhiṣṭhira only speaks the truth. Here, Śakuni tells Duryodhana: “[a]ll the Pāṇḍavas, bull of the Bharatas, abide by the truth of their word, my son” (3.8.5). As we have seen, like Śalya, Yudhiṣṭhira only has a special allegiance to his vows when it suits him. The important thing for the other characters in the Epic is not his actions but his reputation as a speaker of truth; a reputation that will be decisive in winning the upcoming war. We have already seen what happens to a character like Duryodhana who assumes that Śalya will be “true” in a broader sense than to the specific wording of their agreement. Imagine what King Dharma, who is regarded as the personification of dharma and renowned as a speaker of truth, can do to those who read too much into his reputation. This type of manipulation will be the topic of the chapter to come.

Chapter Four: Yudhiṣṭhira and Kingly Speech

In the last chapter I demonstrated that Yudhiṣṭhira takes on the persona of a brahmin to become once again King Dharma. It is through this guise that Yudhiṣṭhira is able to convince people that the Pāṇḍava version of the dicing story is true and that he can be a trusted ally. However, as we have seen in chapter one, an integral part of a brahmin's identity is an ability with speech. It is through speech that brahmins demonstrate their connection to the truth and their understanding of dharma. So strong is the connection between this caste and speech that a brahmin who speaks eloquently is assumed to have knowledge and to speak the truth, as we saw in the case of Utanka. Our exploration of Yudhiṣṭhira will not be complete until we explore his relation to speech. Yudhiṣṭhira has an ability with speech that is brahmin-like and this ability accounts for the assumption in some characters that Yudhiṣṭhira only speaks truthfully. In this chapter I will demonstrate how Yudhiṣṭhira uses his ability with speech and his guise to manipulate and deceive others so that he can find worldly success. I will demonstrate that a portion of the Epic encourages such a reading of Yudhiṣṭhira. In this segment of the Epic Yudhiṣṭhira is not condemned for not following his caste; nor is he condemned for using deceit. Rather, the text suggests that this immorality is the only means open to him and presents Yudhiṣṭhira as a "true" king. A "true" king in the Epic is one who ultimately succeeds, one who rules and is able to defeat his enemies. Such a king is not necessarily righteous, but he knows how to use language and the appearance of being lawful to fool and weaken his opponents. This is not the Yudhiṣṭhira Vaiśampāyana wants us to see, but it is nonetheless one of the models of kingship that are part of the Epic.¹

¹ Briefly, I would like to note that I think there are three general models of kingship offered by the text. One is brahminical and suggests that being truly moral is the best form of kingship. This model demonizes Duryodhana and over looks or explains away Yudhiṣṭhira's immoral acts and speech. A second model understands kingship to be inherently immoral and promotes the idea that success is only gained through deceit. This view is rarely explicitly stated in the text, but this model is continually and subtly presented by elements of the text. Part of this chapter and the next chapter are devoted to illustrating the existence of this view in the Epic. The third view is a blend of one and two. It recognizes the humanity of characters like Yudhiṣṭhira and sees kingly morality as responsive to

This chapter has three sections. The first section will discuss *brahmodyas* as they are found in Brahminical Vedic and Classical texts. *Brahmodyas* are verbal competitions that brahmins, and at times others, engage in. In this section I will argue that *brahmodyas* illustrate a brahmin's ability with words, and therefore a connection to the truth. Much of this section will remind us of the connection between brahmins, speech and truth that I illustrated in chapter one. The second section will demonstrate Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with *brahmodyas*, and therefore his special relationship to language. It will become clear in this section that through Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with eloquent language he is able to appear truthful and dharmic. However, an exploration of what the king actually says and does will demonstrate that his connection to the truth in the way that brahmins understand it is dubious and that he uses the assumptions of others regarding those with eloquent speech to manipulate people. The final section has two parts to it. In the first part I will discuss how Yudhiṣṭhira uses deceit and his ability with language to bring about the death of Bhīṣma. In the second part I will discuss how King Dharma uses his reputation as a speaker of truth to bring about the death of Droṇa. Through this chapter it will become clear that Yudhiṣṭhira's use of deceit begins well before the Mahābhārata war and the deceit he uses in that war can only be understood by unravelling the Yudhiṣṭhira that appears after the dicing.

4.1 The Brahminical *Brahmodya*

Literally, *brahmodya* means "brahman utterance" (Thompson 1997:13), but the term specifically refers to a verbal contest, usually between brahmins and it focuses on their knowledge of Brahman. There are usually two contestants, and the format is question and answer. These contests appear as a series of enigmatic riddles in verse: "[t]he question of the challenger is couched in terms of a well-turned enigma to which his opponent should react, not with a clear-cut, unambiguous solution, but with an equally enigmatic rejoinder, till one of the parties is reduced to silence or till the strongest, well aware of his strength, enforces silence by withdrawing" (Heesterman 1985:71). The test of ability in these contests is usually two fold: poetic diction and brahminical wisdom (Thompson 1997:13).

context. When faced with a crisis most kings employ deceit in the Mahābhārata. Conversely, when times are better kings tend to act more dharmically.

George Thompson (1997) and J. C. Heesterman (1985) point to two types of *brahmodya*. The first comes from ancient Vedic sources and is focused on a hostile challenge between brahmins competing for superior spiritual authority (Thompson 1997:17-18). Elements of this *brahmodya* are found in the R̥gVeda, but the clearest examples of it are found in the Brahmaṇas and Upaniṣads. The *brahmodya* is depicted in these texts as a real competition requiring the spontaneous construction of verses. The loser either becomes the student of the winner or is put to death. While the topic of these early riddles is Brahman,² it is the eloquence and spiritual authority of brahmins that are tested in these verbal battles, personal traits which are validated by victory or destroyed by defeat (Kuiper 1960:254).

Thompson argues that the test of a brahmin's authority in the contest is the truth of his word. The victorious brahmin is a *kavi*, an *ṛṣi*, he understands the order (*ṛta*) of the cosmos and how the elements of that cosmos link together and is able to present these connections in a poetic way. Such an eloquent brahmin has powerful speech. This speech is backed by a special knowledge and imbued with cosmic truth: "[a] brahmin's integrity, his personal authority, will be established likewise *by means of the truth* -- i.e., by means of the truth that resides in his utterances.... It [*brahmodyas*] therefore provides an arena for... the demonstration of one's integrity, or power, which in the case of brahmins depends upon the truth, the force, of one's words" (Thompson 1997:20). Given my discussion of brahminical speech in chapter one, little of this information on *brahmodyas* should come as a surprise. Once again, we find brahminical authority identified by their ability with speech. A brahmin's eloquence and knowledge is a sign that he is a speaker of truth, someone with direct contact with *satya* and *dharma*.

² The Brahman referred to in these early *brahmodyas* appears to be like the Brahman described in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4.11-16). In this section of the Upaniṣads, Brahman is depicted as the beginning of the world from which all things develop including the various castes and dharma. Thus, the topic of these *brahmodyas* may include anything of the Vedic world. However, it is clear that not any answer will do and usually the knowledge demonstrated by contestants is particular to brahmins. Thus, the hidden elements of the cosmos and the order of the cosmos are frequent topics as are the links between ritual and elements of the cosmos.

This Vedic form of *brahmodya* is of particular interest to us because it identifies a truth speaker without taking into account an individual's actions. Thus, an unrighteous person could be labelled as a speaker of truth because he demonstrates eloquence and brahminical knowledge in one of these contests. We shall see this type of deception when I present Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with speech.

The second form of *brahmodya* comes from the Classical tradition. The Classical *brahmodya* is less of a competition and appears as a scripted dialogue between brahmins engaged in a ritual (Heesterman 1985:73). This version is concerned with naming. A typical Classical contest features a questioner giving a series of esoteric epithets and a respondent giving the everyday name of the epithet and linking it to another esoteric epithet. The test of wisdom is based on a knowledge of the secret names and relationships between things (Thompson 1997:16-17). Yet, the test of knowledge and eloquence here is circumscribed in that what the contestants say is scripted by ritual liturgy. Thompson cautions us that beyond these two main categories of *brahmodya* there are various other types of the contest which mix features of the Vedic and Classical context (1997:23).

To see how these features of the *brahmodya* appear in the Epic in relation to brahmins we must explore the story of Aṣṭāvakra found in Book Three. Aṣṭāvakra's story begins while he is still in his mother's womb. His father, Kahōḍa, is a student of Uddālaka, a learned brahmin, who thinks highly of his pupil:

There were many brahmins around him [Uddālaka] as pupils,
But his guru knew that *he* [Kahōḍa] had a priest's makings;
He gave him at once both all his learning
And his daughter Sujātā as a bride. (3.132.7)

Kahōḍa is clearly a gifted brahmin, but more gifted is his son even while in Sujātā's womb:

She [Sujātā] got with child, a child like fire.
And that child now spoke to his studious father:
"All night you have been doing your studies,
And still you don't have it right yet, father!"
The sage, insulted amidst his own students,
Threw an angry curse at the child in the womb:
"Since you choose to speak while still in the womb,
You shall be crooked in all eight ways!"
And so exactly he was born, crooked,
The seer now famed as Aṣṭāvakra. (3.132.8-10)

Aṣṭāvakra's ability to speak to his father from the womb establishes that he is no ordinary brahmin. As with other brahmins who have powerful speech, there is an allusion to Aṣṭāvakra as fire-like. Such an allusion links this young brahmin to Agni, the god who inspires eloquence in brahmins. While physically crooked, Kahoḍa's son is marked off as a brahmin of exceptional ability.

While Aṣṭāvakra is still a baby, Kahoḍa goes to King Janaka to seek his patronage. He is, however, defeated in a *brahmodya* by a *sūta* named Bandin and drowned (3.132.13-14). When Aṣṭāvakra is twelve he learns of his father's fate and travels to Janaka's court seeking revenge against Bandin. Janaka is conducting a rite that will include a *brahmodya*. Aṣṭāvakra hopes to gain entry to the rite and challenge Bandin to a word duel. While Aṣṭāvakra wants entrance into Janaka's rite, his age and crooked appearance stand in his way. His entrance is first barred by the gatekeeper, who questions his knowledge by asking him:

“Then recite the Vedic Sarasvatī,
One syllable long, but of many forms!
Come on, look at yourself, a child --
Why boast? It is hard to win in wrangling!” (3.133.8)

The gatekeeper's first instinct is to test the child's knowledge.³ As Thompson suggests, *brahmodyas* test a brahmin's personal authority and eloquence. The guard rejects Aṣṭāvakra's request to wrangle because he assumes that a child lacks the necessary spiritual authority and specialized knowledge to compete. Aṣṭāvakra counters the keeper by claiming age has nothing to do with knowledge:

A gray head does not make an elder. The Gods know him to be an elder who *knows*, be he a child....
Today you shall witness, warden of gates,
As goes on my wrangling with the learned,
How either I'll rise, or may be lowered,
While all the rest have fallen silent! (3.133.11,.14)

The gatekeeper is convinced by these words of the young brahmin. Astavakra does not demonstrate his knowledge, but simply claims to have the necessary knowledge to silence (to defeat) his opponent. His approach is not unusual within a Vedic context of *brahmodya*. Brahmins often poetically stated

³ The keeper expresses a recurring question in *brahmodyas* and that is the connection between the one and the multiple: “recite the Vedic Sarasvatī, One syllable long, but of many forms”. The Vedic Sarasvatī refers to the Vedic source of learning and the One syllable refers to OM which encapsulates the various Vedas (van Buitenen 1975:827).

that they had knowledge in the contest without demonstrating that knowledge directly (Thompson 1997:18). It is assumed in the Vedic contest that those with eloquence have knowledge and are truthful, and Aṣṭāvakra demonstrates his eloquence by using verse (3.133.14). Aṣṭāvakra's demonstration of poetic diction convinces the gatekeeper of his worthiness. In this section of Aṣṭāvakra's story we are reminded of the effect eloquence has on some people. This twelve year old, whose appearance suggests an adharmic nature, demonstrates neither knowledge nor truth, but gets past the guard because of his eloquence.

Once past the gatekeeper, Aṣṭāvakra must now convince the king of his worthiness who tests the brahmin with a series of *brahmodya*-like questions:

The king said:

The greatest sage is he who knows the meaning of that which has six naves, twelve axles, twenty-four joints, and three hundred and sixty spokes.

Aṣṭāvakra said:

May the ever-turning wheel⁴ of twenty-four joints, six naves, twelve fellies and thrice eighty spokes protect thee!....

The king said:

What does not close its eye when asleep? What does not stir when it is born? What has no heart? What does grow under pressure?

Aṣṭāvakra said:

A fish sleeps without closing its eyes. An egg when laid does not stir. A stone has no heart. A river waxes under pressure.

The king said:

Not a man I deem you, but the mettle of Gods;

You are not a child, I judge you ancient.

There is no equal to you in word use,

So I open the gate, and here is Bandin!

(3.133.21-27)

While not a *brahmodya* proper, this sequence resembles a Classical contest in that it is focused on names. The correct response to each enigmatic question is a correlating name. So far we have seen a mixture of what scholars have termed Vedic and Classical contests, and I feel this mixing is typical of *brahmodyas* in the Epic.⁵

What impresses the king may not be Aṣṭāvakra's knowledge. The riddles he uses may be well known. We shall see verses 23-24 again in a *brahmodya* in which Yudhiṣṭhira is involved. These

⁴ Aṣṭāvakra is referring to a year.

⁵ We will see more evidence of this mixing as the chapter continues.

riddles also speak of mundane reality and not the special knowledge of a brahmin. What I think truly impresses the king is Aṣṭāvakra's eloquence: "[t]here is no equal to you in word use." This story continually emphasizes the role eloquence plays in forming reputation in the Mahābhārata: "[n]ot a man I deem you, but the mettle of Gods;/ You are not a child, I judge you ancient."

The king accepts Aṣṭāvakra into his rite and the *brahmodya* begins with Bandin:

Bandin said:

There is only one fire [Agni], which is variously kindled;
And one lone sun illumines all world;
One king of the Gods [Indra], a hero and slayer;
Yama alone is the King of the Fathers.

Aṣṭāvakra said:

Indra and Agni walk as a pair;
Nārada and Parvata are the two seers;
The Aśvins are two; two wheels to a cart;
The Ordainer made two into man and wife.

