

WOMEN'S MOURNING IN THE STRĪPARVAN OF THE MAHĀBHĀRATA

WOMEN'S MOURNING
IN THE
STRĪPARVAN OF THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

By
G. WILLIAM CUTBUSH, B.A.

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University

© Copyright by G. William Cutbush, September 1997

MASTER OF ARTS (1997)
(Religious Studies)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Women's Mourning in the *Strīparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*

AUTHOR: G. William Cutbush, B.A. (University of Toronto)

SUPERVISOR: Professor P. Granoff

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 125

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present various themes concerning women's mourning in the *Strīparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. This paper is intended as a preliminary study upon which further work on death, grief and mourning in the *Mahābhārata* may be built. Owing to this focus, it attempts to connect those themes found in the *Strīparvan* with similar themes found elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*.

In this thesis, the mourning behaviour of the women is divided into three separate categories: the appearance of the women, the actions of the women, and the laments that the women utter. Each category is presented as it is found in the text, and analyzed accordingly. There is a strong emphasis on the symbolic and metaphorical connections between these women and other liminal beings, such as ascetics, menstruating women, gods, and animals. The meaning of these connections is subsequently explored.

There are three significant findings within this thesis that stem from the analysis of the categories of mourning behaviour. Firstly, the symbolic and metaphorical links that mourning women have with the beings mentioned above lend the women an aura of power that is primarily used to hurl curses that destroy entire lineages. It is argued here that these curses are part of a background of women's curses that cause most of the suffering in the main plot of the *Mahābhārata*.

Mourning women also possess many erotic characteristics that are found both

in their laments as well as through their metaphorical connections with other liminal beings. The main element of this eroticism is the expression of frustrated fertility. This frustrated fertility becomes destructive through symbolic connections with the doomsday mare. The longer the duration of the frustration, the more destructive the women become.

Finally, the women's laments indicate that they firmly support the code of duty (*kṣatradharma*) that warriors (*kṣatriyas*) are supposed to adhere to. Just as the main villain Duryodhana does, the women place a priority on *kṣatradharma* as a system of moral judgement. Owing to this priority, the women emphasize the responsibility of humans for their own moral actions, which is directly opposed to the theological solution of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* (devotion) as it is presented in the text by the divine Kṛṣṇa.

The thesis concludes with some speculations as to the direction that further research on the same topic may take. An emphasis on men's grief and mourning is indicated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Phyllis Granoff, without whose time, effort, patience and suggestions this thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Professor Ellen Badone for her help and editing, and Professor David Kinsley for his assistance. As well, I am highly appreciative of the time that Professor Koichi Shinohara gave to reading my thesis on such short notice.

In addition, a great deal of thanks, sincere appreciation and love goes to my wife Kushma. Without her continuous support and determination, I would never have been able to accomplish what I have.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	2
Chapter One	9
Chapter Two	32
Chapter Three	52
Conclusion	93
Appendix: Translated Selections from the <i>Strīparvan</i>	97
References Cited	123

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I will be discussing women's mourning in the *Strīparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. This paper is designed to be a preliminary study of death in the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. As such, it will attempt to cover many aspects of the mourning rituals conducted by women in the text. My intentions are to create a base from which later studies and papers can be launched. Death is a theme in the *Mahābhārata* that has only been examined selectively and in a limited fashion to date. This is my first step towards a larger and more comprehensive study of death, grieving, and the *Mahābhārata*. The conclusions that I will draw within this thesis have this larger goal in mind.

Death is a significant topic for the study of any religious tradition. It is one of the few universals that all human beings in every culture share. However, it is a universal that is ultimately unknown. Confronted with a mystery that is destined eventually to affect every member, a society will attempt to make this unknown a culturally formulatable fact, an aspect of the universe that no longer makes one uneasy or afraid (Geertz, 1973, p. 102). This transition from unknown to cultural fact is done through the creation and integration of symbol systems. Clifford Geertz defines symbols as "tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible form, [and] concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgements, longings, or beliefs" (Ibid, p. 91). These symbols become linked together in complex

systems and patterns that become sources of information for the culture (Ibid, p. 92). Such symbol systems include cultural elements like rituals, music, etiquette, and narratives. They have an inherent double aspect in that they function to provide frameworks for thoughts and actions as well as to show the direction to be used to create new frameworks, symbols and systems (Ibid, p. 93). For example, musical notes and keys create a framework with which music is made while at the same time providing the tools to create new music and different styles of music.

Death is a special case within a culture's symbol systems. It is one of those chaotic phenomena that threatens to break in at the limits of our capacity to create and use symbols (Ibid, p. 100). As a result, a continuous flow of symbols is constantly directed towards ideas about death (Ibid, p. 102).¹ New concepts arise to exist next to traditional ones. Old theories are modified while ancient beliefs may be resurrected. Hence, symbol systems that deal with death, such as funerary rituals, mourning practices, and narratives about death, can reveal a great deal about how a culture envisions itself. One such narrative within the Hindu tradition is the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Mahābhārata*, the Great Epic of India, is the world's largest continuous narrative, being eight times longer than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined. Divided into eighteen books, it is the story of the great war between the five Pāṇḍava brothers (Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) and their hundred cousins led by Duryodhana for the rulership of the known earth. Around this main story line have

¹ As an example, the continuous altering, changing, and adjusting of rituals, narratives, and beliefs concerning death is apparent in Western society in such forms as emerging reincarnation beliefs, the appropriation of symbols from religions other than the Judeo-Christian faiths, and the prevalence of New Age beliefs in alien afterlives and paradises in the centre of the Earth.

grown many myths, legends, folktales, and didactic sections.

Death is a frequent subject within the *Mahābhārata*, given that it is about a war in which "one billion, six hundred and sixty million, and twenty thousand men" die (Roy, 11.26, p. 42).² However, most scholarship that I am aware of deals only with the brahminical-ascetic ideas about death found within many of the didactic portions of the text.³ The actual activities of the characters during death scenes, grieving, and mourning, especially within the four battle books,⁴ book X (*Sauptikaparvan*), book XI (Strīparvan), and book XIV (*Aśvamedhikaparvan*) have almost been entirely overlooked and/or underplayed.⁵ By examining these sections, I hoped to find a picture of death very different from that in the more philosophical chapters. I hypothesized that a great deal about the meaning and structure of the *Mahābhārata* might be learned from studying death within the text, especially by studying the

² I am abbreviating the Roy/Ganguli translation of the *Mahābhārata* by major book, chapter and page number since it does not include verse numbers of any kind. Other references to the *Mahābhārata* are my own translation from the Poona Critical Edition, unless otherwise noted.

³ This ideal of the brahmin-ascetic in the *Mahābhārata* is not really a singular, unified concept, but a mixture of many different theories about the nature of reality, the causative forces in the universe, and the purpose of humankind on the earth. It includes such ideas as mortality being a logical necessity for relieving an over-burdened earth, the necessity to learn the true nature of the immortal Self to overcome the ignorance/illusion of death, and/or the acceptance of karma, time and fate as the primary driving forces of humankind (Holck, 1974, pp.57-76; Long, 1980, pp. 42-51). This is clearly an oversimplification of these ideas, and I will clarify some of them.

⁴ These are the *Bhīṣma*, *Droṇa*, *Karṇa*, and *Śalyaparvans* (Books VI-IX).

⁵ There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization, such as Katz's study of the death of Abhimanyu in the context of her discussion on Arjuna (Katz, 1989, pp. 137-154), and her discussion of the *Sauptikaparvan* (Katz, 1991), as well as Alf Hildebeitel's examination of the deaths of the four leaders of the Kaurava army in *The Ritual of Battle* (Hildebeitel, 1976, pp. 244-287). These books tend to deal with men's deaths, mourning, and grief and are thus of little use to a thesis concerning women.

actions of the main characters during death, grieving and mourning scenes. However, this hypothesis is one that I will only partly be able to illuminate in this essay, owing to the constraints of length and the necessity of focus for such an introductory analysis.