Bandin said:

This creature is thrice begotten by rite;⁶
Three *Vedas* conjoint drive the Vājapeya;⁷
The *adhvaryus* perform the pressing thrice;⁸
The worlds, they say, and the lights, are three.⁹

Aṣṭāvakra said:

The brahmin's stages of life are four,
And four altogether make sacrifice;¹⁰
There are four regions, there are four classes,
And they always say the Cow is four-footed.... (3.134.7-10)

The contest carries on in this fashion until thirteen is reached. The contest is a mixture of Vedic and Classical *brahmodyas*. Like the Classical contest, naming is featured in the exchange, but, like the Vedic contest, challenge and aggression are a central part of the contest. There is a constant challenge to form relevant verses based on the next number and each successful completion has an implicit challenge to go one better. We should also note the difficulty of the exercise. There appears to be no pause in the series of riddles for each competitor to form a new verse. As we shall see, silence means defeat, a speedy reply is a must. In sanskrit these spontaneous verses conform to a meter and are

⁶ The three rites are the *garbhādhāna* (conception rite), the *pūṃsavana* (son-bearing rite) and the *jātakarman* (birth rite) (van Buitenen 1975:827).

⁷ The four *Vedas* less the *Atharvaveda* which should not be heard (van Buitenen 1975:827).

⁸ There are three pressings at a regular Soma sacrifice (van Buitenen 1975:827).

⁹ The three are the sun, moon and stars (van Buitenen 1975:827).

¹⁰ The four Vedas or priests belonging to the four Vedas (van Buitenen 1975:827).

eloquent. The ability to be eloquent and poetic seems to be more important than the actual content of the responses. Not any response will do, but the real difficulty appears to be in packaging a response in poetic meter (Shulman 1997:154). The ability level needed to compete in this contest is well beyond the scope of ordinary people and to win such a competition clearly marks one off as gifted in both knowledge and poetics -- a clear sign of a *kavi* and truth speaker.

The verses end at thirteen where Bandin fails:

Bandin said:

The thirteenth day of the fortnight is dread;
The earth has thirteen continents...¹¹

*Lomaśa said:*¹²

Having said only this much, Bandin fell silent,
Aṣṭāvakra completed the rest of the verse:
“The long-haired One ran for thirteen days,
The *aticchandās* start with thirteen.”
A loud applause arose when they saw
That the son of the *sūta* had fallen silent,
Had lowered his head, and was lost in thought;
And that Aṣṭāvakra went on reciting. (3.134.19-21)

Aṣṭāvakra is victorious and Bandin is drowned. Bandin is a *sūta* and his defeat brings about a general celebration from the brahmins present (3.134.21-22). Part of this story is about the brahminical dominance of language. From a brahminical perspective, the rightful victor prevails in this *brahmodya*, truth wins over untruth.¹³

Among the various layers of meaning presented by this story, we find the eloquence and authority of Aṣṭāvakra emphasized throughout. His quick wit and ability to form poetic verses spontaneously mark him as someone who knows the hidden elements of Vāc and Brahman and as such, we must assume, he is imbued with truth speech. His responses are never questioned; they are assumed to be true. We leave Aṣṭāvakra’s story reminded of the points I raised in chapter one regarding the special relationship between brahmins, eloquent speech, knowledge and truth.

4.2 Yudhiṣṭhira, Riddles and *Brahmodyas*

¹¹ Included by the translator.

¹² Lomaśa is narrating this story to the Pāṇḍavas.

¹³ The *brahmodya* itself is somewhat irregular in light of the greater tradition in that both of the contestants are not brahmin. Yet, most of the *brahmodyas* in the Epic share this irregularity.

In chapter three I presented Yudhiṣṭhira as taking on the guise of a brahmin in order to recreate his image as King Dharma. I have argued, despite the protestation of the narrator, that Yudhiṣṭhira's actions in the forest are motivated by greed and some of his actions are based in deceit. However, as the Aṣṭāvakra story shows in rather an extreme form, one's appearance and actions are not enough to gain the reputation as a speaker of truth. This reputation is formed through speech, especially the eloquent speech of a brahmin. I am not suggesting that Yudhiṣṭhira's persona is ineffective, far from it; but the persona is incomplete until we discuss Yudhiṣṭhira's relationship to speech. Changing the history of the dicing begins with creating a story. For the words of this story to become "fact," they must be spoken by someone with the same moral authority as a brahmin. Such moral authority is signalled by a special relationship with speech. Yudhiṣṭhira must demonstrate the same eloquence and knowledge as a brahmin in order for his reputation and rendition of the dicing story to be accepted as "true" in the eyes of brahmins. As we shall see, Yudhiṣṭhira's return to power comes from his righteous appearance and ability with speech. We shall see this ability with speech in a series of *brahmodya*-like situations in which he is placed.

We are not explicitly told by brahmins in the Mahābhārata that Yudhiṣṭhira has a special relationship with speech or brahmin-like eloquence. Yudhiṣṭhira never explicitly claims to be like a brahmin in either speech or actions. To take on the duties of another caste is considered adharmic and part of a king's duty in protection is to keep a dharmic social order. Thus, it is not surprising that Yudhiṣṭhira and the brahmins remain silent about his adoption of a brahmin-like persona in order to be King Dharma. As we have seen, the only characters to accuse King Dharma of behaving like a brahmin are Bhīma and Draupadī in their tirade against the oldest Pāṇḍava brother. Besides Bhīma and Draupadī we do not have many negative references to Yudhiṣṭhira's brahmin-like behavior, and scant references to his ability with words. What we do have is an overwhelming number of references to Yudhiṣṭhira's dharmic nature and his truth speech. However, if we look to Yudhiṣṭhira's actions and speech in the Epic, we find numerous examples of his special ability with language which point to his brahmin-like ability with speech and his deception. Again, it is not what we are told about

Yudhiṣṭhira that should be our guide as to his character, but his actions that should guide us in this enquiry.

4.2.1 Vidura's Riddle

One of the first indications of Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with speech comes in the Book One story called "The Fire in the Lacquer House." This story involves a plot by Duryodhana to get rid of the Pāṇḍavas by burning them alive in a lacquer house. He convinces his father to send the Pāṇḍava brothers to another city called Vāraṇāvata, where they will stay in a lacquer house that has been constructed by Duryodhana's supporters. The house is a fire trap, and his supporters plan to kill the Pāṇḍavas by setting fire to it. Vidura learns of the plan and wants to warn Yudhiṣṭhira without appearing to betray Duryodhana and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who would undoubtedly punish him. To escape publicly accusing the Kauravas, Vidura decides to deliver his warning as a riddle to Yudhiṣṭhira:

When the townspeople had gone back, Vidura, who knew all the Laws, spoke to Yudhiṣṭhira in order to alert him; the sage, perspicacious in all of the Law and Profit, who knew how to speak in riddles, said to the youth [Yudhiṣṭhira], who understood them, "One who knows will act so that he overcomes his danger. There is a weapon, not made of iron, yet sharp, which carves up the body. Him who knows it this weapon fails to kill, and it is turned against the enemy. The weapon that kills the underwood, and kills the dew, won't burn moles in their big hole -- he who knows this and protects himself lives.... After being instructed by him thus, while he followed them, Vidura circumambulated the Pāṇḍavas, took his leave, and returned to his house. (1.133.17-25)

Vidura's message is not clear to anyone except Yudhiṣṭhira: "Kuntī called Ajātasatru [Yudhiṣṭhira] and said, 'What did the Steward [Vidura] say in the middle of the crowd? It was as though he didn't say anything at all, but you said, 'Yes,' and we did not understand it'" (1.133.25-26). Yudhiṣṭhira explains the basic message to Kuntī and when he reaches the lacquer house he quickly realizes that it is a fire trap. He and his brothers make a tunnel to escape the flames, which is what Vidura had advised in his riddle: "[t]he weapon that kills the underwood [fire], and kills the dew [the sun, but also Agni, fire], won't burn moles in their big hole." With Vidura's help the Pāṇḍavas escape the fire.

What the first quote (1.133.17-25) clearly states is that only Vidura and Yudhiṣṭhira can understand the riddle. Vidura's ability with words and Yudhiṣṭhira's ability to understand those words are beyond the ken of ordinary humans. Vidura's riddles are like *brahmodyas* because a special knowledge and a special ability with words are required to make and understand the riddles. The

quote also emphasizes Vidura's ability with the law before introducing his ability with riddles. We are told that he "knew all Laws," is a "sage," and is "perspicacious in all of Law." The focus on Vidura's dharmic nature seems to be linked to his ability with words. As with brahmins, knowledge is a key aspect of Vidura's ability with speech. Vidura and Yudhiṣṭhira both share an intimate knowledge of the law and both are depicted as incarnations of the god Dharma (3.298.21). It is this divine knowledge of the law that is the basis of Vidura's and Yudhiṣṭhira's remarkable speech. Characters in the Epic tend to assume that those who know dharma will follow it. However, as Yudhiṣṭhira will demonstrate, knowing dharma and adhering to it are not always directly related. Vidura's riddles have helped us to understand the source of King Dharma's ability with speech. Now we must turn to other sections of the Epic to evaluate Yudhiṣṭhira's speech.

4.2.2 Yudhiṣṭhira and the Boa

In Book Three of the Mahābhārata we find two instances of brahmin-like speech. The first example finds Yudhiṣṭhira debating a boa and the second features a *brahmodya* between King Dharma and a yakṣa. The first story is called "The Boa" (3.173-178), which finds Bhīma in the clutches of a boa. Yudhiṣṭhira comes across the two and asks the snake what he can do to gain the safe release of his brother. The boa answers: "if you answer the questions I put to you, you will thereafter free the Wolf-Belly, your brother" (3.177.11). Bhīma's life is in Yudhiṣṭhira's hands and depends on King Dharma's ability to answer questions. This situation is an unusual one for a kṣatriya, who usually has to rely on his arms. It is for brahmins to get what they want through words, a point we have seen the Mahābhārata repeatedly make: "[t]he brahmin's prowess lies mostly in his tongue.... A baron's might lies in his arms, his is not the power of speech" (2.19.43, .46). We have cause to question what the function of this story is in the Mahābhārata given the text's apparent understanding of the differences between a ksatriya and brahmin. One possible point of the story is that Yudhiṣṭhira is no ordinary warrior or king: he has a special ability with speech.

There is also a metaphorical level to this story. Bhīma, as we have seen, espouses warrior dharma and acts on that dharma. Here, he is powerless, his warrior strength will not gain his release -- only

some one with an ability with words has power in this scene. This forest parvan story symbolically illustrates Yudhiṣṭhira's position while in the forest: his ksatriya prowess is of no use to him, but he does find power in speech, an ability associated with being a brahmin. While Yudhiṣṭhira is not following his own dharma here, there seems to be an element of the Epic which suggests that such a course is required if Yudhiṣṭhira is to succeed.

Yudhiṣṭhira accepts the snake's offer and tells him: [y]ou know fully what a brahmin may know here, O king of the Snakes. When I have heard you I shall make my reply" (3.177.14). Yudhiṣṭhira's comment on "what a brahmin may know" is odd here. Neither the snake nor Yudhiṣṭhira is a brahmin, yet it is brahminical knowledge in which Yudhiṣṭhira expects to be tested. King Dharma's expectation suggests that he has brahmin-like knowledge and with such a suggestion comes the additional association of truth. Even before the questions begin, Yudhiṣṭhira shifts attention from the questioning to his personal authority and character. Here we see that Yudhiṣṭhira understands a *brahmodya*-like situation to be about more than the topic of the questions. These verbal tests are a means of constructing identity through words and not deeds, and Yudhiṣṭhira seems to be aware of this fact and will use his eloquence to help forge his guise.

Before the questioning begins Yudhiṣṭhira tries to find out with whom he is dealing. He discovers the snake is King Nahuṣa, who has been cursed by brahmins to take his current form.¹⁴ The questioning begins and the topic is brahmins: "*The Snake said*: Now, who is a brahmin, king, and what may he know, Yudhiṣṭhira? Speak up, for from your words we gather that you are very wise" (3.177.15). The boa's words here are loaded with meaning in both topic and the assumption of wisdom. From the snake's perspective, Yudhiṣṭhira's words carry the same authority as a brahmin's. Yudhiṣṭhira's initial suggestion that he has brahmin-like knowledge seems to have convinced the boa and in the process part of Yudhiṣṭhira's identity is constructed. Like Utanka in chapter one,¹⁵

¹⁴ We shall meet this king again in the final chapter where we will learn in greater detail about him and his crime against the brahmins.

¹⁵ Specifically, pages 24-26.

Yudhiṣṭhira does not have to prove his knowledge, he just has to speak the right way and people assume he has knowledge and what he says is true.

Yudhiṣṭhira answers the question with:

He is known as a brahmin, king of the Snakes, in whom truthfulness, liberality, patience, deportment, mildness, self-control, and compassion are found. And he may gain knowledge of the supreme Brahman, beyond happiness and unhappiness, Snake, on reaching which they grieve no more. What more do you wish to say? (3.177.16-17)

The qualities Yudhiṣṭhira applies to brahmins are those we have seen him demonstrate in the forest.

The only quality I have not made note of in chapter three is Yudhiṣṭhira's liberality. Yudhiṣṭhira does, however, give gifts to brahmins and, at times, makes arrangements for their support even though he has released himself of that responsibility (3.2.49-60). Yudhiṣṭhira has almost admitted here that he has adopted what he considers to be a brahminical personality while in the forest. The snake, however, does not accept Yudhiṣṭhira's answer telling him:

Authority, truth, and the Brahman extend to all four classes: even *śūdras* may be truthful, liberal, tolerant, mild, nonviolent, and compassionate, Yudhiṣṭhira....

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

The marks of the *śūdra* are not found in a brahmin; but a *śūdra* is not necessarily a *śūdra*, nor a brahmin a brahmin. In whomever the brahmin's marks are found, Snake, he is known as a brahmin; and in whom they are found, him they designate as a *śūdra*.... (3.177.18-21)

Yudhiṣṭhira suggests that membership to caste is not dictated by birth, but by adherence to the qualities of a particular caste. He has made membership to brahminhood open to all, and he has also separated birth brahmins from their traditional occupations of ritual and Vedic study. At no point in this story does King Dharma equate brahmins with priestly duties. Such an omission separates the label brahmin from occupation and allows anyone in any occupation with certain moral qualities to be a brahmin -- even a kṣatriya king. Clearly, Yudhiṣṭhira is defining brahminhood so as to allow himself to carry that label without being accused of abandoning his own caste duties for another. We may speculate that our brahminical redactors have recognized the problem of Yudhiṣṭhira acting as a brahmin and present a solution in this new definition of brahminhood.¹⁶ We must also appreciate that

¹⁶ This definition of brahminhood may not be completely without backing. The content and tone of Yudhiṣṭhira's responses are reminiscent of Upaniṣadic speculation, which may add weight to his argument. There are also Buddhist and Jain definitions of brahmins which argue that actions and not birth make one a brahmin.