This paper will concentrate almost exclusively on the *Strīparvan*, which is the eleventh major book of the *Mahābhārata*. I have selected this particular book because it deals almost entirely with death, grief, and mourning. The great battle is over, but the bodies of the dead still litter the battlefield. In this book, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra, whose hundred sons have been slain, must be brought out of a state of intense grief by his companions and advisors Vidura and Saṁjaya. He brings the women of his family to the battlefield, where they begin to mourn the fallen heroes. After this, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Yudhiṣṭhira must see to the disposal of the bodies and their last rites. The *Strīparvan* has yet to be translated from the Critical Edition, so I have endeavoured to translate sections of this text relevant to my study, in particular those dealing with the mourning activities of the women on the battlefield. The selection of specific chapters has been done with an eye to ensuring that all of the topics I will deal with have some representation in my translation. I would also like to note that this study mainly deals with the primary source material in the *Mahābhārata*. I am dealing with a section of the text and a theme within *Mahābhārata* studies that has almost never been mentioned by other scholars, except in passing.⁶ As a result, there are very few

⁶ As examples of this kind of literature, Bruce Long (1980) only deals with the philosophical portions of the *Mahābhārata* and the ideas about death present in them. He looks at similar sections for the same purpose in another article (1977). Frederick Holck (1974) examines almost exactly the same sections in his book. Jagdish Tiwari (1979), in the only book to contain a chapter on the *Strīparvan*, only deals with the final cremation rites of the warriors and scarcely even mentions the women. Finally, Lynn Thomas' article (1994)

materials that comment on women mourning in the *Mahābhārata*. Hence, I place a great deal of emphasis on using the *Mahābhārata* itself.

At this point, it would be relevant to note that I am distinguishing throughout this thesis between mourning, which is the social rules regarding the behaviour of the bereaved, and grief, which is the personal emotion experienced by the bereaved (Kastenbaum, 1995, pp. 314-318). Moreover, it is important to note that the mourning practices will generally be performed independently of any emotion that the bereaved is experiencing (Ibid). In other words, a person may go through all of the mourning rites and feel very little grief, or vice versa.

As I noted above, the purpose of this paper is to examine the various themes concerning the mourning of women found within the *Strīparvan*. This will be done by describing the rites as they occur in the text and comparing them to relevant passages in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*⁷ and with the mourning of Balin by his wife Tārā in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁸ I will also compare the appearance, actions, and speech of these women with those of menstruating women and ascetics, both of whom exist on the fringes of society. I intend to demonstrate that the mourning women possess a dangerous power and an ability to voice curses and censure others owing to their

deals solely with the varying names used for the Destroyer in the *Mahābhārata*.

⁷ I have selected the mourning of Abhimanyu in the *Droṇaparvan*, Kṛṣṇa's recounting of this mourning in the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, the reaction of the Kuru women to the news of the Kaurava army's destruction in the *Śalyaparvan*, and Draupadī's mourning of her sons in the *Sauptikaparvan*.

⁸ The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the other major epic of the Hindu tradition, being about a quarter of the length of the *Mahābhārata*. It is the more popular of the two, and has spread well beyond India into places like Bali and Burma. It is the story of Rāma, an incarnation of the god Viṣṇu, and his battle with the demon Ravaṇa, who abducted his wife Sitā. Vālin was the king of a group of monkey people until he was unrighteously slain by Rāma.

connection with these other individuals. I will include references to the appearance and behaviour of deities like Śiva and Kālī in order to further support my conclusion.

The first chapter will deal with the change in appearance of the mourning women. In it, I will explore such ideas as the link between the change in appearance and the liminal status of the mourning women, the polluting and inauspicious aspects of this appearance, and the similarities between the appearance of the mourning women and the characteristics of other liminal beings, like menstruating women, ascetics, and various liminal deities. These similarities among liminal entities, I will argue, cause the mourning women to take on connotations of dangerous power, as well as elements of eroticism and fertility.

The second chapter will discuss the actions of the mourning women in the *Strīparvan*. These elements of behaviour include wailing, striking one's own body or head, falling down on the ground, sitting near and/or holding the deceased, and smelling the deceased's head or body. I will suggest that many of the actions are socially-sanctioned outlets for the intense grief felt over someone's death. Other aspects of these actions suggest that the women are denying their loved one's deaths. I will also show how explicit metaphorical connections made between women in mourning and various animals lend to the women an aura of both pollution and power. As with the appearance changes, these metaphors also link the women to symbols expressive of repressed and possibly dangerous fertility. I will end this chapter with a discussion of the power that these women are thought to possess. Specifically, I will examine the curses that the mourning women employ, and the effect these have on the plot of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole.

In the third and final chapter I will discuss the laments of the mourning women.

I will begin by presenting the five major topics present in the laments, including the denial of death, the acceptance of death through a comparison of past and present, the fate of the warrior, expressions of frustrated fertility, and blame-placing, either on metaphysical forces or on various warriors. This element of the laments also involves the censuring of those who have violated the rules of battle. Having presented these elements, I will then demonstrate that the laments serve to help the transition between the rites of incorporation and the rites of separation. This is done through the comparisons of past and present and by stating the fate of the deceased. The laments also provide a way for the women to find some consolation for their grief. As with the appearance changes and the actions, the laments express the frustrated fertility of the women. Finally, the laments serve as commentary within the text for pointing to those that have committed some form of transgression in battle. The implications of this censuring will then be dealt with.

I will conclude my paper with some tentative ideas and theories regarding the place of death and grief in the *Strīparvan* and the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. I will look at some possibilities dealing with men's grief and mourning in the *Strīparvan* and beyond. I would like to suggest that the majority of the major events in the *Mahābhārata* story can be seen as resulting from the emotion of grief.

CHAPTER ONE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the appearance of the mourning women in the *Strīparvan*. I will demonstrate that their change in appearance separates the women from normal, hierarchical society and places them between social roles, or in a state of liminality. There are three elements to this change of appearance, including the unbinding of the hair, changing into a single garment, and casting off one's ornaments. In addition, I will show that the women adopt new ornamentation by becoming covered in the blood of the battlefield. Moreover, the elements of these changes are all symbolically linked to the appearances of certain liminal entities, like menstruating women, ascetics, and deities like Kālī and Śiva. I will show that these symbolic connections lend the mourning women certain characteristics, such as being inauspicious and polluted, and possessing dangerous power. This change in appearance also carries connotations of eroticism and fertility. I will organize this chapter by describing each of the appearance changes in turn. These descriptions will be followed by a discussion of the meaning of these changes and their symbolic connections to the other liminal beings mentioned above.

The unusual appearance of the women is first noted when King Dhṛtarāṣṭra is making arrangements to depart his city for the battlefield:

Letting loose their very beautiful hair and taking off their ornaments, the women, wearing a single garment, rushed to and fro as if without protectors. (11.9.10)

This verse demonstrates that the change of appearance is a voluntary act, done as part of their preparations for the journey. The hair is not naturally loosened, and the ornaments do not fall off. It also implies that the normal state that women keep their hair in is bound up. The women, being aware that their husbands are dead, have begun to exhibit the signs of mourning.

Similar lines are repeated throughout the *Strīparvan*. At 11.9.15, the women are "wearing a single garment." Gāndhārī describes various women on the battlefield as possessing "dishevelled" or "loose" hair (11.16.18; 17.23; & Roy 11.21, p. 34; 23, p. 37). She also notes the lack of ornaments on the Magadha women (Roy 11.25, p. 40). Bhūrīśravas' mother's description of her daughters-in-law has them "wrapped in a single garment, dark hair dishevelled" (11.24.7).⁹ Gāndhārī also mentions that the women look like "beautifully-maned fillies", which seems to be a reference to their long, flowing, unbound hair (11.16.57).¹⁰

The alteration of physical appearances is only mentioned in one of the other passages that I am examining. In the *Śālyaparvan*, when the women learn of the destruction of the Kuru army, they "untied their braids" (Roy, 9.29, p. 87). However, in the *Droṇaparvan* and in the recounting of these events in the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, upon learning of the death of Abhimanyu, none of the women alters her appearance even though they all participate in the other forms of mourning. I would like to suggest that this lack of change in clothing and ornamentation is for a fairly specific reason. The proper time for mourning has not arrived in either situation. As Edward W. Hopkins

⁹ Bhūrīśravas, King Somadatta's son, is a warrior that fought on the Kaurava side of the war. He was unjustly slain by Sātyaki (one of Kṛṣṇa's kinsmen), and Arjuna during the battle.