Bhīma is part of Yudhiṣṭhira's captive audience. King Dharma's response continues the dispute between these two brothers over Yudhiṣṭhira's apparent adoption of brahminical behavior patterns.

The story continues with the snake raising a logical question: "[i]f you judge a brahmin by his conduct, king, then birth has no meaning, my dear sir, as long as no conduct is evident" (3.177.25). Yudhiṣṭhira responds by claiming that one's birth can be uncertain. He feels that the classes have become mixed, and a father cannot be certain that it is his child that his wife has. Yudhiṣṭhira ends his argument by citing doctrine: "on this Manu Svāyambhuva [Manusmṛti] has said decisively, 'Class is determined by observance of tasks. If no conduct is observed, there is judged to be overwhelming class mixture,' O Indra of Snakes. But him, now, in whom cultured conduct is postulated, him I have earlier called a brahmin, best of Snakes" (3.177.30-31). Yudhiṣṭhira appears to present a strong argument backed by authoritative scripture. The snake is convinced; "I have heard your answer, Yudhiṣṭhira, who know what there is to be known. Now how could I devour your brother the Wolf-Belly" (3.177.32). At this stage the snake stops questioning Yudhiṣṭhira and seems to assume that what he has been told is true. However, what is not clear from Yudhiṣṭhira's words is if they are true.¹⁷

Thompson suggests that truth speech is the test of a brahmin's character in a *brahmodya*, but, as we have seen, eloquence and cleverness are what people recognize as signs of a truth speaker and not the truth itself. It is Yudhiṣṭhira's cleverness and ability in debate that seems to convince King Nahuṣa. The snake's questions are progressively shorter and Yudhiṣṭhira's answers progressively longer, which indicates that King Dharma has taken control of the debate and that the snake is not skilled enough in debate to form an argument.¹⁸ It is not so much what Yudhiṣṭhira says, but how he says it that silences the boa. Yudhiṣṭhira carries the eloquence of brahmins which links him, by

¹⁷ For instance, the quote Yudhiṣṭhira gives from Manusmṛti does not exist in the text as we have it today. It may or may not have existed, but we are unable to check its authenticity. King Nahuṣa is also likely unable to check the truth of Yudhiṣṭhira's words. Gaining an intimate knowledge of these texts is the duty of brahmins and it is unlikely that this king knows the text by heart.

¹⁸ Nahuṣa's inability with debate is not a surprise because debate is largely the domain of brahmins (Heesterman 1985:130). Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with debate is another sign of his brahmin-like learning and speech.

association, to the truth. He projects the same dharmic and ever truthful image that a brahmin has, but he is none of these; he is merely skilled in manipulating others through speech and taking advantage of the assumptions surrounding a good speaker. We do not see explicit deceit from Yudhiṣṭhira here. The truth or lack of it in his words is not clear. What we do see, however, is the construction of character through a *brahmodya*-like contest and therefore words.¹⁹

4.2.3 Yudhiṣṭhira and the Yakṣa

The next example of Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with words comes from the final story of Book Three called "The Drilling Woods" (3.295-299). I think it is no coincidence that this story ends the forest parvan. This story demonstrates Yudhiṣṭhira's weak position while in the forest and shows us how he uses speech and reputation to strengthen his position. A comparison between this story and "The Boa" will also demonstrate that Yudhiṣṭhira's speech and reputation do not confirm to brahminical understandings of truth. Finally, the story acts as a bridge to the rest of the Epic where Yudhiṣṭhira's deceit becomes much more explicit.

The story begins when a brahmin comes to the Pāṇḍava brothers and explains that his ritual gear and his drilling woods, which he had hung in a tree, got caught in the antlers of a deer. He asks the brothers to get back his gear so that he can perform his rituals. The brothers agree and set out after the deer, but it escapes them in the depths of the forest. The five brothers are tired, hungry and desperately thirsty, so Yudhiṣṭhira, who is described as "steadfast in truth" (3.296.9),²⁰ sends Nakula to fetch water (3.295.1-15, 3.296.1-10). Nakula finds a pond and is about to quench his thirst when he hears a disembodied voice say: "[c]ommit no violence, friend. This is my old property. Answer my questions, Mādreya, then you may drink and fetch" (3.296.12). From what we have seen so far of speech in the Epic, we might expect Nakula to take a cautioning heavenly voice seriously, especially

¹⁹ While not a *brahmodya* proper, the exchange between the boa and king share some aspects of a *brahmodya*. It takes on a question and answer format and a loss will result in death. Like a *brahmodya*, it is not so much the quality or substance of Yudhiṣṭhira's answers, but his ability to speak with eloquence and like a brahmin which leads to an assumption that he speaks with spiritual authority and that what he says is correct or true.

²⁰ As we shall see, this description of Yudhiṣṭhira is full of irony in this story. But, we should also note the continuing attempts of Vaiśampāyana to present Yudhiṣṭhira as a true King Dharma.

one that expects a demonstration of speech and knowledge as payment for water. But, Nakula is a warrior, his is to act not to speak. Thus, immediately after the voice speaks, we are told: “Nakula, who was very thirsty, did not heed these words and drank the cool water. And having drunk he collapsed” (3.296.13-14). This scene is repeated three times as the remaining brothers are sent out by Yudhiṣṭhira with each making the same mistake as Nakula.

If we wonder whether or not Nakula’s actions are typical for his caste, we have no doubts after Arjuna arrives on the scene. Arjuna finds his two younger brothers dead, loads his bow and approaches the water to drink. Once more the strange voice comes and tells the Pāṇḍava: “[w]hy did you come near? You cannot take this water by force. If you answer my questions, Kaunteya, then you shall drink and fetch the water, Bhārata” (3.296.25-26). The message seems clear: kṣatriya virtues of strength and force are of no use here, only an ability with speech and knowledge will bring success. Arjuna is, however, a kṣatriya. The only means he understands of how to gain things is through might, thus he yells back at the voice: “[s]top me where I can see you, so that you, pierced by my arrows, won’t speak like this again!” The Pārtha pelted that entire region with enchanted arrows, displaying his skill at sound shooting” (3.296.27-28). Arjuna does not seem to grasp the situation. His speech and actions are typical of the taunts and challenges that precede battle. Yet, a linguistic battle is the context here, not a physical fight. It will become apparent as we continue that the voice intends to conduct a *brahmodya* when it speaks of answering his questions. When faced with the *brahmodya* Arjuna shows us his great warrior’s skill with arms, but fails to understand the power of speech outside of physical conflict and never even entertains the idea of trying his hand at the *brahmodya*. In this he is a stereotypical kṣatriya. After Arjuna covers the area with arrows, the voice repeats its conditions which Arjuna ignores by drinking the water and dying. The story delivers a strong message that there is a more powerful force than kṣatriya might and that force is speech. It is vocal prowess that stands above physical strength here, brahminical power over kṣatriya.

As in “The Boa” story, there is a strong symbolic or metaphorical level to this story. While in the forest, the Pāṇḍavas are repeatedly taught that they will not regain power through physical might.

The above scene tells us that violence can only lead to death; a more thoughtful, calculating approach is needed, one that centres on speech. Again, as with “The Boa,” we find a story which suggests to us that such an approach is required. There appears to be an element of the Epic that runs counter to Vaiśampāyana’s constant praise of dharma and truth speech, and subtly promotes the creation and use of reputation through speech to gain success.

Eventually, Yudhiṣṭhira sets out only to find his four brothers dead next to the pool. As before, the voice proposes the *brahmodya* and, true to his persona, Yudhiṣṭhira accepts. Immediately, the story signals King Dharma as different from his brothers and different from other kṣatriyas and kings. Yudhiṣṭhira takes the voice seriously and relies on his knowledge and ability with speech before he relies on his warrior prowess. He has an additional power of speech that his brothers do not share.

Before the *brahmodya* begins King Dharma takes another step that his brothers did not; he tries to find out what he is dealing with. He discovers the source of the voice to be a yakṣa that is hiding near the pond. Even though he has found a physical thing that he could fight, King Dharma continues with the contest. Unlike Arjuna who would have strafed the yakṣa with arrows, Yudhiṣṭhira realizes that he can win the *brahmodya* and that killing the yakṣa will not bring back his brothers. Winning the competition and keeping the yakṣa alive might return his brothers to life, and without these brothers Yudhiṣṭhira cannot defeat Duryodhana. Yudhiṣṭhira always has his eye on the final goal of defeating the Kauravas in battle.

The *brahmodya* between the yakṣa and Yudhiṣṭhira consists of nineteen riddles presented to Yudhiṣṭhira, all of which he is able to answer. We cannot cover all of the riddles, but I will focus on those which most illuminate Yudhiṣṭhira’s character. The yakṣa begins with:

What causes the sun to rise, and what are its companions?

What makes it set, and on what is it founded?

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

Brahman makes the sun rise, and the Gods are its companions.

The Law makes it set, and on truth is it founded. (3.297.26-27)

Yudhiṣṭhira begins his answers with Brahman, the topic of a *brahmodya* and, in effect, the answer to the remaining questions (Shulman 1996:153). Yudhiṣṭhira presents an ideal image of the cosmos to

us. Nothing is haphazard in this world grounded in truth. If we look back to chapter one, we note that Yudhiṣṭhira's image of a universe ordered by Brahman, dharma and rooted in truth is close to that presented in the Vedic texts we examined. There is a strong brahminical and Upaniṣadic ring to both the questions and answers in this *brahmodya* (Hiltebeitel 1976:188-189). We see a different Yudhiṣṭhira in this scene than the king we saw in "The Boa." In both versions Yudhiṣṭhira is eloquent,²¹ but this King Dharma appears to know what he is talking about, he is demonstrating a special, brahmin-like knowledge and ability with language.

Another subject the yakṣa raises is the nature of brahmins and kṣatriyas:

The Yakṣa said:

What is the divine nature of the brahmins, what is their Law, like that of the strict, what is their human nature, what is their vice as of those without strictness?

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

Ṛ̥da study is their divine nature, austerity their Law, as it is of the strict; morality is their human nature, detraction their vice, as it is of those without strictness.

The Yakṣa said:

What is the human nature of the barons, what their Law, as it is of the strict? What is their human nature, what their vice, as it is of those without strictness?

Yudhiṣṭhira said:

Weaponry is their divine nature, sacrifice their Law, as it is of the strict; fear is their human nature, desertion their vice, as it is of those without strictness. (3.297.30-33)

Here, we see a more standard definition of brahmins based on occupation than what we saw King Dharma give the boa. Vedic study is a brahmin's link to the divine and sacrificing is a kṣatriya's. A warrior cannot sacrifice without priests, so in both of Yudhiṣṭhira's answers the priestly occupation of brahmins is their primary feature. The traditional ideals of each caste are with their appropriate caste in Yudhiṣṭhira's description: brahmins have morality, austerity, knowledge (study) and the priesthood; kṣatriyas have war, might (fear) and a reliance on brahmins in the form of a need to sacrifice. Yudhiṣṭhira also seems to be aware that the way to heaven for a warrior is on the battlefield and not through austerity in a forest. Yudhiṣṭhira presents his knowledge as closely associated with Vedic texts and the Dharmaśāstras.

²¹ Here, King Dharma's eloquence is found in his ability to wrap his answers in *ślokas*, in poetic meter (Thompson 1997:23).

Accounting for the dissidence between what Yudhiṣṭhira says here and what he says to the boa is difficult. This difference does, however, tell us something about the text we are reading. It is a patchwork of stories which pulls together various views from various periods and groups them under one roof to form a not always cohesive story. The text is multivocal in the sense that it represents a number of different philosophical and religious views which our redactors have unsuccessfully, at times, tried to pull together to form a story narrated from one perspective. The lack of a cohesive Yudhiṣṭhira between these two *brahmodya* stories points to the multivocal nature of the Epic.

A second element we must consider is what is consistent in both stories: Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with words and the juxtaposition between King Dharma and his brothers. There are voices in the text that ask us to look at Yudhiṣṭhira's speech in a more detailed manner than Vaiśampāyana's superficial references to his truth speech. These stories force Yudhiṣṭhira to use speech and brahmin-like characteristics in order to survive the crisis his exile brings about. These stories seem to encourage Yudhiṣṭhira's approach. However, what these stories also suggest is that Yudhiṣṭhira's actions are unnatural. While Yudhiṣṭhira's brothers fail in these stories, they do act in near exact accordance with their dharma. The difference between Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers suggests that Yudhiṣṭhira's actions hint at adharma. These stories present a more complex image of Yudhiṣṭhira than Vaiśampāyana's straight forward presentation of King Dharma. The boa and yakṣa stories present us with a double edged sword: Yudhiṣṭhira has no choice but to act in the way he does; yet, in doing so he does not follow his dharma. These stories subtly suggest that a successful king is not a dharmic king. These stories present a model of kingship where kings are cunning and do not blindly follow their own dharma even if the result is adharma. A king does what he must to succeed and success is found in speech and guises.

Another thing these differing stories prompt is a consideration of Yudhiṣṭhira's ability with words and part of that ability is his ability to speak to his context. He grasps that certain contexts require certain forms of speech. Thus, we see Yudhiṣṭhira investigating who he is dealing with before he engages both the boa and yakṣa in verbal combat. The boa is not skilled with words and his

version of the *brahmodya* does not follow the same brahminical structure as the yakṣa's. The king is not a brahmin and is not able to present poetic and knowledgeable questions to ask. Thus, the debate between the kings is not in verse, but in prose. Yudhiṣṭhira does not have to present his thoughts in verse to impress the boa with his eloquence. As we have seen, what Yudhiṣṭhira says to the boa may be questionable, but it speaks to his context. We must remember that Bhīma is being held by the snake and Yudhiṣṭhira delivers a response to both members of his audience. Now, surrounded by his dead brothers who have fallen without a clear sign of physical struggle and a yakṣa who seems to grasp what a proper *brahmodya* is, Yudhiṣṭhira responds in kind. He places his responses in verse and ensures that they carry a clear brahminical tone that cannot be questioned by his skilled opponent. Again, part of Yudhiṣṭhira's gift with language is his ability to tell people what they need to hear in order to escape a situation and to have them accept his dharmic guise. He understands how to read a context and how to speak successfully in that context.