¹⁰ See the next two chapters for further implications of the women looking like fillies.

has noted, formal mourning for warriors is only permitted during the funeral rites (Hopkins, 1972, p. 132). Thus, these women are undertaking what might be thought of as informal mourning. It is not necessarily frowned upon (none of the women ever gets in trouble for it), but it is not encouraged either. Evidence of this is found in Kṛṣṇa's reply to the lamentations of Subhadrā in the *Droṇaparvan*:

Grieve not, O Subhadrā!...O Thou of Beautiful Face, let all other men yet alive in our race obtain that goal which Abhimanyu of great fame hath obtained. Ourselves with all our friends wish to achieve, in this battle, that feat...[which Abhimanyu] hath achieved without any assistance. (Roy, 7.78, p. 148)

The battle is not yet over, so Kṛṣṇa feels that Subhadrā should not engage in mourning. Many others should be given their opportunities to die in battle before the funerals may commence.¹¹ In the situation mentioned above, the formal mourning of the *Strīparvan* had not begun, so any forms of mourning are informal, spontaneous, and brief. As a result, the only instance that the women take the time to loosen their hair, cast off their ornaments, and change into a single garment is at the start of the formal mourning period of the *Strīparvan*, which, for the Kuru women, begins with the announcement of defeat in the *Śalyaparvan*.¹²

A similar situation presents itself in the passages on Vālin's death in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. When Tārā learns that her husband is dead, she goes quickly to the scene of his demise. There, she performs all of the actions that mourning women do, which will be discussed below. However, there is no mention of her clothing, her hair,

¹¹ Equally valid here is the idea that such mourning is an inauspicious thing, and may bring bad luck to the army. More will be mentioned on this idea later on.

¹² Draupadī is staying with her father's women, and hence does not hear of the defeat until Nakula arrives to inform her of the slaughter of the Pāñcālas in the *Sauptikaparvan* (Roy, 10.10, p. 31).

or her ornaments. This is another example of what I am calling 'informal mourning'.

Draupadī's mourning in the *Sauptikaparvan* represents a special case. Her appearance is never described in that book. However, Nakula was ordered by Yudhiṣṭhira to bring her to the battlefield "with all of her maternal relations" (Roy, 10.10, p. 31). None of the Pāñcāla women is mentioned again in the *Sauptikaparvan*, but when Yudhiṣṭhira approaches Dhṛtarāṣṭra when the latter had arrived at the battlefield with the Kuru women, "Draupadī...followed [Yudhiṣṭhira] as well, along with the Pāñcāla women who had met her there" (11.11.4). Although their appearance is not stated outright by the text, it seems reasonable to assume that the Pāñcāla women, including Draupadī, underwent the same preparations as the Kuru women when they left for the scene of the slaughter. This conclusion is further substantiated by the fact that Gāndhārī includes the women of all of the families in her descriptions of the battlefield. They are all described as having undergone the change in appearance.

Having noted the occurrences of appearance-changing during mourning in the *Strīparvan* and other *Mahābhārata* passages, I will now examine the meaning of such actions. There are many different facets to these symbols. I will begin by showing how these appearance changes separate women from cultural roles and everyday society and bring them into a condition that lies outside of the social structure. This analysis will be done through the use of Arnold van Gennep's theories on rites of passage, and Victor Turner's theories on liminality. I will follow with a discussion of the place of hair, clothing, and ornaments in Hindu culture and mythology, both within and outside of the *Mahābhārata*. The appearances of the women resemble those of menstruating women and ascetics, and have some features in common with certain

deities, like Śiva and Kālī, all of whom are liminal entities within Hindu society. Through their link with these fringe-entities, I will demonstrate that the mourning women are not only outside normal society, but gain a dangerous and power as well.

Arnold van Gennep, in *The Rites of Passage*, proposes a system of classification of the rites that accompany a passage from one social role to another. He divides the rites into three categories: rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation. Rites of separation are preliminary rites that separate the participants from their old social role and place them into a period of transition (van Gennep, 1960, pp. 10-11). Rites of transition are rites that occur while the participants are between the two social worlds (ibid). Rites of incorporation bring the participants back into the social order with their new roles (ibid). Mourning rituals are generally rites of transition. Van Gennep has noted that "during mourning, the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (ibid, p. 147).

Victor Turner, drawing on van Gennep's theories, states that the beginning of this condition is marked by "symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a "state"), or from both" (Turner, 1969, p. 94). By altering their appearances, these women are separating themselves from their earlier roles as wives, daughters, and mothers of living warriors. Most have ceased to be wives and will become widows, moving between two points on the social structure. Moreover, they are removing themselves from the conditions of ordinary life, in which they are ornamented and dressed in many clothes, with their hair bound.

Having separated themselves, the women enter into a state that Turner calls

the liminal period. In this phase, "they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols..." (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Some of these symbols include wearing a single garment and having a lack of ornamentation (Ibid). He also notes that in specialized societies with complex divisions of labour, liminality can become an institutionalized state, bearing its own characteristics and roles (Ibid, p. 107). Generally, liminal entities are seen as dangerous, anarchical, and/or polluting from the point of view of those within the social structure (Ibid, p. 109). Moreover, the liminal condition is thought by most societies to allow individuals to wield moral and supernatural powers¹³ to a greater degree than the non-liminal (Ibid).

The appearance of the mourning women resembles that of menstruating females. A good example of the appearance of a menstruating woman occurs during the dice game in the *Sabhāparvan*. Yudhiṣṭhira stakes and loses Draupadī in a dicing match after having lost everything else he possessed, including himself. Draupadī, now apparently belonging to the Kauravas, is ordered to appear in the hall. When she enters at the request of Yudhiṣṭhira's messenger, she is dressed in "one garment, knotted below" (van Buitenen, 2.60.15). Soon after that, when Duṣṣāsana drags Draupadī across the hall, he does so by grabbing her "long-tressed, black and flowing hair" (van Buitenen, 2.60.22). Draupadī makes it clear that her clothing is due

¹³ For want of a better word, I am using "supernatural power" to refer to any magical, sorcerous, arcane, or mystical ability that is possessed and wielded by various liminal beings. In the Hindu tradition, this kind of power can be conceived of as *śakti* (inherent power or energy, generally thought of as female), *tapas* (power or heat accumulated by an individual through self-mortification), and *maya* (the power to delude others).

to her menses when she rebukes Duḥśāsana, "It is now my month! This is my sole garment, man of slow wit..." (van Buitenen, 2.60.25). Finally, when Draupadī and her husbands are sent away to their forest exile, she is "in her sole garment, besmirched with blood,...her hair undone" (van Buitenen, 2.70.9). In regards to her ornamentation, it is not mentioned specifically in this section whether she was ornamented or not. However, since her husbands have lost everything to the Kauravas and are now "bereft of ornaments" (van Buitenen, 2.70.10), it is safe to assume that Draupadī wears no ornamentation either. Thus, the menstruating woman has the same appearance as the mourning woman; a single garment, no ornamentation, and unbound hair. Moreover, they are both liminal entities, existing outside the boundaries of the social hierarchy.

The appearance of the mourning women also resembles that of some ascetics. The *Mānavadharmasāstra* (*Laws of Manu*) describes the forest-dwelling ascetic as one who "should wear an animal skin or bark or rags...he should always keep his hair matted and his beard, body hair, and nails (uncut)" (*Manu* 6.6). The *Mahābhārata* supports this ideal in a description of the ascetic seer Vyāsa's appearance. Before he will lie with a woman so that she may bear children to continue a king's lineage, he states that she must bear with "my smell, my looks, my garb, and my body" (van Buitenen, 1.99.43). He comments on his own ugliness twice (van Buitenen, 1.99.43; 100.16). One of the women with whom he must lie sees to her horror his "matted orange hair, his fiery eyes, [and] his reddish beard" (van Buitenen, 1.100.5).

More examples of an ascetic's appearance occur later in the text. When Yudhiṣṭhira, disgusted at his own actions during the war, decides to become an ascetic, he states "I shall wander in the forest...I shall thin myself by reduced diet, and

covering myself with skins, bear matted locks on my head" (Roy, 12.9, p. 14). When Kṛṣṇa first encounters the ascetic Upamanyu, the latter has "matted locks on head" and is "dressed in rags" (Roy, 13.14, p. 44). In addition, Yayāti, a famous king, claims that a single loincloth is an ascetic's proper garb (van Buitenen, 1.86.14). Hence, the ascetic has unbound, matted hair, wears no ornamentation, and clads himself in a single animal skin, loincloth, or rags, just as the mourning woman wears a single garment, has unbound hair, and has removed her jewellery. Like the mourning women, the ascetic lives beyond the social hierarchy, existing in an institutionalized liminal condition.

Being related to ascetics also brings women in mourning closer to the god who is the ultimate ascetic - Śiva. With respect to clothing and hair, Śiva's appearance is very much like that of mourning women. He is "the bearer of matted locks on [his] head" (Roy, 13.17, p. 82).¹⁴ "His hair is long and stands erect" (Roy, 13.14, p. 51). "He is perfectly naked, for he has the horizon for his garments" (Ibid), or he wears an elephant skin (Roy, 13.14, p. 50). His ornaments are made of snakes (Ibid). Thus, like the mourning women, Śiva is clothed in one garment (or none at all), and has unbound, long hair. He does wear ornaments, but these are abnormal, to say the least. They seem to add to his ascetic character, rather than bring him closer to social norms. In fact, as Wendy O'Flaherty has pointed out, Śiva's ornaments are frequently seen as inauspicious, frightening, or inappropriate (O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 239), and hence to wear such ornaments moves one into a greater segregation from society than that of the mourning women. In other words, Śiva not only resembles the

¹⁴ This is only one of four references to his matted hair over the next four pages of Roy's translation.

mourning women, he exceeds them with his ornaments and occasional nakedness. The implications of this excess will be discussed below.

The mourning women also share some features of their appearances with goddesses like Kālī. In conventional Hindu iconography, Kālī usually has long, unbound, unkempt hair and is clad only in a skirt of severed arms (Kinsley, 1986, p. 116). However, Kālī, like Śiva, does wear ornaments, although they are very unconventional. She often wears garlands of human heads or skulls, and has serpents for bracelets (Ibid). In the *Mahābhārata*, Kālī is a rather indistinct entity.¹⁵ The best reference to a Kālī-like figure in the *Mahābhārata* occurs during Aśvatthāman's destruction of the sleeping Pāñcāla and Pāṇḍava armies in the *Sauptikaparvan*.¹⁶ As Aśvatthāman slays the soldiers, the warriors see the embodied form of Kālarātrī (Roy translates her name as "Deathnight"). She is "wearing crimson garlands and smeared with crimson unguents, attired in a single piece of red cloth...with dishevelled hair..." (Roy, 10.8, p. 21). As with the mourning women, both Kālī and Kālarātrī are clothed in single garments and their hair is unbound. Moreover, their ornamentation is atypical, recalling death and blood more so than any proper ornaments. In this way, these goddesses are like the mourning women as well. Although there is no explicit reference to the women being covered in blood, the

¹⁵ Most references to Kālī are merely as a name on a list of occupants of Brahmā's heaven, or as one of a group of "mothers" that goes into battle with the god Skanda (Kinsley, 1976, pp. 88-9). The list of the mothers occurs at 9.46, pp. 138-140, trans. by Roy. However, their appearances differ a great deal and no description is ever linked to any particular mother. Hence, it is hard to determine what Bhadrakālī or Kālīkā (the two names used in the list of mothers that are also common epithets for Kālī) might look like.

¹⁶ I hesitate to name this entity directly as Kālī, although she looks and behaves a great deal like her. The text itself never calls her Kālī. However, as David Kinsley has pointed out, she was not yet recognized as a major deity in the pantheon (1976, p. 90). Hence, this figure in the *Sauptikaparvan* is likely a proto-Kālī of some kind.

battlefield itself is described as "strewn with bones and hair, inundated with rushing rivers of blood...covered with blood-fouled, headless bodies and bodiless heads..." (11.16.5-6). Again, being "filthy with blood and flesh, [it] leaves no place to walk on" (11.16.55). As a result, the women get their feet dirty walking on the blood (11.18.3). Some women stumble over bodies and fall on the ground (11.16.14). Others hold blood-soaked bodies in their arms (11.16.51; 17.23; 18.10; et. al.). In addition, part of mourning behaviour is to fall down on the ground, which will be discussed in more detail later on. Two lines in the text also support the assumption that the mourning women are covered in blood. When Draupadī curses the Kuru women after her molestation in the royal hall, she states that "their bodies [will be] smeared with the blood of their relatives" (van Buitenen, 2.71.20). In the *Strīparvan* itself, Gāndhārī states that "the beautiful faces of these highest women look like a bunch of withered red lotuses" (11.16.43). The word for "red" in this line is *rakta*, which also means "blood." The simile in this line refers not only to the beauty of the women, but also to their ornamentation with blood. Thus, it is clear that these women are at least partially covered in blood and gore, bringing their appearances even closer to Kālī and Kālarātrī, as well as increasing the pollution associated with them.

So far, I have suggested that the appearance of the mourning women in the *Mahābhārata*, and especially in the *Strīparvan*, bears a striking resemblance to that of menstruating women, ascetics, Śiva, and goddesses like Kālī. All of them wear a single garment, have unbound hair, and are either unornamented or covered in unconventional ornamentation, like blood. All of these people exist outside of structured society in a liminal condition. As symbols of liminality, these marks also carry meanings that go beyond mere separation from civilization. I will now examine

the meaning of these symbols for mourning women, using their similarity with other liminal figures to aid in the analysis.

Hair plays an important role in the Hindu tradition. As stated above, the normal condition for women's hair in the *Mahābhārata* is bound or tied. There are many differing reasons for this practice. Lawrence Babb has noted that Hindus believe hair absorbs pollution (Babb, 1975, p. 74).¹⁷ As a result, during birth and death rites, close relatives shave to get rid of the pollution of these rituals (Ibid, p. 76). Thus, long hair is capable of absorbing more pollution, especially if it is left unbound.¹⁸ Moreover, the matted hair of ascetics is often naturally unclean, smelling bad, dirty, and filled with lice (Obeyesekere, 1981, p. 35). Menstruating women are also polluted, and can transmit such pollution through a touch, especially a touch of the hair (Hiltebeitel, 1988, p. 235). Hence, long, unbound hair of any kind may carry some of these stigmas and dangers. As noted above, the women are also covered in blood from the battlefield, and this condition likely includes their hair. The mourning women are polluted and are thus extremely inauspicious. Such pollution is considered dangerous, since it can contaminate and defile even those not associated with the deceased.

However, pollution is only one facet of unbound hair. As noted above, liminal entities are thought to possess supernatural power. Hair in the Hindu tradition is

¹⁷ By pollution here, I do not mean actual dirt, but spiritual pollution, a kind of unseen psychic dirt that contaminates a person, place, or thing.