In Yudhiṣṭhira's constant adjustments to the context he is in²² we get a glimpse of the truth, or lack of truth in his words. Speaking to one's context for personal gain appears to be a kingly thing to do in the *Mahābhārata*. The kings in the dicing hall remain silent due to context. King Duṣṣanta lies to Śakuntalā because it fits his context for personal gain. I also believe that it is context that Śalya uses to justify his deceit with Duryodhana. Kings use differing contexts for deceit, especially verbal deceit. These shifts kings use in each new context are not part of brahminical understandings of truth speech. Brahminical truth and what is right to say does not change in each new context. For instance, in chapter one we saw that Agni did not adjust his speech to Puloman to fit his context. As I have demonstrated, Agni is aware that not speaking the truth to Puloman is in his best interests, but he speaks the truth anyway. His responses are constant, just as the truth as a cosmic principle is constant. As we have seen, *satya* does not change due to context and truth speakers should exhibit the same constancy in their speech regardless of personal gain or loss. The shifts we see in Yudhiṣṭhira suggest that he is not a real speaker of truth and that his personality is much closer to those of other deceitful

²² As in, for instance, his different presentation of brahmins to the boa and yakṣa.

kings than his title implies. He addresses each new context differently to ensure his personal gain and not out of complete devotion to truth speech.

This potential untruth of Yudhiṣṭhira is not recognized by other characters because of his ability with speech, something we see in his successful participation in this *brahmodya*. Thompson has pointed out that the exchange between the yakṣa and Yudhiṣṭhira is without question a *brahmodya* and like brahminical *brahmodyas* it points towards a person's character (1997:23).²³ Yudhiṣṭhira speaks with eloquence and is able to display a brahmin-like knowledge and, by extension, he has connections to dharma and truth. As we are beginning to see, these connections to truth and dharma are not wholly justified by his actions. In order to continue to build a case for Yudhiṣṭhira's lack of truth, we must look to his understanding of morality.

In his article "The Yakṣa's Questions," David Shulman identifies morality as one of the main points of question and answer in this story (1997:161). There are two of these moral exchanges that are of interest to us. In the first, the yakṣa says: "[y]ou have answered my questions correctly, enemy-burner! Now tell me, who is a man, and what man owns all riches" (3.197.62). Yudhiṣṭhira answers: "[t]he repute of a good deed touches heaven and earth; one is called a man as long as his repute lasts. And *he* possesses all riches to whom the pleasing and displeasing are the same, and happiness and unhappiness, past and future" (3.197.63-64). In this quote, Yudhiṣṭhira emphasizes not the deed itself but the repute of it; it is the story and not the deed that makes a man. Yudhiṣṭhira gives us a summary

²³ In "The Drilling Woods" we see elements of both the Vedic and Classical *brahmodya*. As with the Vedic type, there is a clear confrontation and lives are at stake. We also see the influence of Upaniṣadic *brahmodyas* in the philosophical bent of the questions and answers which is also indicative of a Vedic type of contest. Yet, there are also elements of a Classical contest here. There is a strong focus on naming and connecting cosmic things: "[w]hich is the one sacrificial chant, which is the one sacrificial formula? What cuts down the sacrifice, what does the sacrifice not exceed? Breath is the sacrificial chant, mind the sacrificial formula; speech alone cuts down the sacrifice, and the sacrifice does not exceed speech" (3.297.34-35). We also see indications of a fixed memorized structure to the contest which is reminiscent of the scripted *brahmodyas* of ritual. Thompson points out that 3.297.46-47 is taken almost word for word from the Classical text the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (23.45-46) (1997:23). Verses 42 and 43 also appeared in the *brahmodya* of Aṣṭāvakra: "[w]hat does not close the eyes when asleep, what does not stir when born, what has no heart, what grows by speeding along? A fish does not close the eyes when asleep, an egg does not stir when born, a rock has no heart, a river grows by speeding along" (3.297.42-43). So, this *brahmodya* uses aspects of both the Vedic and Classical tradition.

of what he has done. He has created his reputation not through deeds but through story. Again, Yudhiṣṭhira points to his own understanding of the power of words and how they make reputation.

The second moral point deals with *ānṛśamsya*: noninjury, noncruelty. One of the yakṣa's questions is: "[w]hat is the highest Law in the world, what Law always bears fruit, what does not grieve when tamed, what bond never comes loose" (3.297.54). Yudhiṣṭhira responds with:

"[u]ncruelty is the highest Law, the Law of the *Veda* always bears fruit, the mind does not grieve when tamed, the bond of the good never comes loose" (3.297.55).²⁴ *Ānṛśamsya* comes up again at the end of the riddles. The yakṣa is pleased with King Dharma's answers to his riddles and rewards him by bringing back to life the brother of the king's choice. Yudhiṣṭhira picks Nakula, something the yakṣa questions because Bhīma and Arjuna are older, potentially more valuable to a king and from the same mother as Yudhiṣṭhira.²⁵ Yudhiṣṭhira responds to this question with:

Uncruelty is the highest of Laws, this I know as the final truth. And I will not be cruel, so, Nakula shall live! 'The king is by character always lawful.' This do people know of me; and I shall not stray from my Law -- Nakula shall live, Yakṣa! As Kuntī was, so was Mādri; I allow no difference. I want the same for both my mothers -- Nakula shall live, Yakṣa!

The Yakṣa said:

Uncruelty you hold superior to profit and pleasure: for that all your brothers shall live, Bhārata bull! (3.297.71-74)

High words from Yudhiṣṭhira and they seem to be backed by a genuine concern for balance between the two Pāṇḍava mothers. Certainly, the yakṣa accepts Yudhiṣṭhira's words as genuine. However, As David Shulman points out, there is a great deal of irony in a warrior-king proclaiming *ānṛśamsya* as his highest dharma (1997:156). It is especially ironic of a king like Yudhiṣṭhira who, I have argued, never takes his eyes off his final goal -- reclaiming the throne by annihilating Duryodhana and the whole Kaurava clan. Indeed, Yudhiṣṭhira and others are steadily proceeding to the inevitable blood bath of the Mahābhārata war.

I think we see this drive of Yudhiṣṭhira in his words to Bhīma that I presented in chapter three.

Let us return to that scene so that we are reminded of Yudhiṣṭhira's motivation. We pick up the

²⁴ Yudhiṣṭhira is full of irony when he says "the bond of the good never comes loose" when we reflect on his advice to Śalya that comes in Book Five to break his bond with Duryodhana.

²⁵ The five Pāṇḍava brothers have the same father, but two mothers. Kuntī had Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Arjuna, while Mādri had the twins Nakula and Sahadeva.

argument as Bhīma tells Yudhiṣṭhira that he should fight now and not wait out the full thirteen year excile:

While we are waiting about for thirteen years, king, Time diminishes our life and leads us to death. For death is sure to befall the bodies of all who have bodies: therefore, before we die, let us work for the kingdom!... There is work to be done, tiger among men; why sit there like a lazy python?... We have already lived in the woods for a full thirteen months -- look upon them as as many years.... Therefore, king, resolve to kill off your enemies, for to any barons there is no Law but to fight! (3.36.5-6, .21, .32-34)

In response to Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhira makes it clear that now is not the time to fight, but once they have left the forest and can gain allies they will defeat Duryodhana: “the unassailable Dhārtaraṣṭras led by Duryodhana, all have their weapons ready and lie in ambush all the time. The kings and the princes whom we chastised have taken the Kauravas’ side.... You cannot kill Duryodhana without allies...” (3.37.8-9, .17). The key to the quote is the reference to allies. Yudhiṣṭhira is thinking ahead to war while in the forest and his first action after the excile is to gain the allies he needs for battle.

Yudhiṣṭhira is planning for battle as early as the Aranyakaparvan.

Nothing about kṣatriya dharma indicates that noninjury should be Yudhiṣṭhira’s highest dharma and it is certainly not the dharma he follows once he leaves the forest. Noninjury is, though, what the yakṣa wanted to hear. I think, Yudhiṣṭhira knows *ānṛśamsya* is what the yakṣa wants to hear because it is something the creature has emphasized both in the question cited above, and, more importantly, while Yudhiṣṭhira probed the yakṣa to find out who he was:

The Yakṣa said: Commit no violence, friend, this is my old property.... I stopped these brothers of yours time and again, king, when they tried to take water by force. Then I finished them off. This water is not to be drunk by anyone here who wants to live, Pārtha, do not commit violence! This is my old property. But answer my questions, Kaunteya, and you may drink and fetch. (3.297.13, 22-24)

The context Yudhiṣṭhira is in calls for his support of noninjury. Again, Yudhiṣṭhira speaks not from his heart, but to the context he is in for his personal gain. Yudhiṣṭhira is a good listener and talker, but his highest law is not *ānṛśamsya* -- a fact that is illustrated by his words earlier in this parvan and in his actions in the rest of the Epic. In this story we have found reason to question Yudhiṣṭhira’s association with truth speech and the brahminical support of this king.

The yakṣa story ends with a twist. The yakṣa reveals that he is actually the god Dharma, Yudhiṣṭhira's father. Dharma praises his son and explains that he came to earth to test him. Yudhiṣṭhira has passed the test and Dharma rewards him by offering him three boons. With the first, Yudhiṣṭhira decides that the brahmin who had lost his drilling sticks will have them returned. With the second, he asks that the five brothers go unrecognized in their up coming year of disguise.²⁶ With the third, he asks: “[m]ay I conquer greed, and folly, and anger forever, my lord, and may my mind always be on charity, austerity, and truthfulness” (3.298.24). Dharma grants all three, but we are the most interested in the final boon. Again, as we look ahead in the Epic, Yudhiṣṭhira's words are full of irony. This boon never seems to come to fruition. It is greed to regain his realm and anger that will continue to motivate Yudhiṣṭhira towards war and, as we have seen with Śalya, deceit and untruths will be some of his main weapons in that struggle.

What we see through these *brahmodya* stories is that Yudhiṣṭhira has a brahmin-like ability with language which fools people, but the link between his speech and brahminical truth that Vaiśampāyana seems to see can and should be questioned. Yudhiṣṭhira can make himself look like King Dharma, but we have seen that his connection to the truth is dubious. Yudhiṣṭhira's guise and use of speech are, however, very successful. Even brahmins assume that because Yudhiṣṭhira speaks well he can be trusted. We find a graphic example of Yudhiṣṭhira's success with brahmins when Vyāsa presents him with a gift. This brahmin arrives in the forest and we are told:

Thereupon Parāśara's son [Vyāsa] took Yudhiṣṭhira aside, and, a master of words, he spoke to him this word full of import: “The time shall come of your fortune, best of the Bharatas, when Dhanamjaya the Pārtha overpowers the enemies in battle. Receive from me this magic knowledge I shall propound to you, which is called Conjunction and is success personified. I shall tell it to you, for you seek my protection...” Having thus spoken to the pure man who had sought his protection, the blessed lord, erudite in the principles of Yoga, pronounced to him that incomparable magic lore; then he dismissed the Kaunteya and disappeared then and there. Law-spirited Yudhiṣṭhira trained his mind and retained that *brahman*, wisely rehearsing it again and again. (3.37.25-38)

Eventually, Yudhiṣṭhira passes on this secret knowledge to Arjuna so that he can travel to heaven and gain the weapons of the gods. This gift that Vyāsa presents to Yudhiṣṭhira has a clear practical

²⁶ A condition of the dicing hall vow is that in the thirteenth year of their exile the Pāṇḍava brothers must live in a city without being recognized for how they are.

implication. The gift is a mantra of sorts; the brahmin gives the king particularly powerful words an indication that the brahmin judges the king's speech as brahmin-like. We should not underestimate the significance of this gift or what it implies about this erudite brahmin's understanding of Yudhiṣṭhira. I do not think a brahmin would hand over the "magic lore" of speech, this "*brahman*," to someone he thought adharmic. The signs of Yudhiṣṭhira's dharma are not found in his actions in the forest; he does not act there. The assumption that he is worthy of such a gift is based on Yudhiṣṭhira's brahmin-like speech. We are beginning to see how Yudhiṣṭhira's guise is effective and brings about his return to power.

The speech of other kings is not like Yudhiṣṭhira's. We have no examples of other kṣatriyas or kings engaging in *brahmodyas* in the Epic. Kings sponsored brahmins or others to take part in *brahmodyas*, but they rarely competed themselves (Kuiper 1960:279-280).²⁷ We have seen repeated examples that rāja dharma is about protection and physical might, while brahminical dharma involves an ability with speech and knowledge both in counsel and in ritual. We have already seen that King Yayāti has no ability at debate or with words and we have seen how King Nahuṣa (the boa) has been easily swayed by Yudhiṣṭhira's arguments. These kings and their inability with words are typical of kings in the Epic; it is Yudhiṣṭhira who stands alone as a king who has an ability with speech.

Perhaps this lack of understanding on the part of others surrounding speech is best demonstrated by Karṇa. In Book One of the Epic Duryodhana and his friends sit in counsel to decide on how to dispose of the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana suggests deceit, to which Karṇa answers:

"Duryodhana, I do not think you entirely have your wits about you. The Pāṇḍavas cannot be overcome with trickery, scion of Kuru.... With his war might did the great-spirited Bhārata conquer the earth. With his war might did the Chastiser of Pāka [Indra] conquer the three worlds. It is war might that they praise in a baron, lord of the people, and warring power is the Law of champions, bull among kings!... How can a man with a malicious mind and concealing his true intent speak and make the honest approve of his words as the best advice? (1.194.1, 18-19; 1.196.14)

²⁷ An exception is found in King Janaka who does engage in debate in Śantiparvan. However, this one exception does not change the numerous examples of kings who have minimal ability with speech and debate.

In some ways Karṇa's words are prophetic. I have demonstrated that the kind of deceit Karṇa regards as impossible is carried out by Yudhiṣṭhira through the course of the Epic. In Karṇa's words we find the very reason why Yudhiṣṭhira's strategy is so effective. Those without an ability with speech do not grasp how easy it is for those with an ability with language to manipulate them; they do not even believe that such a manipulation is possible. The Kauravas do not understand the power of words to manipulate people and to change history; they fail to grasp the potential for deceit in words and this will lead to their downfall. Karṇa, though not fully a kṣatriya himself, espouses kṣatriya virtues, virtues that do not include an ability with language. Karṇa believes that kṣatriyas are not skilled enough in language to deceive others through a pretended truth speech. Yet, as we have seen, Yudhiṣṭhira has this ability with language. He is marked as different from other kṣatriyas in the Mahābhārata because of his ability with speech. Karṇa's inability with language and his lack of understanding with those who can use language make him an easy target for Yudhiṣṭhira. Karṇa and the other Kauravas will believe that Yudhiṣṭhira is truthful, a prime weapon for Yudhiṣṭhira once the war begins.