¹⁸ For Hindu women in Trinidad, it is custom never to enter a cemetery or burning grounds without tying up one's hair in a bun. Not only does pollution enter one's hair, but ghosts and spirits may ride in unbound hair as well. Frequently, after one has returned home from such places, drops of a foul-smelling liquid known as "mixture medicine" are sprinkled in the hair and on the body to drive out the pollution and any riding spirits.

strongly linked to the possession of potential power.¹⁹ For example, the hair of an ascetic is said to be the storehouse of power (*tapas* or *śakti*) (Obeyesekere, 1981, p. 34). This power is gained through ascetic practices, including various forms of self-mortification. It is a neutral power, capable of creation and destruction equally.²⁰ On the level of the male body, *śakti* is thought of as semen that is drawn up into the head through ascetic practices and stored in the head and hair (O'Flaherty, 1980, p. 45). The semen is then transformed into Soma, providing the ascetic with immortality (Ibid, p. 46). Hence, long, matted or unbound hair is a sign of potential stored power.

In the case of mourning women, this power is stored differently from male ascetics, but it is stored nonetheless. Whereas the men need to perform asceticism to obtain power, women only need to be chaste wives, or *pativrata* (women devoted to their husbands) (Ibid, p. 45). A good example in the *Mahābhārata* of the link between a wife's chastity and her power is found in the story of Nala and Damayantī. Damayantī has been deserted by her luckless husband Nala and is about to be molested by a hunter. To defend herself, she cursed him, "If even in my heart I have never thought of any man but Nala, so let this brute who lives off animals fall dead!" (van Buitenen, 3.60.37). He falls dead, slain by her power as a *pativrata*. In another instance, this time from the *Strīparvan*, one of the reasons that Gāndhārī is given

¹⁹ I use the word 'potential' here because the hair does not grant the power. Hair is not power. However, it does represent the probability that a person possesses power.

²⁰ The gods use such power to create the universe (O'Flaherty, 1973, pp. 40-2). Śiva uses it to destroy Kāma, the god of love (O'Flaherty, 1973, pp. 141-71). The chief villain of the *Rāmāyaṇa* gains his near-indestructibility with it. Various sages, gods, and women use it to curse different people throughout the *Mahābhārata*. Hence, it can be used to do almost anything, regardless of the ethics involved. The implications of this power with regards to the mourning women will be discussed later on.

divine sight is because she is a *pativratā* (11.16.2). To the best of my knowledge, there is not one example in the entire *Mahābhārata* of a Bharata or Pāñcāla woman being unfaithful to her husband, or failing to serve him well. Hence, all of the women mourning on the battlefield have the potential to be storehouses of *śakti*, as represented by their long, dishevelled hair.

The fact that the women's hair is unbound is also of importance. This can be found in the symbolism of Kālī's hair. Such wild, dishevelled locks are representative of an uncontrolled energy (Kinsley, 1976, p. 135). This energy is a threat to the established earth, gods, and men (Babb, 1975, p. 222). The goddesses, like Durgā and Kālī are *śakti* incarnate, according to such texts as the *Devī-Māhātmya* (Ibid, p. 221). The only time that their power becomes restrained is when they enter into a proper social role, like a mother or wife. In other words, the power is contained when they stop being liminal entities and enter into the social structure. For example, in the *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Śiva stops Kālī's bloodthirsty rampage after a battle by turning himself into a crying baby. Kālī stops her slaughter to nurse the infant (quoted in Kinsley, 1976, p. 104). In a similar myth, Śiva stops her rampage by lying on the battlefield. When Kālī realizes she is stepping on her husband, she is horrified and ceases the bloodbath (Babb, 1975, p. 222).

Perhaps the best example of the link between the goddess' incredible power and unbound hair can be found in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. When Kālī has slain the demon Ruru, she rips out his entrails and proceeds to bind them into her hair (quoted in Granoff, 1979, p. 144). In addition, numerous temple sculptures of Mahiṣāsūramardinī (the goddess as the slayer of the demon Mahiṣa) show the goddess binding up her hair while standing over the demon's corpse (Granoff, 1979,

p. 142). It is worthy to note that at the end of these battles in the *Devī-Māhātmya*, the first thing the gods do is praise the goddess as the "mother of the whole world...queen of the universe...by thee alone, as mother, this world has been filled" (*Devī-Māhātmya* 11.2-5). Thus, the goddess restrains her power when she ends her period of liminality and fits into a social role, be it mother or wife. In some cases, this involves an explicit binding of the hair.

The last example of unrestrained power being associated with unbound hair is the story of Draupadī's hair in vernacular versions of the *Mahābhārata*.²¹ When Draupadī has been dragged into the hall after Yudhiṣṭhira loses her to Duryodhana in the dice game, she is molested and insulted by Duryodhana and his brother Duḥśāsana. After enduring repeated insults, and having been saved from being stripped naked by a divine miracle, she declares before all of the assembled men in the royal hall, "I will not take up and bind with my hand my rolling wavy hair which has fallen on the earth unless you and all your relatives are destroyed on the very cruel battlefield....Listen, you kings in the sabhā [hall]! If in the future, on the battlefield, I do not tie up my hair standing on the chest of the man who has done the disgrace of touching my hair and saris, having made me stand in this royal sabhā, then I am not Draupadī" (quoted in Hildebeitel, 1988, pp. 236-7). In another version, she vows that "not until the victory drums roll on the battlefield, having cut off [their] crowned heads, smelling of raw meat, the hot blood falling, will I take up and bind my dishevelled hair"

²¹ This story does not occur in the Critical Edition or in Roy's translation. The only hint that Draupadī's hair remains unbound throughout books II-XI occurs in the *Virāṭaparvan* when she must bind her hair to disguise herself as a chambermaid (van Buitenen, 4.8.1). However, the story of Draupadī's hair is a popular tale throughout Hindu India, as shown by its prevalence in plays and temple iconography (see Hildebeitel, 1988). The example I will use is drawn from the selections of various Tamil sources found in Hildebeitel, 1988.

(Ibid, p. 237). In still another variant, she makes a similar vow regarding Duryodhana, claiming she will not bind her hair until she stands on his corpse on the battlefield, takes a handful of blood with his ribs to comb her hair, and gathers up his intestines to tie in her hair as she binds it (Ibid, p. 306). This retying of her hair is said to mark the end of her extended menstrual period (Hiltebeitel, 1991, p. 396). However, in one version, she is about to retie her hair as she vowed when she learns of her five sons' deaths at the hands of Aśvatthāman. At this point, she again vows not to bind her hair until she has Aśvatthāman's head (Hiltebeitel, 1988, p. 424).

It is also important to point out that it is during this time between her molestation in the *Sabhāparvan* and the funeral rites performed in the *Strīparvan* that Draupadī's behaviour towards her husbands and society in general changes. She becomes vindictive, outspoken, and generally dangerous, with the power to curse those she is displeased with. In other words, she becomes liminal. This is true of both the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the vernacular versions. As a result, the unbound hair of Draupadī represents a condition that is associated with pollution (menstruation, "besmirched with blood"), but also one in which she has the potential for a great deal of power, unrestricted by social boundaries. The re-tying of her bloody hair with Duryodhana/Duṣāsana's intestines is reminiscent of the behaviour of the goddess after her battles with demons.²² By binding her hair, she ends her liminal condition and returns to the social hierarchy.

It is also interesting to note that people with long, unkempt hair tend to live in or frequent very specific places. They always reside away from civilization.

²² In fact, some Tamils consider her to be a multiform of Kālī (Hiltebeitel, 1988, p. 307).

Menstruating women like Draupadī are kept segregated from men as well as from various household chores (*Manu* 4.40-42; 4.57; 4.208). The ascetic should live in the forest or in a hermitage (*Manu* 6.4). Śiva lives in mountains, caves, and burning grounds (O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 219). Kālī typically haunts battlefields and cremation grounds (Kinsley, 1986, p. 116), while Kālarātrī makes her only appearance during the battle between Aśvatthāman and the sleeping Pāñcāla-Pāñḍava army. The women in the *Strīparvan* mourn on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. All of these places are either wild and untamed, or else full of death, destruction and pollution. Hence, the liminality of all of these beings is enhanced through their location.

To summarize thus far, I have argued that unbound, long hair of the mourning women is representative of a liminal condition in which the individual is polluted and inauspicious on the one hand, and potentially in possession of power on the other. I have done this by examining the symbols of similar liminal entities like menstruating women, ascetics, and deities like Śiva and Kālī. Having explored the meaning of hair, I may now turn to clothing and ornaments.

Wearing a single garment has meaning beyond the mere separation of the individual from structured society and entry into in a liminal condition. The act of wearing a single garment also carries shameful and immoral connotations, as well as hints of supernatural power and eroticism. Hence, if the inauspicious side of the mourning women is highlighted by their clothing, the single garment also emphasizes their attractive, erotic characteristics. I will demonstrate this argument by examining the symbolic connections between mourning women, ascetics, and Śiva. In addition, I shall turn to stories in the *Mahābhārata* involving Draupadī and Damayantī in their liminal conditions to provide further evidence.

As has already been established, wearing a single garment is a sign of liminality. As such, it is a sign that the wearer may possess potentially dangerous power. Moreover, a person with uncontrolled senses is said to be naked (O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 244). Wearing one garment is only a single step from being naked. As a result, these liminal beings are dangerously close to being uncontrolled. Thus, as with the hair, the single garment of the mourning women represents potential power that has the possibility of going out of control.

Another facet of the meaning of the clothing can be found in the symbolism of Śiva. As noted above, Śiva clads himself in a single loincloth, or goes one step further and walks around naked. This nakedness on Śiva's part is said superficially in various myths to be improper, a sign of his poverty, or proof of his immodesty (O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 244). To wear only one garment is to be one step away from improper, immodest, behaviour, or to be extremely close to poverty. In the *Skanda Purāṇa*, Pārvatī emphasizes this negative aspect of wearing one garment when she wins Śiva's loincloth from him in a game of dice. Śiva begs for it back, but Pārvatī refuses, asking him "What need have you for a loincloth? You went naked into the Pine Forest and seduced the wives of the sages on a pretext of begging" (quoted in O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 174). Thus, the loincloth of Śiva and its stripping emphasize his wanton lust and eroticism (O'Flaherty, 1973, p. 174). The erotic connotations of his nakedness are brought out in other myths as well.²³ On one level, then, the single garment of Śiva is a scant cover for his lustful behaviour, seducing wives and chasing

²³ See pp. 204 & 244 in O'Flaherty, 1973.

many all-too-eager women.²⁴

Śiva is not the only liminal entity to have eroticism linked to his clothing. Erotic connotations in a single garment are found in some of the myths in the *Mahābhārata* that I have discussed already. When various people in the royal hall condemn Duryodhana for having Draupadī brought there while menstruating, Karṇa defends him, saying "*She* submits to many men and assuredly is a whore! Thus there is, I think, nothing strange in taking her into the hall, or to have her in one piece of clothing, or for that matter naked!" (van Buitenen, 2.61.36-7). He then orders her to be stripped of her clothing. Hence, according to Karṇa, it does not matter if Draupadī only wears one garment or even goes naked, since she engages in lustful, immoral behaviour. As in the myths of Śiva, we are presented with a situation in which a single garment is said to be a scant cover for wanton behaviour.

There are more examples of the erotic connotations of wearing one piece of clothing. In many of the stories in the *Mahābhārata* in which a woman is desired by a male to the point that the man dies because of his lust, she is wearing a single garment. I have already cited the story of Draupadī's molestation in the royal hall. Many Tamil variants claim that Duḥśāsana's attempted disrobing of Draupadī was driven solely by lust, which overcame any fear he might have had for her polluted condition (Hiltebeitel, 1988, p. 269). As a result, Bhīma vows to kill Duḥśāsana and succeeds in this undertaking during the great war.

In King Virāṭa's court, Draupadī, masquerading as a chambermaid, is accosted

²⁴ Various ascetics also engage in erotic behaviour, either seducing women or being seduced. However, none of these stories specifically mention the clothing of the ascetic in connection with eroticism as clearly as the myths of Śiva, so I have omitted them from the core discussion. For the myths, see van Buitenen, 3.94-113 & 3.121-125.

by the king's marshall Kīcaka. In this disguise, which occurs during her period of liminality from book II to book XI, she wears "one long, black, very dirty robe" (van Buitenen, 4.8.1). While wearing this robe, Draupadī is described by the queen as follows:

The people you mention are not as beautiful as you....Your heels are flat, your thighs are full, you are deep in the three places, high in the six, red in the five spots, and your voice halts like a wild goose's. Your hair is fine, your nipples are pretty, you are shapely, with full breasts and buttocks, you are endowed with every grace like a filly from Kashmir! Your eyelashes curl nicely, your lips are like *bimba* berries, your waist is slender, your throat is lined like a conch shell, your veins are hidden, and your face is like the full moon! (van Buitenen, 3.8.9-12)

Draupadī's beauty and desirability are clearly highlighted in this passage, thereby emphasizing the erotic connotations of a woman wearing a single garment. As a result of her attractiveness, Kīcaka molests and attempts to rape her. The result of Kīcaka's lust, like that of Duḥśāsana, is that he is slain by Bhīma.

During her exile in the forest, Draupadī is sought after by a king named Jayadratha. She is abducted by him while her husbands are away, wearing the appropriate forest-dweller garb of a *kuśa* grass skirt, which is mentioned twice during the abduction (van Buitenen, 3.250.1 & 252.23). Jayadratha will not take 'no' for an answer, and, as a result, is almost killed by Bhīma, who only holds back when reminded that his cousin is married to Jayadratha.

Damayantī, having been cast out in the forest with her husband, and having been subsequently deserted by him, is lusted after by a hunter while she was "covered with only half a piece of cloth" (van Buitenen, 3.60.31). The hunter is killed by Damyantī's power as a *pativrātā*. It should be noted that Damayantī, like Draupadī, was living in a liminal condition, although hers was the result of poverty rather than

menstruation or vows of any kind. Her husband had lost his kingdom in a dicing match and they were both forced to leave and live on what they could scavenge in the wilderness, each clad in a single garment (van Buitenen, 3.58.6-7). However, her husband lost his clothes and before he deserted her, he took half of her skirt to preserve his modesty (van Buitenen, 3.59.16).

All of these examples serve to emphasize the attractiveness and erotic appeal of a person clothed in a single garment, in spite of his or her marginal and polluted condition. Śiva, Draupadī, and Damayantī either desire the opposite sex, or are objects of desire. In addition, many of these examples continue to emphasize the inherent danger of the woman clad in one skirt. She is capable of killing those lusting after her, by herself or through others.²⁵ Hence, being clad in one garment is a state that is both erotic and dangerous for others. The men feel that they are one step away from passion when they are really one step away from death. Although not explicitly linked in the *Strīparvan*, the connection of the appearance of the mourning women with that of these other liminal entities suggests that they might have the same erotic and dangerous connotations. Since the mourners wear one garment, they are desirable and desiring, but also dangerous.²⁶

The last element of the appearance of the mourning women to be examined is

²⁵ It is interesting to note that Bhīma does all of the killing for Draupadī. As David Gitomer has shown, Bhīma exhibits many characteristics of *rākṣasas* or demons in his actions, and especially in the cannibalistic and gory manner with which he slays those who offend Draupadī (see Gitomer, 1991). As a *rākṣasa* of sorts, Bhīma also lies outside of the standard social hierarchy. Hence, if a liminal woman does not kill the overly lecherous male, her demonic counterpart will do it for her.

²⁶ The erotic aspects of the mourning women will be elaborated upon when I come to the laments of the women.

their lack of normal ornaments. At this point, I would also like to address their re-ornamentation in battlefield gore that I mentioned briefly before. As I have noted, the removal of the conventional ornaments is a symbol of detachment from the social hierarchy and entrance into a liminal condition. In this condition, the women acquire new decorations: the blood of their relatives. Here I will explore what this change of ornamentation means for the women, focusing especially on the meaning of blood in the Hindu tradition in order to show that being ornamented in blood carries polluting connotations, as well as implications of dangerous power and fertility.