4.3 Speech, Deceit and the Battlefield

That Yudhiṣṭhira uses deceit in the Mahābhārata war has been demonstrated by Alf Hiltebeitel:

“[t]he *Mahābhārata* war is the scene of numerous questionable acts which the text does not hesitate to call sins. Nearly all are committed by heroes on the Pāṇḍava side, and the guiding hand seems almost always to be that of Kṛṣṇa. There is, however, in one set of incidents, a definite and consistent series of involvements by two figures: Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira. (1976:244)

Hiltebeitel goes on to explain that Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers use deceit on the battlefield to win the war, but that this deceit is sanctioned by Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of Viṣṇu (1976:244-256). It is Kṛṣṇa's presence in the Epic which prompts scholars like Hiltebeitel and Madeleine Biardeau to call the Mahābhārata: “a work of *bhakti* through and through” (Hiltebeitel 1984:1). In the war Yudhiṣṭhira's deceit becomes an act of *bhakti*; his obedience to Kṛṣṇa is interpreted as recognition of Kṛṣṇa's divinity, which in turn legitimates King Dharma's actions (Gitomer 1992:224). This type of sanctioned deceit by Yudhiṣṭhira has been well studied by Hiltebeitel and we need not dwell on it.

What we need to note is that most scholars accept that before the war Yudhiṣṭhira's dharmic appearance was legitimate, I have tried to show this assumption to be faulty.

The form of deceit Yudhiṣṭhira uses in battle is explicit. As we have seen, the deceit of Yudhiṣṭhira in the forest is more subtle and is never explicitly treated of by our narrator. The deceit of the forest is also without the legitimation of Kṛṣṇa; this deceit is Yudhiṣṭhira's own design and as such more damaging to his status as King Dharma. However, these two forms of deceit are related. The dharmic guise of the forest leads into the deceit of the battlefield. It is only by understanding the basis of Yudhiṣṭhira's guise and speech in the forest that we can understand how his deceit works on the battlefield.

4.3.1 The Death of Bhīṣma

It is through his reputation as King Dharma that Yudhiṣṭhira is able to manipulate and defeat a number of the Kaurava generals. Let us begin with Bhīṣma, a brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and a general on the Kaurava side. At one point, before the birth of the Pāṇḍavas, Bhīṣma ruled over the Kuru kingdom as a regent for Prince Vicitravīrya who was too young to take the throne (1.95.10-14). Vicitravīrya dies before he can take the throne leaving Bhīṣma to continue the line, something his family members pressure him to do:

Your brother's queens, the good daughters of the king of the Kāśis, both lovely and in the bloom of their youth, are yearning for sons, Bhārata! Beget children on them, so that our line may continue, beget them at my behest, lord. Pray carry out the Law that applies here. Be consecrated as king of the realm, rule the Bhāratas, take a wife by the Law, lest you drown your forebears! (1.97.9-11)

Bhīṣma is regarded by all to be lawful and a keeper of truth. He has no children and will not take the throne permanently even under this pressure because he has made a vow to give up these worldly things. He argues that he cannot break his word, a point he makes to his family just after the narrator has alluded to Bhīṣma's lawfulness:

When he [Bhīṣma] was so being urged by his mother and kinsmen, O scourge of your foes, the law-minded Bhīṣma gave his lawlike reply. "Doubtless that is the highest Law that you have quoted to me, mother. Yet you know the sovereign vow I have sworn concerning offspring.... Here I vow my truth, again, Satyavatī [Bhīṣma's mother] -- I shall forsake the three worlds, and the sovereignty of the Gods, or whatever surpasses both, before I forsake my word!... Queen, look to the Laws lest you bring ruin to us all! Breaking his word is not counted among the Laws of the baron!" (1.97.13-15, 24)

Bhīṣma keeps his word, not having children nor ruling the kingdom.

Bhīṣma's past history illustrates his devotion to keeping his personal dharma, here a form of truth speech -- a vow. What his history also suggests is that truth speech and keeping one's vows are incompatible with kingship, especially when a kingdom is in crisis. Bhīṣma is an ideal kṣatriya, but maintaining this truth excludes him from kingship.

We should also note the differences between a warrior like Śalya and Bhīṣma. Śalya assumes he is only responsible for the exact wording of his vow, allowing him to manipulate how he will carry that vow out. Each new context that differs from the exact wording of the vow allows Śalya to subvert the intent of the vow. Bhīṣma does not share Śalya's assumption. Bhīṣma thinks like a brahmin in that he assumes his vow is connected to truth, order and dharma and feels he is bound to his promise in all the contexts he enters and not just the exact wording of the vow. He does not try to find a way around his vow. There are warriors in the Mahābhārata who keep their word and are speakers of truth, but they are not kings and they will not survive the war.

It is Bhīṣma's allegiance to keeping his vows that is his downfall in the war. This process begins before the actual fighting. When the two armies are camped across from each other, Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers cross the no-man's-land between the two armies and pay honour to the Kaurava generals: Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Kṛpa and Śalya. Yudhiṣṭhira approaches Bhīṣma and asks for a blessing which he receives as well as an offer of a boon (Roy 1896, Vol.5:106-107). Bhīṣma offers his boon because he supports the Pāṇḍava side, but explains that he is bound to the Kauravas because they support him economically:

I am gratified (with thee), O son. Do battle, and obtain victory, O son of Pāṇḍu. What else may be desired by thee, obtain thou in battle. Solicit also the boon, O son of Pritha, which thou desirest to have from us. If it happens so, O great king, then defeat will not be thine. A man is the slave of wealth, but wealth is no one's slave. This is very true, O king. I have been bound by the Kauravas with (their) wealth. It is for this, O son of Kuru's race, that like a eunuch I am uttering these words, *vis.*, -- Bound I am by the Kauravas with wealth. Battle excepted, what dost thou desire? (Roy 1896, Vol.5:106-107)

Clearly, Bhīṣma supports the Pāṇḍavas over the Kauravas, but what we must question is why? My exploration of Bhīṣma's devotion to his own vow and truth speech leads towards a potential answer.

Bhīṣma feels more loyalty to Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers because of their lawful and truthful reputation. This reputation is largely unfounded, but Bhīṣma is a member of the Kaurava court and he has seen esteemed brahmins like Maitreya proclaim Yudhiṣṭhira's apparent dharma and punish Duryodhana's apparent adharma. The support of brahmins has given a powerful legitimation to Yudhiṣṭhira's title of King Dharma. Given Bhīṣma's devotion to the truth, it should not surprise us that his heart lies with Yudhiṣṭhira. Bhīṣma's support of Yudhiṣṭhira is based on King Dharma's brahminical guise.

Bhīṣma has promised Yudhiṣṭhira a boon and he will keep his vow. Yudhiṣṭhira asks how Bhīṣma can be killed in battle to which he replies: "I do not see the person, O sire, who can vanquish me in battle. The time also of my death is not yet come to me once again" (Roy 1896, Vol.5:107). Bhīṣma has not delivered on his boon, but he will give a true answer later in the parvan. Once the war begins Bhīṣma proves to be too much for the Paṇḍavas: "king Yudhishtira, seeing that twilight had come and that his own troops, slaughtered by Bhishma, had thrown aside their weapons, and that stricken with fear, and turned off the field, they were seeking to flee away... ordered the troops to be withdrawn" (Roy 1896, Vol.5:287). Facing defeat at Bhīṣma's hands, Yudhiṣṭhira decides he will return to Bhīṣma's camp and ask him to fulfil his boon. Kṛṣṇa approves of this strategy telling King Dharma: "[r]epair unto that son of the Ocean-going (Ganga) [i.e. Bhīṣma the son of Ganga], for asking him about the means of his death. Asked by thee, in particular, he will certainly say the truth" (Roy 1896, Vol.5:289). Kṛṣṇa's words indicate that Bhīṣma has a particular affection for King Dharma, supposedly a fellow speaker of truth. What Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa propose to do is to take advantage of Bhīṣma's truth and use his willingness to keep a vow in order to bring about his death, a clear example of their unrighteousness. Yudhiṣṭhira's appearance as King Dharma is close to Bhīṣma's character. Both are famed for keeping the truth and for being dharmic, but as we have seen dharmic warriors who keep their word are defeated by those who use deceit. It is Yudhiṣṭhira's falsely assumed guise that brings about Bhīṣma's boon. It is Yudhiṣṭhira's knowledge of speech and his

ability to lower his enemies' guard through his righteous guise that allows him to find success with Bhīṣma without fighting him.

Thus, Yudhiṣṭhira goes to Bhīṣma and asks him how he is to be killed after which Bhīṣma maps out for the king just how such a feat can be achieved (Roy 1896, Vol.5:290-292). Yudhiṣṭhira carries out Bhīṣma's plan and the great warrior dies. Bhīṣma is true to his word and the Epic commends his virtue with comments like: "[t]his son of Śamtanu whose word is his strength, is keeping faith with his word" (1.99.30) Bhīṣma is also the narrator of the Śantiparvan where he teaches Yudhiṣṭhira *rājadharmā* and *upaddharma*. However, even with all the fame Bhīṣma achieves, his allegiance to the truth only results in earthly failure. What the Epic continually tells us is in an implicit way is that a king cannot succeed if he is completely devoted to truth and dharma. The simple fact that Yudhiṣṭhira ultimately succeeds in the Epic should indicate that his title of King Dharma is a deceitful tool and not a true allegiance to the truth such as we find in Bhīṣma.

4.3.2 The Death of Droṇa

What is odd, from my perspective, is that none of Yudhiṣṭhira's enemies recognize his deceit. They assume that he is King Dharma and will speak the truth in accord with his reputation. It is these assumptions that Yudhiṣṭhira encourages which allows him to succeed in the Epic and be a "true" king, that is a king who achieves victory on the battlefield and rules as absolute sovereign over his realm. One of the best examples of someone Yudhiṣṭhira manipulates in this manner is Droṇa.

Droṇa is an unusual character; he is a brahmin, but he is very skilled with weapons. He teaches the five Pāṇḍavas and the young Kauravas how to use weapons and his best student is Arjuna. So great is Arjuna's ability with weapons and so great his devotion to Droṇa that his master promises the young Pāṇḍava: "I shall do anything to see that no archer on earth shall ever be your equal, I promise you" (1.123.5)! One day, a kṣatriya named Ekalavya comes to Droṇa for instruction in archery, but the master refuses this new student who touches his head to Droṇa's feet and leaves for the forest. While in the forest, Ekalavya builds a clay image of Droṇa and reveres the image as though it were his living teacher. He spends his days working at archery and "so great was his faith, and so

sublime his discipline, that he acquired a superb deftness at fixing arrow to bowstring, aiming it, and releasing it” (1.123.14). Ekalavya becomes so good with a bow that when Arjuna stumbles across him in the forest he realizes that Ekalavya is better than him. Arjuna also finds out that the forest dweller believes his guru to be Droṇa. Arjuna finds Droṇa and tells him: “‘Didn’t you once embrace me when I was alone and tell me fondly that no pupil of yours would ever excel me? Then how is it that you have another powerful pupil who excels me, who excels all the world -- the son of the Niṣāda chief’ (1.123.26-27)? Once reminded of his promise, Droṇa and Arjuna travel to Ekalavya, who receives his guru with due honour. Droṇa then tells Ekalavya: “‘[i]f you are my pupil, then give me at once my fee (1.123.34)’”. Ekalavya enthusiastically agrees telling Droṇa that there is nothing he would not give: “‘there is nothing I shall withhold from my guru’” (1.123.35). Droṇa asks for his right thumb and without hesitation Ekalavya cuts off his thumb and hands it to his guru. Without this thumb he is slower and less accurate with his bow and Arjuna is his better. We are told of Ekalavya as he cuts off his thumb that he “kept his promise [to give anything], forever devoted to the truth” (1.123.35) and of Droṇa we are told “and Droṇa’s word was proved true: no one bested Arjuna” (1.123.37). Droṇa’s actions in this story may not be wholly good, but it demonstrates that he has a brahmin’s understanding of speech and truth. He does his utmost to ensure that his own words are true and assumes that Ekalavya will also be true to his word. Droṇa has brahminical expectations of those who are called truth speakers and these expectations apply especially to King Dharma.

We get our first hint of Droṇa’s understanding of Yudhiṣṭhira when King Dharma crosses the battlefield before the fighting commences to speak with the Kaurava generals. As with Bhiṣma, Yudhiṣṭhira approaches Droṇa, honours him and is told much the same thing that Bhiṣma told him: “I am... gratified, O Yudhishtira, and honoured by thee, O sinless one. I permit thee, fight and obtain victory. I will also fulfil thy wish.... A man is the slave of wealth, but wealth is not one’s slave. This is quite true, O king! Bound I have been with (their) wealth by the Kauravas” (Roy 1896, Vol.5:108)!

Droṇa thinks highly of Yudhiṣṭhira and calls him “sinless one.” He also assumes that Kṛṣṇa is righteous: “[v]ictory, O king, is certain for thee that hast Hari for thy counsellor. I (also) grant that thou wilt vanquish thy foes in battle. Thither where righteousness is, thither is Krishna, and thither where Krishna is, thither is victory” (Roy 1896, Vol.5:108). Droṇa seems to assume that both Kṛṣṇa and Yudhiṣṭhira are completely righteous -- nothing could be further from the truth. Yudhiṣṭhira then asks for his boon, which is how he can defeat Droṇa, and true to his word the brahmin answers:

The foe, O sire, I see not who may slay me while standing in battle I am engaged in fight, with wrath excited, and scattering (my) arrow showers continually. Except when address for death O king, having abandoned my arms and withdrawn (in *Yoga* meditation) from surrounding sights, none will be able to slay me. This that I tell thee is true. I also tell thee truly that I will cast off my arms in battle, having heard something very disagreeable from some one of credible speech. (Roy 1896, Vol.5:108)

The key here is “some one of credible speech.” If someone who Droṇa believes is a speaker of truth tells him bad news of death, he will stop fighting and sit in meditation until killed. We may see the writing on the wall, but let us see how Droṇa’s death plays itself out.

As with Bhīṣma, Droṇa is laying waste to the Pāṇḍava army and something must be done to bring an end to him. It is a time of crisis and from what we have seen of Yudhiṣṭhira so far in this context we can expect him to be immoral. Kṛṣṇa makes the first suggestion to Yudhiṣṭhira: “[s]ave us, then, from Drona. Under such circumstances, falshood is better than truth. By telling an untruth for saving a life, one is not touched by sin” (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448). At this idea Bhīma recounts that he has already tried untruth:

As soon, O monarch, as I heard of the means by which the high-souled Drona might be slain, putting forth my prowess in battle, I immediately slew a mighty elephant.... I then went to Drona and told him, ‘Aswatthaman has been slain. O Brahmana! Cease, then, to fight. Verily, O bull among men, the preceptor did not believe in the truth of my words. (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448)

The elephant Bhīma killed is called Aśvatthāman, which is also the name of Droṇa’s son. Bhīma has tried to trick Droṇa into believing that his son is dead. The attempt fails because Bhīma is not known as a speaker of truth. Yudhiṣṭhira is known as a speaker of truth; a point Bhīma is well aware of:

“[*Bhīma said*] desirous of victory as thou art, accept the advice of Govinda [Kṛṣṇa]. Tell Drona, O king, that the son of Saradwat’s daughter is no more. Told by thee, that bull among Brahmanas will

never fight. Thou, O ruler of men, art reputed to be truthful in the three worlds” (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448). Yudhiṣṭhira decides he will go ahead with the plan even though, we are told, he fears “untruth” (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448). Clearly, he does not fear untruth enough to not go ahead with the lie and we are told:

Fearing to utter an untruth, but earnestly desirous of victory, Yudhisthira distinctly said that Aswatthaman was dead, adding indistinctly the word *elephant* (after the name). Before this, Yudhishtira’s car had stayed at a height of four fingers breadth from the surface of the earth; after, however, he had said that untruth, his (vehicle and) animals touched the earth. Hearing those words from Yudhishtira, the mighty car-warrior Drona, afflicted with grief, for the (supposed) death of his son, yielded to the influence of despair. (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448)

Droṇa lays down his weapons and adopts a yogic position and is killed by the Pāñcālā prince Dhr̥ṣṭadyumna. If there is any doubt that it is Yudhiṣṭhira’s reputation as a truth speaker that makes Droṇa believe the deceit; Saṃjaya, who is narrating the events of the battle to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, tells the blind king: “Droṇa had firm knowledge [*sthira buddhir*]²⁸ that Yudhiṣṭhira would not speak an untruth [*anṛtam*], even for the sake of sovereignty of the three worlds [*trayāṇāmapi lokānāmaīśvaryaṛthe*]. Therefore he asked him especially, and no one else, for in this Pāṇḍava, beginning with childhood, Droṇa surely had his hope for truth” (6.164.95-96 quoted in Hildebeitel 1976:251). However, as we have already seen, Yudhiṣṭhira commits this untruth for sovereignty: “earnestly desirous of victory...”. It is victory that has motivated Yudhiṣṭhira since his defeat in the dicing hall and his actions have been full of deceit since that incident. Hildebeitel has noted this untruth of Yudhiṣṭhira in the war (1976:252), but we have a means of explaining how this untruth works, that it has a history beyond the battle; it is rooted in Yudhiṣṭhira’s ability with words and his assumed brahmin-like guise. In this scene with Droṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira is anything but a speaker of truth. The difference between Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira is only one of reputation. They both try the same untruth, but Yudhiṣṭhira’s reputation makes his attempt successful. Droṇa carries certain assumptions about someone called a speaker of truth and he is convinced that Yudhiṣṭhira is a speaker of truth. Here, Yudhiṣṭhira explicitly manipulates Droṇa through his supposed connection to truth speech and kills the brahmin through a lie. Finally, we note that Yudhiṣṭhira’s success on the battlefield is based

²⁸ These sanskrit inclusions and those that follow in this quote are supplied by Hildebeitel.

in speech. He understands his opponents' commitment to vows, truth and their perception of himself and uses these elements, all backed by speech and appearance, to defeat his enemies. Throughout the Epic, even though it is not a kṣatriya virtue, a king who has an ability with speech gains victory by knowing how to use that gift to deceive others.

What I have presented thus far is an alternate reading of Yudhiṣṭhira and his status as King Dharma. I have demonstrated that Yudhiṣṭhira uses deceit to regain the throne and win the Mahābhārata war. It is largely accepted by scholars that Yudhiṣṭhira employs adharma while on the battlefield, but I have demonstrated that his adharma exists well before the battlefield and the sanctioning of Kṛṣṇa. I have also demonstrated that this image of King Dharma is one that Vaiśampāyana encourages to the exclusion of other readings. I think, however, that I have presented an alternate reading of the Epic that is encouraged by certain elements of the Epic. Stories like the boar and the yakṣa emphasize Yudhiṣṭhira's speech and encourage us to examine the legitimacy of his words and his status as King Dharma. These stories do not encourage Yudhiṣṭhira to follow his rāja dharma, but encourage him to use his brahmin-like guise and ability with speech to escape danger. It is almost as though an element of the text is training Yudhiṣṭhira for his eventual deceit in battle. My reading of Yudhiṣṭhira suggests that kings cannot be dharmic in the way Vaiśampāyana wants, but must employ deceit in attaining success. King Dharma is a model king in the Epic not because he is dharmic, but because he is an example of how to use deceit successfully. He is a pragmatic guide for kings, a "true" king.

Chapter 5: “The Victory of Indra”

In the previous chapter I argued that my reading of Yudhiṣṭhira is one that certain elements of the Mahābhārata encourage. In this chapter I hope to demonstrate how my analysis of speech and Yudhiṣṭhira works in the context of another story from the Epic. I will investigate a story called “The Victory of Indra” found in Book Five of the Epic. The story is narrated to Yudhiṣṭhira by Śalya just after Śalya has agreed to deceive Duryodhana. Śalya introduces this story as a comfort to King Dharma because it describes how Indra got into and out of trouble: “[I]isten, king, to the ancient story of yore, how Indra and his wife found trouble, O Bhārata” (5.9.2). Yet, the story is about much more. In this story we find an encapsulated form of the “true” king I argued for in the last chapter and a summary version of my account of Yudhiṣṭhira. In this story we will find a number of the themes that have arisen in my investigation of kingly speech in the Mahābhārata, especially the use of speech and deceit. In many ways “The Victory of Indra” encapsulates my thesis and presents a clear example of a portion of the text which supports my reading of a “true” king in the Epic.

5.1 Truth Speech in “The Victory of Indra”

Of speech and its role in the Mahābhārata David Shulman has the following to say:

Let us assume, for the moment, that the world is impenetrably enigmatic; that blindness is far more than a metaphor for human perception, the question being merely one of the degree of its actualization in each person; that any defined path, any conception of absolute values, any statement of identity -- all inevitably and insidiously subvert themselves in real experience; and that language, at least in its referential mode, is consistently shown to abet this subversion. (Shulman 151:1996)

The situation David Shulman describes is an important element in the story “The Victory of Indra”.

One of the main themes in this story is truth speech. Most of the characters in the text claim at one point or another to be speaking the truth. However, as Shulman's quote suggests, these “absolute values, [and] any statement of identity” are subverted in part because of a character's inability to live out the truth he speaks of and the actual use or, as I will suggest, abuse of language in such truth claims. A gap is created in this story between speaking the truth, a truth that is assumed to be a part of a brahminical understanding of truth, and the way characters live out this truth. This brahminical

understanding of truth subverts itself in the gap between speech and action because most of the characters in this story are not able to, and many never intended to, carry out the actions their speeches implied. In this regard the actions of these characters are much like Yudhiṣṭhira's. These characters use people's assumptions about what it means to make a vow and speak the truth against their enemies.

Those characters in the story who recognize that truth statements do not, in practice, directly relate to brahminical truth and speech, are able to create a number of relative truths specific to one's position in society and the circumstances of a given situation. Like Yudhiṣṭhira, these characters are context sensitive and they are constantly adjusting themselves to each new context. Such characters recognize what Shulman has pointed out, that words can play a part in creating these lesser truths. Those characters who are able to manipulate language in the space created between a statement and the acting out of that utterance gain power within the text. As I have suggested, speaking the truth takes on many forms in the story and a careful study of its nuances can help us to understand the nature of the various characters we encounter in a story like "The Victory of Indra" and how speech functions in the Epic. I shall also investigate these various truths and attempt to locate an ultimate Truth which can act as a measure with which we can judge the various truth statements made by individuals in the text. In this part of the chapter I will try to find an answer to the question of how we know when someone speaks the truth in the Epic.

The second topic I will deal with is power and speech. The text gives a great deal of power to the spoken word: "the role of linguistic articulation is actually seen by the text as endowed with serious, effective power" (Shulman 1996:157). Certain forms of speech are seen as binding characters to the very meaning of the words they speak. It is as though certain words, usually those spoken as an oath or promise, have a separate power once spoken that forces the speaker to abide by their meaning. However, as I have suggested in my introduction, there are certain characters who recognize that a gap exists between speech and action and are able to use that gap to gain power. I shall begin by

describing some of the episodes in the story and after each episode I shall describe its important features in relation to the ideas I have just outlined.

The story begins with "Tvāṣṭar Prajāpati, the best of the Gods and a great ascetic" (5.9.3-4), who creates a three-headed son to spite Indra. Triśiras, the three-headed being, became powerful because he was a "controlled ascetic, intent on law and austerity" (5.9.5). Indra fears that Triśiras may take his place as king of heaven and decides to send the Apsarās to seduce him. The attempt fails because "[i]t is impossible to sway this unapproachable man from his self-control" (5.9.19). After this failure Indra decides he must kill Triśiras and does so by striking him with a thunderbolt. Indra then tries to convince a woodcutter to cut off Triśiras' heads, which he does, but it is made clear during this episode that Indra's action is considered to be "brahmin murder" (5.9.30).

One of the main themes of this story is established from its opening sequence: a brahminical -- kingship conflict. Those capable of challenging Indra are not his fellow warriors, but ascetics practised in austerity. Indra recognizes the source of Triśiras' power and attempts to counter it with the Apsarās; their failure to draw him away from his austerities forces Indra to commit brahmin murder before the ascetic becomes too powerful. This conflict will progress through the story to include another challenge to Indra's authority and it will also illustrate some basic differences of truth speech between brahmins and ksatriyas within the story. Initially, Indra has taken a different approach than Yudhiṣṭhira in dealing with brahmins. While Yudhiṣṭhira co-operates with brahmins and becomes brahmin-like, Indra counters brahminical prowess with warrior might. As we have seen in the Mahābhārata, the approach Indra employs cannot work. We have repeatedly seen that a warrior-king must seek the support of brahmins, and this fact alone should alert us to Indra's eventual fall.

The story continues with an enraged Tvāṣṭar Prajāpati who creates another being, Vṛtra, to kill Indra. Vṛtra is made powerful by Tvāṣṭar's austerity: "[e]nemy of Indra, grow by the power of my austerity" (5.9.44)! Vṛtra and Indra battle for a long period until "Vṛtra burgeoning with strength, swelled in that battle by the power of Tvāṣṭar's austerities, Śakra wisely retreated" (5.9.50). While

Vṛtra is not a brahmin, his power is based on austerity, something the Mahābhārata repeatedly associates with brahmins and as such it is not something Indra can defeat on his own. Indra and the gods do not know how to defeat Vṛtra so they go to Viṣṇu for advice.

Viṣṇu is described as "sovereign of the Gods" (5.10.5), and "the Great God, honoured by all the worlds. Be thou the recourse of Indra and the Gods, O highest of the Immortals" (5.10.9). When asked how the gods can slay Vṛtra, Viṣṇu answers "[o]f necessity I must do what is most beneficial to you...Act toward him with conciliation, then you shall vanquish him. By virtue of my splendour, O Gods, Śakra will proceed and I shall invisibly enter his supreme weapon, the thunderbolt" (5.10.10-14). He then sends the Gods to contract a peace between Vṛtra and Indra.

The theme of renunciation verses kingly power continues with the conflict between Indra and Vṛtra. The stakes have been raised because Indra is unable to defeat Vṛtra, "[i]n older times I [Indra] was capable of doing it, but now I am impotent" (5.10.1). Larger themes are being worked out in this story. Indra, the god of the sacrifice, has lost his power and risks losing his place to the new sacrifice: the internal fire of the ascetic (Masefield 1989:xix-xx). Indra must turn to another new religious power to counter Vṛtra: Viṣṇu. While Indra is the king of the gods, Viṣṇu is the "sovereign of the Gods" (5.10.5). Viṣṇu is the one capable of defeating Vṛtra, the clear superior of Indra. In the context of the Mahābhārata we must remember that Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa are one and the same. There is a parallel between this story and that of Yudhiṣṭhira. When Yudhiṣṭhira fails in battle he turns to the supreme divinity Kṛṣṇa for help. Here Indra and the gods turn to the supreme divinity of Viṣṇu. As with the advice Kṛṣṇa gave Yudhiṣṭhira, the advice Viṣṇu gives to Indra supports the use of deceit by a king. The gods are to act with conciliation towards Vṛtra and when his guard is down they are to kill him.

Viṣṇu's superiority leads to the question: is he the Truth in this story by which other truths can be measured. Does this primary force in the Epic encourage *satya*, *ṛta* and *dharma* or is he a force that encourages kingly deceit. Later in the story the gods will call Viṣṇu a speaker of truth: "[a]fter hearing this propitious and truthful speech of Viṣṇu" (5.13.15). He is one of only three speakers in

the story whom other people call a speaker of truth. Having others say Viṣṇu is a speaker of truth clearly separates him from the vast array of characters in the story who call themselves speakers of truth. Viṣṇu's reputation appears to support him as the Truth in this story; however, if we examine his actions his reputation as a speaker of truth is questionable.

Viṣṇu allows for deceit when the gods come to him for advice, which he justifies with "[o]f necessity I must do what is most beneficial to you" (5.10.10). The gods may consider Viṣṇu a speaker of truth because he brings about the defeat of Vṛtra; in this his deeds do correlate with his words, but he cannot be an ultimate representative of Truth, because all we ever see Viṣṇu engaging in is deceit. As with Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata war, Viṣṇu pushes characters and kings towards deceit.

Viṣṇu demonstrates an important aspect of truth speech within this story and in the Mahābhārata in general. It would be easy to assume that Viṣṇu, given his position as sovereign of the gods, represents the ultimate Truth in this story. It is natural to assume his speech is true just as we might assume that King Dharma, "the Law-wise" (1.144.10) and a "truthful man" (1.129.5) also speaks the truth. But, Viṣṇu is just one of many relative truths, truths that fit a certain situation or social group within the story. Those who know how to manipulate language to gain power within the story will prey on the assumptions other people make about those who claim to speak the truth. Actions speak much louder than the truth people speak in this story and words only work to undermine the truth spoken by various characters. Those who assume that a spoken truth is not subject to reinterpretation when it is transferred to the active world will lose their power in this story.