Blood generally carries negative, polluting qualities in the Hindu tradition. There is not one positive reference to blood in the *Mānavadharmasāstra*. Most references are decidedly negative. For example, it is included on the list of the list of the twelve human defilements (*Manu* 5.135). The *Strīparvan* generally refers to blood in a disapproving manner as well. The corpses are "blood-fouled" (11.16.6). The earth is "filthy with blood" (11.16.55). Blood is seen as polluting, and thus to be covered in blood is to be polluted. In keeping with their liminality, the mourning women have exchanged auspicious ornaments for polluting adornment.

Being decorated with blood also has a dangerously powerful and fertile side to it for these women, which is linked to menstrual blood. This connection is set up by Draupadī in the *Sabhāparvan* when she curses the Kuru women to end up in the same condition she was in at that moment, part of which involves being covered and menstruating (van Buitenen, 2.71.20). Whether the women in the *Strīparvan* are menstruating or not is unknown. However, Draupadī has linked her garment being "wet and besmirched with blood" to the women being "smeared with the blood of their relatives...themselves in their courses" (van Buitenen, 2.71.18 & 71.20). Hence, the

blood the mourning women are covered in carries some of the connotations of menstrual blood.

Like other types of blood, menstrual blood is polluting. It is also extremely dangerous for the male. According to Manu, a man who has sex with a menstruating woman "loses his wisdom, brilliant energy, strength, eyesight, and long life" (*Manu* 4.41). Moreover, he is instructed not to have a conversation with her, and he must clean himself if he is touched by her (*Manu* 4.57; 5.85). There is clearly some kind of power associated with menstrual blood, one that is capable of polluting or even draining a man. Hence, being covered with blood, especially menstrual blood, lends the mourning women more dangerous power, in addition to that implied by the hair and clothing.

However, menstrual blood has many positive aspects as well. The *Aśvamedhaparvan* claims that life (*prāṇa*) first arises from the union of semen and menstrual blood (Roy, 14.25, p. 48).²⁷ For the *Mahābhārata*, menstrual blood is almost as essential to fertility as semen.²⁸ Moreover, menstrual blood is said to be created by desire (Roy, 14.25, p. 48), lending to it erotic characteristics, as well as connotations of fertility. It is also interesting to note that blood is thought to create milk in a woman's breasts, which is her primary auspicious and fertile fluid (O'Flaherty, 1980, p. 36). Thus, menstrual blood is also a fertile substance for the

²⁷ This is also the most common theory on the conception of children within the Hindu tradition (O'Flaherty, 1980, pp. 33 & 37).

²⁸ There are many births of people in the *Mahābhārata*, especially brahmins, that arise only from male seed, likely because of the desire of the composers to give these characters a perfectly "pure" birth. In other words, these characters carry none of the possible pollution of being made partly from menstrual blood. However, the norm is standard conception.

Mahābhārata and one that carries erotic connotations. The mourning women are at least partly covered in blood which is linked to menstrual blood. In this way, the women radiate a fertility.

In this chapter I have shown that the mourning women in the *Strīparvan* separate themselves from the normal social hierarchy and enter a state of liminality by altering their appearance. This appearance change only occurs during periods of formal mourning. Moreover, the elements of the change, like the unbound hair, the single garment, and the lack of conventional ornamentation all bear resemblances to the appearance of other liminal entities, including menstruating women, ascetics, and deities like Kālī and Śiva. These symbolic connections with other fringe beings give the appearance of the mourning women specific characteristics. On the one hand, the women are polluted, polluting, and inauspicious. They have the potential for using dangerous supernatural power. On the other hand, the women also exhibit signs of eroticism and fertility. All of these traits will become more apparent in the examination of the mourning women's actions in the next chapter, as well as in the subsequent chapter on laments.

CHAPTER TWO

In this chapter I will address the actions and behaviour of the mourning women in the *Strīparvan*. These actions include wailing, striking one's head or body with one's hands, falling down on the ground (conscious or unconscious), sitting near the deceased, and smelling the deceased's head or body. As with the appearance of the women, I will compare the behaviour of the *Strīparvan* mourners with that of mourning women in other sections of the two epics. By addressing each action in turn, I will show that they are the socially-acceptable outlets for the intense grief felt after the death of one's relatives and friends. As well, some of the actions, especially touching and holding the corpse, and smelling the corpse's head, express a denial of death. I will also demonstrate that certain aspects of the women's behaviour, including wailing and sitting around the dead, carry polluting and inauspicious connotations, further heightening the aura of dangerous power surrounding these women that began with their change of appearance. I will also discuss the uses of this power that the mourning women appear to possess, referring to the curses the women hurl and the effect these curses have on the plot of the epic. Parallels between the behaviour of these mourning women and the actions of other liminal entities, including battlefield scavengers and menstruating women, will also be addressed to strengthen my conclusions.

Wailing is one of the most common expressions of grief that women perform in

the *Strīparvan*. At 11.16.47, one finds women "sighing, wailing, and lamenting for a long time..." The battlefield "resounded in all directions with the cries of those whose hearts were stricken with suffering" (11.16.16). Gāndhārī wails upon embracing her son Duryodhana's corpse (11.17.3). Helping the grieving Uttarā, the Matsya women are "wailing and lamenting" (11.20.28). In 24.11, the wives of Bhūriśravas wail over the body. More examples can be found at 11.19, p. 31; 21, p. 34; 22, p. 34; 23, p. 36; and 25, p. 40 (all trans. by Roy). In addition, the wails are often compared to the cries of birds. The women are "wailing like ospreys" at 11.11.5, 11.10, and 16.18. In 11.18.14, they are "stuttering like swans" and "shrieking like cranes."

Women who are mourning in other parts of the *Mahābhārata* also wail.

Although there is no mention of wailing in the *Droṇaparvan* account of the mourning of Abhimanyu, Kṛṣṇa's recounting of the event in the *Aśvamedhaparvan* mentions that Subhadrā "indulged in loud [wails]...like a female osprey" (Roy, 14.61, p. 123).²⁹ The Kuru women hearing of the loss of the battle also wail "ceaselessly, [causing] the earth to resound with their voices like a flight of she-ospreys," and they "cried aloud, wept, and uttered loud shrieks" (Roy, 9.29, p. 87). When Pāṇḍu dies in the *Ādīparvan*, Mādrī "shrieked and shrieked" (van Buitenen 1.116.14). Her co-wife Kuntī, upon learning of his death, issues "a violent scream" and "wailed with misery" shortly after that (van Buitenen 1.116.16-17).

More examples of wailing are found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Upon seeing her fallen husband, Tārā utters "piercing cries, resembling an osprey's" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.19, p.

²⁹ I would like to note that I have translated √kruś (to cry out, wail), which was used here, as wailing, unlike Roy, who tends to translate √kruś as either wailing or lamenting. Hence, I have replaced his word "lamenting" with "wailing."

216). When the other women that are with Tārā hear her laments, they "emitted pitiful cries on every side" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 218). During Vālin's funeral, the women begin wailing (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230). In fact, "their cries were heard in the depth of the forest and re-echoed through the woods and among the rocks on every side" (ibid).

Having presented the instances of wailing in the texts, I will discuss the meanings of this action. Firstly, wailing is an expression of grief common to many cultures and their narratives. The Bedouin women of Egypt wail during their mourning rites as an expression of grief (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 197). The women in Homer's *Iliad* utter "wails of grief" when they hear of the death of Hector (Fagles, *Iliad*, 22.525). The women of various African tribes, including the Lugbara, Hadza, and Mbuti, wail during funerary rites (Middleton, 1982, p. 148; Woodburn, 1982, pp. 189 & 197). Among the Laymi of Bolivia, wailing and keening are led during the funerary services by the women (Harris, 1982, p. 53). Cantonese women wail in shifts continuously for a few hours to a day until the corpse is encoffined (Watson, 1982, p. 160). Given the frequency of wailing on a world scale, it can be assumed that it is a natural reaction to grief that has become ritualized in diverse cultures.³⁰

However, in the *Mahābhārata*, the meaning of wailing does not end with the expression of grief. One is immediately struck by the number of references to the similarities between the wailing and the cries of birds, and especially of ospreys. This comparison is important for understanding the actions of the mourning women in the

³⁰ Men also wail occasionally, which helps support my claim that it is a natural reaction to grief that has become institutionalized among women. For example, Yudhiṣṭhira utters "loud wails of woe" at the conclusion of the funeral rites in the *Strīparvan* (Roy, 11.27, p. 46). The men of the Laymi tribe also wail, but are less likely to than the women (Harris, 1982, p. 53).