The story continues with the gods trying to convince Vṛtra of Indra's peaceful intentions. To convince Vṛtra the gods tell him: "Indra is respected by the strict and is the abode of those who are great spirited; for he is a speaker of the truth, undejected, wise in the Law" (5.10.25-27). Based on this Vṛtra agrees to the peace providing the following compact is made: "I [Vṛtra] am not to be slain by Śakra and the Gods with matter dry or wet, rock or wood, thunderbolt or weapon, by day or by night" (5.10.30). Everyone agrees to the compact and Vṛtra is happy and confident in the power of

the compact. Indra, however, is not happy, being "filled with resentment, [he] remained constantly on the alert, pondering on the means that were appropriate for the killing of Vṛtra" (5.10.33).

One day Vṛtra is on the ocean shore at twilight and Indra thinks: "[i]t is grisly twilight now, and neither day nor night. I surely can kill him now, my all-grasping enemy! If I do not kill Vṛtra with deceit today, that powerful and gigantic great Asura, I shall find no rest" (5.10.35). He sees foam in the ocean and thinks: "[t]his is neither dry nor wet, nor is it a weapon. I shall throw it at Vṛtra, then he shall instantly perish" (5.10.33-34). He throws his thunderbolt covered with foam with Viṣṇu in it and kills Vṛtra. While the gods rejoice at Vṛtra's fall, Indra is "overcome by his falsehood and became greatly depressed; he had already taken on the burden of brahmin murder in the case of Trisiras" (5.10.43-44). Indra leaves his realm and hides in "the Waters, writhing like a snake" (5.10.44).

In this section of the story Indra is called "a speaker of the truth" and "wise in the Law." It is clear from how the story develops that Indra speaks no truth in a brahminical sense. When the gods claim Indra is a truth speaker, they are willingly trying to deceive Vṛtra into believing in the fabricated peace. They are trying to get his guard down so that he will be easier to defeat. There is no doubt on the part of the gods that Indra will act against the truth of the peace agreement. However, in a way, Indra does keep part of the truth of the agreement, for he does keep the exact wording of the agreement or vow. He is true to the specific wording of the agreement; it is the spirit of the agreement he violates. We have already seen this understanding of vows from the narrator of this story: Śalya. Śalya is trying to validate his own abuse of vows by giving his actions a divine precedent.

Once the compact has been made and Vṛtra's guard is down, Indra cannot simply violate the compact and kill him in anyway he pleases. It is as though the words of the compact have real power: "the role of linguistic articulation is actually seen by the text [Mahābhārata] as endowed with serious, effective power.... There seems to be a way to use language not only to express truth, but also to make it work upon the person and/or the world" (Shulman 1996:157, 164). Indra cannot contravene the wording of the compact because once spoken it has real power. As the story demonstrates, the power of the compact does not mean Vṛtra is safe. Yet, Vṛtra seems to assume he is safe. He regards his

compact in a brahminical way and he regards Indra as a speaker of truth. Vṛtra assumes that such a lawful person will respect the assumptions of truth and dharma that go with a vow, and thinks it closes off any possibility of Indra's killing him, but Indra's truth and law are only found in his reputation which is not backed by his actions. Indra's reputation causes Vṛtra to let his defences down.

The compact does not create an impenetrable barrier for Indra; this is a barrier that can be spoken around and manouvoured around. Vṛtra's assumptions about vows, speech and people who apparently speak the truth bring about his downfall, just as the same assumptions brought about Bhiṣma's and Droṇa's fall. Vṛtra fails to recognize that a gap exists between linguistic statement and action. That gap must be filled with a near constant supply of new utterances and qualifications in order to make the original utterance fit into a never ending list of new circumstances. The original utterance never envisioned such circumstances as twilight and ocean foam.

In this story not to recognize that a vast number of actions can fulfil a single statement due to varying contexts is not to recognize death is upon you. As in a *brahmodya*, silence in this story is deadly. One must be continually prepared to present linguistic qualifications and counters to ensure one's original statement crosses the bridge between statement and action (Shulman 1996:154). Indra seems well aware that the gap between statement and action is full of opportunity to subvert the intention of the compact: "Śakra, pondering on the means that were appropriate for the killing of Vṛtra, the slayer of Vala and Vṛtra [Indra], perturbed, kept watching for an opening" (10.33). Indra's opportunity comes when a context arises that the compact did not anticipate and Indra is able to act in such a way that sees the lettering of the compact remain true, but its intention (Indra is not to kill Vṛtra) is subverted.

Indra and Yudhiṣṭhira are, then, very much alike. They both demonstrate an ability with language that allows them to defeat their enemies. For both of them context, language and deceit go hand in hand. Each new context opens a door to subvert the meaning and intention of one's past words. Each new context allows for, and at times demands, deceit, especially when one's enemy does

not understand the changing conditions of context and has brahminical assumptions about speech. In Epic mythology Indra and Yudhiṣṭhira are literally the same as the story “The Five Indras” demonstrates. The parallels between this story and Yudhiṣṭhira’s story should not be taken lightly, especially when it comes to the character of the two kings.

We must also consider the context of the story. The Śalya incident is the first truly explicit use of deceit by Yudhiṣṭhira that the text gives us following Yudhiṣṭhira’s exile. This story also treats Indra’s adharma in an open fashion. Yudhiṣṭhira’s explicit deceits tend to make our redactors nervous. They surround such incidents with Kṛṣṇa’s approval and often present the deceit as someone else’s idea that Yudhiṣṭhira reluctantly follows. With Yudhiṣṭhira’s encouragement of Śalya’s abuse of his vow to Duryodhana, however, we find explicit deceit that is clearly Yudhiṣṭhira’s idea and without clear approval from Kṛṣṇa. This use of explicit deceit also falls out of the context of battle which is another means used to explain Yudhiṣṭhira’s deceit. In some ways “The Victory of Indra” tries to make up for these absences by presenting Viṣṇu as a prime supporter of deceit. Yet, there is a different tone taken in this story than what we see through the additional comments of the narrator Vaiśampāyana. For instance, in the Droṇaparvan when Yudhiṣṭhira tells Droṇa that Aśvatthāman is dead we read: “[f]earing to utter an untruth, but earnestly desirous of victory, Yudhiṣṭhira distinctly said that Aswatthaman was dead, adding indistinctly the word *elephant*” (Roy 1896, Vol.6:448). The character Yudhiṣṭhira does not actually tell us he fears untruth or that he desires victory. These additional comments are supplied by Vaiśampāyana to lessen the impact of Yudhiṣṭhira’s immorality. Indra’s acts of adharma are not rationalized in anyway nor does our narrator, Śalya, point to these actions as wrong or unkingly. Much of this difference may be due to our warrior-king narrator who clearly supports the use of kingly deceit.¹ “The Victory of Indra” points to an understanding of kingship which question Vaiśampāyana’s claims about Yudhiṣṭhira and claims of dharmic kingship in general. This story assumes that a king should use deceit and that using the title of “speaker of

¹ There are two levels of narration in this story. Śalya narrates this story to Yudhiṣṭhira, but Vaiśampāyana is still in turn narrating the story to us. Thus, Vaiśampāyana tells the tale that Śalya told Yudhiṣṭhira.

truth” and “wise in the Law” (5.10.27) to bring about that deceit is acceptable. This story treats in an explicit fashion what I have argued Yudhiṣṭhira’s story in the forest presents in an implicit fashion. Yudhiṣṭhira has also used and abused his false reputation as a speaker of truth. “The Victory of Indra” gives us a kṣatriyan appraisal of Yudhiṣṭhira’s actions in an allegorical fashion.

The story continues with the gods offering the kingship of the gods to Nahuṣa, a human king, to whom they give the following boon: “[i]f Gods, Dānavas, Yakṣas, Seers, Rākṣasas, Ancestors, Gandharvas, and Ghosts come within your range of vision, you shall with your eyes seize their splendour for your own and become strong” (5.11.6). Nahuṣa accepts the kingship, but quickly becomes “lust-driven” (5.11.7). One day he sees Śacī, Indra’s wife, and demands: “[w]hy doesn’t this Goddess, the queen of Indra, wait on me? I am the Indra of the Gods and the sovereign of the world! Śacī must come to my house at once” (5.11.14-15). These actions of Nahuṣa echo Duryodhana’s treatment of Draupadī. Like Duryodhana, Nahuṣa is depicted as adharmic, and therefore a poor king. That Indra is also adharmic and a king does not seem to enter into Śalya’s description of events.

Śacī goes to Bṛhaspati, a brahmin and priest of the gods, for protection:

[p]rotect me from Nahuṣa, brahmin, I seek shelter with you! You always say that I am endowed with all marks that betoken luck, Brahmā; you say that as the beloved of the king of the Gods I partake of perfect bliss, and that, being a devoted wife avowed to her husband, I shall never be a widow. So have you spoken before -- now make your words come true! Never before my lord, have you spoken idly; may it therefore be true what you have said. (5.11.16-20)

Bṛhaspati responds with: “Goddess, what I have said of you shall certainly be true. Soon you shall see the king of the Gods Indra return here. I tell you the truth, you have nothing to fear from Nahuṣa, I shall shortly reunite you with Śakra” (5.11.20). Bṛhaspati gives her shelter, which greatly angers Nahuṣa who sends the gods to get Śacī. Bṛhaspati refuses to let her go saying: “I do not give you up, blameless woman, who are law-wise and law-wonted. Especially being a brahmin, I do not want to do the forbidden, for I have heard the Law, practice truth, and know the ordinance of the Law. I shall not do it [hand Śacī over]” (5.12.16-18).

It may seem odd that Śacī goes to Bṛhaspati, a brahmin, for protection. Protection was usually the responsibility of the king or some other member of the kṣatriya caste. Her reason for choosing

Br̥haspati, however, becomes evident as she speaks to him: [s]o have you spoken before -- now make your words come true! Never before, my Lord, have you spoken idly; may it therefore be true what you have said" (5.11.20). Br̥haspati appears to have a reputation for making his words come true. Not only does he speak the truth, but he also tells us he "practice[s] truth" (5.12.18). Indeed, he seems true to his word in not abandoning Śacī and everything he tells her will come to pass does so. As the example of Indra's compact with Vṛtra demonstrates, if she had gone to a kṣatriya for shelter she would not have had the same assurance that what she was being told would actually be acted out in the way she envisioned.

We are frequently reminded in the story that Br̥haspati is a brahmin: "[w]hen he [Br̥haspati] had thus spoken, the Gods said pleased, 'Brahmin, you have spoken well..." (5.12.26). As I have demonstrated, truth speech for a brahmin and truth speech for a warrior are different things; they have different standards of conduct. Br̥haspati does not search for ways around the words he has spoken, but accepts both his words and their implications. Does this make Br̥haspati the ultimate Truth in this story? I am not sure that we know enough of him to make such a judgement. What we can say is that if he is not the Truth in the story, he has access to a more profound Word than most devas and mortals have contact with due to his status as a brahmin. I have already demonstrated this link between brahmins, speech and truth in chapter one.

That Br̥haspati lives under a different code from the warriors is a basic fact of the caste system. His concern for doing what is right and keeping dharma, especially his own, are particular to his caste in this story and in the Mahābhārata in general. There is no dharmic ambiguity for Br̥haspati, he demonstrates a clear understanding of right and wrong and acts on this understanding. As I have demonstrated in chapter two, kings are not skilled in determining dharma from adharma. Yudhiṣṭhira appears to have a knowledge of dharma, but as we have seen when Yudhiṣṭhira is forced to explain the polyandrous marriage of Draupadī, he is quite happy to argue that "[t]he Law is subtle" (1.187.28). Concepts of dharma and adharma seem to be much less of a concern for the gods than for Br̥haspati. The same situation exists in this story. We witness situations which are not obviously

dharmic or adharmic and gods who are not anxious to acknowledge into which category their actions fall. Yet, we do have a brahmin who is very anxious correctly to label and live by dharmic acts. It is small wonder that kings and brahmins share different understandings on truth speech and corresponding actions. Br̥haspati's concern for the truth and law are tied to his caste membership, a concern the gods and Yudhiṣṭhira only share in speech but not in action. As the theme of competition between renunciation and kingship works itself through the story it enters the realm of speech. In the realm of speech renunciates and brahmins can be admired for their connection with the truth as it is embodied in primordial sound, but the power they derive from that speech is of a different nature than Indra's and Yudhiṣṭhira's manipulation of actions and words. This truth speech is more closely associated with keeping the Truth and it is associated with dharma. However, their caste associations and concern for the Law make brahmins and some lawful warriors weak in the world because they are unable to manipulate language in the way Indra and King Dharma are. Eventually, Indra, like Yudhiṣṭhira will come to power over his enemies in this story partly due to his ability with speech.

The story continues with Br̥haspati advising Śacī and the gods to ask Nahuṣa for a delay in Śacī moving into his home because: "[t]ime authors many obstacles; Time will lead on Time. Nahuṣa is prideful and powerful on account of his boon" (5.12.25). Like the advice of Viṣṇu, Br̥haspati's advice is to cause a delay. Unlike Viṣṇu, he does not openly condone deceit, but seems assured that time will undo Nahuṣa. The gods agree that a delay is for the best and they tell Śacī: "[y]ou are a devoted wife and true. Go to Nahuṣa: King Nahuṣa, who lusts after you, will soon perish, Goddess, and Śakra will resume the overlordship of the Gods" (5.12.30). Taking their advice Śacī leaves to speak with Nahuṣa. She asks him for a delay in her coming to his home because: "it is not known what has happened to Śakra or where he has gone. After the truth of the matter has become known, or if it cannot be found out, I shall wait on you, my Lord, this I declare to you as truth" (5.13.4-5). Nahuṣa accepts the delay and cautions her to "remember your oath" (5.13.7). This sequence is focused on vows and the truth. Śacī is described as "a devoted wife and true" and she wants to know the truth

about her husband before she comes to Nahuṣa. She makes a vow to Nahuṣa that she declares as the truth and Nahuṣa accepts the vow. We shall see what becomes of Śacī's truth as the story continues.

The gods approach Viṣṇu to find out how they can regain Indra who "was covered with brahmin murder" (5.13.12). Viṣṇu says Indra can be released if he sacrifices to him. Indra is to offer a horse sacrifice to Viṣṇu. The sacrifice is carried out and Indra is "purified of evil, and was his own master again" (5.13.17). He does not, however, return to the throne or his wife. He continues to wander, which causes Śacī to say:

'if there be truth in me, then I shall have but one husband! I shall pay worship to this auspicious and divine Night that has fallen in the Northern Course, and my desire must come true.' The Goddess thereupon attentively worshipped the Goddess Night, and by virtue of her devotedness to her husband and her truthfulness she brought forth the oracular Whisper. The Goddess said to Whisper, 'Show me the place where the king of the Gods is. Be truth seen by truth!' (5.13.21-25)

With these words the two seek out Indra. Śacī's truth seems to be confirmed here by her successful use of an Act of Truth.² The arrival of Whisper seems to be based on Saci's truth and she uses this truth to search for her husband.

Śacī has heard all of Bṛhaspati's talk and her speech to the brahmin certainly indicates that she is aware of the value of truth speech being backed by corresponding actions. However, when she approaches Nahuṣa to ask for a delay she uses truth speech to convince him of the sincerity of her intentions which, as will become clear, are far from sincere: "[a]fter the truth of the matter has become known, or if it cannot be found out, I shall wait on you, my Lord, this I declare to you as truth" (5.13.5). Nahuṣa even takes the time to remind her of her oath, but she appears to have no intention of keeping it; it is only a stalling tactic which appears to bear little resemblance to any truth.

We can assume she does learn of Indra's location and his condition through the horse sacrifice Indra offers to Viṣṇu; as Indra's wife she would be needed to participate in the ritual. Yet, she does not go to Nahuṣa at this point. She may be able to claim that Indra had disappeared again and she did not truly know his situation, but the reason she goes on is in the service of another truth, a more contextually based truth.

² I have already discussed Acts of Truth in chapter one.

The truth that overshadows her commitment to Nahuṣa in this story is associated with her status as a wife and it appears to be this truth that makes her Act of Truth effective. When she speaks of keeping her truth her concern is for her husband: "if there be truth in me, then I shall have but one husband" (5.13.21). This marital fidelity is also what the story recognizes as her truth: "by virtue of her devotedness to her husband and her truthfulness she brought forth the oracular Whisper" (5.13.25) and "[y]ou [Brhaspati] always say.... being a devoted wife avowed to her husband, I shall never be a widow" (5.11.18) and the gods tell her "[y]ou are a devoted wife and true" (5.12.30). The truth the story gives to her is a truth associated with a devoted wife.

It is difficult within the context of the story to ascertain what we are to make of Śacī's truth talk and oath to Nahuṣa. She holds true to one truth, but seems to ignore the truth she has spoken to Nahuṣa. The basic understanding of the story is that once she speaks the oath she must fulfil it in some way. However, there is an initial truth she speaks of in the story before she commits herself to Nahuṣa: "it is not known what has happened to Śakra or where he has gone. After the truth of the matter has become known, or if it cannot be found out, I shall wait on you, my Lord, this I declare to you as truth" (my emphasis 5.13.4-5). If we assume that Śacī must go to Nahuṣa after her initial attempt to find out what happened to her husband, we ignore the undefined nature of "[a]fter the truth of the matter has become known". Nahuṣa seems to understand the agreement as one that will see a quick return of Śacī to him: "Nahuṣa rejoiced at Indrānī's words. Nahuṣa said: `So shall it be, full-hipped woman, just as you have told me. You must come when you know -- you will remember your oath" (5.13.6). He assumes that she will find out the status of Indra and return, but he must qualify her statement of discovering the truth of the situation if the statement is to cross the gap between speech and action in the manner he intends. With discovering the truth of the matter left open to interpretation Śacī may enact her truth as she pleases and, as the story depicts, her understanding is subject to the context of her truth as a devoted wife where it takes on new ramifications. Such a devoted wife would not end the search for her husband after initial failure. Finding out what has become of her husband falls into her commitment to the truth of marriage. Her commitment to

Nahūṣa takes on a new context, one that Nahūṣa never seems to have envisioned when he agreed to have her find the truth of her husband's situation. Again, a character's ability to work with the meaning of words and to allow other's assumptions about the intention of certain statements to mislead them gives power and the ability to act to those who control words. Yet, in Śālyā's narration of the story, Śācī remains true enough to bend cosmic forces to her will. Even the brahminical concept of *satya* has been contextualized in this story.

Finally, the deity who comes to help Śācī search for her husband is Whisper. The naming of this being in a story dealing with the power of speech is significant. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that Vāc is depicted in a female form and the consort of various gods. As a consort she gives these gods her creative power, she is much like the later *sakti* in this respect (Padoux 1990:10-12). Both Whisper and Śācī are divine, but only Whisper is given the power actually to find Indra. Without Whisper Śācī would be helpless. Whisper demonstrates another example of connecting with the silent portion of Vāc to gain power. It is, then, not surprising that the use of truth and seeking out the truth become the main themes when Whisper enters the story: "I am the Whisper, Goddess. I have come and appeared to you, since I am satisfied with your truth. You are a devoted wife..." (5.14.3). This divine form of speech seems to be aware of the dangers of language and places key words like truth into a context so that her meaning is clear. While there is power in manipulating the meaning of speech in this story, there is also power in making contact with a divine form of speech. The final episode of the story is Śācī's recovery of Indra and the fall of Nahūṣa. Both are achieved through language.

The story continues with Whisper revealing Indra to Śācī. Śācī is able to recover Indra and make him speak to her by praising him: "[a]nd Indrani praised Indra for his famous feats of yore. Upon her praise the God Sacker of Cities said to Śācī, 'Why have you come and how did you discover me'" (5.14.10-11). We have already seen the effective power of praise in chapter one. Śācī explains what Nahūṣa has done and Indra returns to his former self and begins plotting how he will regain power. Indra remains hidden, but sends Śācī to Nahūṣa to tell him:

[c]arry out what I say with affection; then I shall be yours to command! Indra has horses for mounts, and elephants and chariots -- now I want from you, overlord of the Gods, an unprecedented carriage, such as neither Viṣṇu nor Rudra have, or the Asuras and Rākṣasas. My lord, great king, let all the

seers together carry you on a palanquin, for that will pleasure me, my king! Don't just be the equal of Asuras and Gods, capture the splendour of all with your prowess, by a mere glance at them. No one shall dare stand before you boldly! (5.15.10-14)

Nahuṣa agrees with Śacī's words of praise and tells her "I shall carry out your words Goddess, no doubt of that" (5.15.19). Again, these words are full of deceit; Śacī and Indra are setting Nahuṣa up for a trap. Nahuṣa walks into their trap because he does not grasp he is being manipulated by the speech of someone he assumes has kept her vow. While the story has already recounted how Śacī has found and returned Indra, the story also presents another version of this event. In this second version Brhaspati uses Agni to find and retrieve Indra. Again, the primary way they reclaim Indra is by praising him:

'[t]hou wert the killer of the grisly Asura Namuci, and of Śambara and Vala, both of dreadful prowess....

By all creatures, desirable one, thou art
To be worshipped, none in the world is your equal.
Thou, Śakra, supportest the creatures all,
Great feats hast thou wrought in the cause of the
Gods....

When he had thus been praised, Indra grew very slowly, and resuming his own body, he became filled with strength. (5.16.15-20)

After regaining his former form Indra returns to heaven. Brhaspati's use of Agni to praise Indra into his former mighty state should remind us of this god's special relationship to powerful speech. Rarely do we find a brahmin using powerful speech without some mention of Agni.

However, by the time Indra gets to heaven Nahuṣa has already fallen from his throne. We are told that Nahuṣa makes the seers in heaven carry him as Śacī requested. They grow tired of this and ask him: "[t]he mantras that have been promulgated by Brahmā for the Sprinkling-of-the-Cows, are they authentic or not?.... And Nahuṣa, his wits befuddled by darkness, replied, 'No' (5.17.9). This causes an uproar among the seers and in the argument Nahuṣa, "pressed down by his Unlaw" (5.17.11), touches a seer on the head with his foot. This highly polluting act exhausts all of Nahuṣa's merit and he is expelled from heaven. Indra regains his kingship and heaven returns to normal.

The final segment of the story highlights the power language has in the form of flattery to make people do things. Śacī is able to get Indra to speak with her through flattery and Brhaspati is able to

restore Indra through similar means. Śacī also uses flattery to get Nahuṣa to agree to the palanquin drawn by brahminical seers, surely something he would not have dared do if Saci had not told him it would display his prowess: "[t]hat is indeed an unprecedented carriage that you describe, fair-skinned Goddess, it pleases me mightily.... Surely one who employs seers as beasts is not of little prowess" (5.15.15). In this instance flattery causes a character's downfall, but in Indra's case it causes his rise. The point the story seems to make is the power of language to affect the real world.

It should not be a great surprise that Nahuṣa falls in the way he does. His power in the story is located in the wrong area: sight. He takes for himself "the splendour of anyone whom I [Nahuṣa] perceive with my eye" (5.15.18). This external splendour does not seem to include a command of language or the ability to think out word oriented questions such as the *mantra* question. His inability with language foreshadows his fall to language in this story that is so anxious to link power with words and an ability with language. For Nahuṣa not to recognize the authenticity of mantras as a powerful force displays his ignorance surrounding language, this, I would argue, is the cause of his eventual fall.

In this story we have seen language and truth speech used in various ways. I have suggested that those characters in the story who have power gain that power through their ability with language. They are able to take statements that imply a larger truth and act them out in such a way that makes the truth of the words relative to a given situation. Successful characters in this story recognize the ambiguity of meaning in uncontextualized statements and are able to place statements into contexts that allows the exact meaning of the words to be carried out, but often in such a way that the original intent of the statement is subverted, in such actions, I have argued, we find deceit. I have demonstrated that this use of language is true of all of the characters in the story except for Bṛhaspati and Whisper, who seem to have direct contact with a higher word or truth, that of Vāc, removed from the vagaries of changing context.

There are two powers associated with words in this story: a mundane use of words to gain power through flattery or manipulating contexts, pretending to be a speaker of truth and a divine use, not

shared by all divinities, that connects the speaker with the power of Vāc and an ultimate truth. These issues seem to be connected to the contrast between renunciation and kings, yet both their uses of language are seen as powerful. I have demonstrated that there are many different levels of truth in this story and knowing how to manipulate truth through language and action in this story can bring about power.

In many ways, I think, “The Victory of Indra” provides the most direct support for what I have been arguing in this thesis. It demonstrates the special relationship brahmins have to speech and truth. It also demonstrates that Indra is willing to abuse vows and the title of “speaker of truth” to achieve his ends. Yudhiṣṭhira and Indra are very much alike, indeed, in Epic mythology the two are the same. There are clear parallels between these two kings regarding their use of speech and deceit. I think this story helps to demonstrate that my reading of Yudhiṣṭhira, especially before the text points explicitly to his deceit, is encouraged by certain elements of the text. This story presents a Yudhiṣṭhira-like character who explicitly does what I have argued Yudhiṣṭhira does in the forest. Indra clearly uses the label of a speaker of truth to deceive others, I have argued that Yudhiṣṭhira does the same. Again, there is an element of the Mahābhārata that depicts a “true” and successful king as one who understands speech and deceives people with that understanding.

Conclusion

I think we have seen evidence that there is another reading of Yudhiṣṭhira's character than the one Vaiśampāyana offers to us, especially before the beginning of the war. We have seen that beneath the surface of Vaiśampāyana's narrative there is an element of the Epic which promotes the use of deceit for a king. This element of the Mahābhārata isolates speech as an important part of kingly deceit even though an ability with speech is associated with brahmins. This reading of the text suggests that the most important element of kingship is skill with language.¹ Yet, the text never explicitly states this fact, it is only through a careful reading of the text that we recognize this element of the text.

I have demonstrated that Yudhiṣṭhira's status as King Dharma and a speaker of truth while in the forest can be questioned. An alternative to Vaiśampāyana's reading presents itself which suggests that Yudhiṣṭhira's adoption of a brahmin-like personality is designed to manipulate brahmins and is not due to a connection Yudhiṣṭhira may have to truth. Yudhiṣṭhira uses his guise to convince brahmins that his version of the dicing story is true. Through his guise he also convinces brahmins that he is dharmic and Duryodhana is adharmic pulling brahminical legitimation away from the Kaurava clan and towards his own. A mixture of brahminical support and the keeping of his vow to remain in exile make Yudhiṣṭhira an attractive candidate for alliance. I think it is a need for allies that has motivated

¹ It is of interest that J. C. Heesterman makes a similar claim of Kauṭilya's Arthasāstra. He argues that this text does not work as a practical guide for administration. He suggests what the text implicitly teaches kings is skill with words and debate (1985:129-130). He feels such skills are essential to a king because "[i]f we think of the importance of *mantra*, the consilium of king and councillors, it is easy to see that the art of argumentation and discussion is not a purely academic concern but a matter of extremely practical importance" (Heesterman 1985:130). Heesterman points to a problem we have already recognized in the example of Janamejaya (pages 25-26): a king's counsellors can control a king. Thus, a king needs to be skilled in debate and verbal manipulation to effectively deal with the advice counsellors give. Heesterman also argues that administration of the state was in the hands of a few specialized families of brahmins who jellously guarded their knowledge of debate and administration to ensure their position and indispensability to kings (1985:131). Heesterman's reading of the work attributed to Kauṭilya adds weight to my argument by presenting another text that makes similar claims about kingly speech in an implicit manner.

Yudhiṣṭhira's actions while in the forest and not a genuine concern for the truth. We have also seen that Yudhiṣṭhira's allegiance to vows is contextually based as is his speech. These aspects of Yudhiṣṭhira's character point to an unbrahminical use of speech and truth and suggest that something other than the truth and dharma lie behind his actions in the forest. We have also seen that it is ultimately Yudhiṣṭhira's guise and ability with speech that allows his explicit deceit while in battle to succeed. Yudhiṣṭhira's use of deceit is not a sudden change of character motivated by battle, but a continuation of an already existent part of his personality that has been in operation since the crisis of the exile began. We must understand that more than one reading of Yudhiṣṭhira's character is in keeping with the nature of this multivocal text: we should be looking for more than one personality behind this character. In the end we must appreciate that there is much more to Yudhiṣṭhira's character than the stock images we receive from Vaiśampāyana and at times from scholars of the Epic. Yudhiṣṭhira's character is much more responsive to context than scholars seem to have recognized.

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