Strīparvan. In the first place, the osprey-like wailing and shrieking is reminiscent of the noises that other animals are making on the battlefield while the women are mourning. The battlefield "resounded with the inauspicious cries of jackals" (11.16.8). Vultures, crows, and jackals are "crying out again and again" (11.16.34). However, the verb used for wailing is generally $\sqrt{kruś}$ with various prefixes, while that used for the resounding of the cries of the jackals is \sqrt{nad} with various prefixes. In one case, though, the women's cries are described as "resounding" ($anu + \sqrt{nad}$), just as the scavengers' cries do. Through this symbolic vocal connection, the women share the inauspicious qualities of these creatures. The creatures that scream and howl are all scavengers that feast on carrion and raw meat, and thus are considered low and dirty. The *Mānavadharmasāstra* notes that a high-caste man should not recite scripture when jackals are howling (*Manu*, 4.115). A woman who is unfaithful to her husband is reborn as a jackal (*Ibid*, 5.164).

In addition, the cries of such animals and birds are considered to be bad omens. At the birth of Duryodhana, "there was a sudden outcry on all horizons of gruesome beasts that feed on carrion and of jackals of unholy howls" (van Buitenen, 1.107.29). When these cries are heard, the priests tell King Dhṛtarāṣṭra that Duryodhana should be killed to save the kingdom and family. As well, just before the great war, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks his bard who the beasts of prey are crying against. Saṁjaya replies that they "yell against the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra" (Roy, 6.20, p. 47). Since the mourning women are connected to these animals through wailing, then this wailing is both inauspicious and a harbinger of bad tidings.

However, the women are not compared directly to jackals or vultures, but to ospreys. Although there are similarities between the ospreys and other battlefield

carnivores in terms of their cries, the osprey is also a strikingly different bird. Ospreys are not scavengers. They only eat fresh fish, or, in desperate circumstances, mice, beetles, and wounded birds (Burton & Burton, 1974, p. 1601). Hence, it is a fairly strange situation in which one would find ospreys on battlefields.³¹ The *Strīparvan* only mentions their presence once (11.16.8). Hence, the wails of the women being likened to the cries of osprey are an indication that the women represent no danger to the corpses. Ospreys do not consume carrion, and neither will the women, in spite of their symbolic connections with other inauspicious screamers like vultures and jackals.³²

As has been shown, the wailing of the women carries two meanings. In the first place, it is an expression of grief that is common to many cultures in the world. Secondly, through connections with jackals and other howling and screeching creatures, the women take on inauspicious qualities, sharing in the low and polluted status of a scavenger, and the harbinger of bad events. However, the women are directly compared only to the osprey, which is a non-scavenger, rather than to the other screamers, and we might therefore assume that their danger is not to the

³¹ I have made the assumption that the ancient Hindus were not ignorant of the behaviour of various birds and animals. Many cultures have extensive knowledge of animals without the presence of the study of biology (see Lévi-Strauss, C. 1963. "The Concept of Archaism in Anthropology" in *Structural Anthropology*. USA: Basic Books, pp. 101-119 for many examples). Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that the Hindus knew of osprey behaviour.

³² Ospreys have another facet of their behaviour that is similar to that of the mourning women. When ospreys protect their young from predators, they let out loud shrieks and begin to stagger on the ground and in the air in order to distract the predators from the nests (Burton & Burton, 1974, p. 1601). The cries of the women are like ospreys, and the women also stagger and stumble around the battlefield (11.16.14), like the protecting ospreys. Thus, one could speculate that the mourning women are protecting the dead through their osprey-like screams and behaviour. However, there is little or no evidence within the text itself to support such a conclusion, so I shall leave it as speculation.

corpses, in contrast to the scavengers.

The second action to be discussed is the striking of one's head or body with one's hands. There are three occurrences of this action in the *Strīparvan*. When Gāndhārī initially describes the battlefield to Kṛṣṇa, she notes that some women "are striking their heads with their hands" (11.16.54). Duryodhana's wife is seen "striking her own head with her hands" while she is standing by him (11.17.28). Gāndhārī's daughter is "striking her body with her own hands" while mourning her husband (Roy, 11.22, p. 35).

This behaviour also occurs in the *Śalyaparvan*. The Kuru women, upon learning of the defeat of Duryodhana's army, "tore their bodies with nails and struck their heads with their hands" (Roy, 9.29, p. 87). They were also "beating their breasts" (Ibid). The other examples in the *Mahābhārata* that I have discussed in previous sections contain no reference to the striking of the body. It would appear that this action is only appropriate during the period of formal mourning that takes place in the *Strīparvan* and is briefly referred to in the *Śalyaparvan*. This conclusion is substantiated by the passages on Vālin's death in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is not until Tārā reaches the corpse of her husband that she begins "beating her head and breast with her two hands" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.19, p. 216).

Having looked at the examples, I will now examine the reasons why a mourner would strike herself. Quite simply, striking oneself is a socially-sanctioned outlet for the intense rage and anger felt as part of the grieving process. It is difficult to argue that it is anything more than a natural reaction, since there are no textual metaphors

associated with it, and no character in the text comments on it.³³

Grieving is not confined to sadness. Rage and anger are inherent parts of the grieving process. In his study of Ilongot headhunters, Ronato Rosaldo has pointed out the force of the intense rage felt at a relative's death. For the Ilongot men, this rage is so powerful that it can only be vented by cutting off the head of male from an opposing tribe and throwing the head in the bush (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 1).³⁴ By using his own wife's death, and the practices of Anglo-American grief therapists as examples, Rosaldo notes that rage in grief is not confined to the Ilongot, but is more likely a universal human reaction to death (Ibid, p. 10).

The *Mahābhārata* makes it clear that rage, and especially vengeance arising out of that rage, is part of women's grief.³⁵ In the *Sauptikaparvan*, Draupadī is extremely angry over the deaths of her five sons and demands that her husbands "take the life of [Aśvatthāman], along with the lives of all his followers" (Roy, 10.11, p. 32).

In another example, Gāndhārī desires to curse Yudhiṣṭhira for defeating her son's army, but is restrained by the seer Vyāsa (11.13.2-3). She claims that it is the way in which Bhīma killed her son Duryodhana is what "causes my anger to grow"

³³ To the best of my knowledge, no secondary source dealing with the *Mahābhārata* even mentions the women striking themselves.

³⁴ Rosaldo does not mention the behaviour of the women is, so I have no idea how the Ilongot women vent their rage.

³⁵ I should also note that rage is part of men's grief as well. Arjuna vows to slay Jayadratha out of rage over the death of his son Abhimanyu. Aśvatthāman kills the entire Pāṇḍava-Pāñcāla force while it sleeps out of anger for his father Droṇa's death. In the *Strīparvan*, Dhṛtarāṣṭra crushes an iron statue of Bhīma because Bhīma was responsible for the death of his hundred sons. However, men's grief is beyond the scope of this immediate project and will have to be dealt with another time.

(11.13.18). Her anger does not leave her until she causes Yudhiṣṭhira's toenails to become diseased (11.15.8-9).³⁶ She had tried to restrain her anger as Vyāsa had instructed, but could not entirely withhold it, which, given her frequently-mentioned virtuousness,³⁷ is certainly a testament to the power of anger in grief.

Gāndhārī's rage is expressed again later in the text. After viewing the battlefield and describing the corpses of the warriors and the actions of their women, Gāndhārī is "possessed by rage [and] overwhelmed with grief over her sons" (11.25.35). She then proceeds to curse Kṛṣṇa and his entire clan to die contemptible deaths.

All three of these examples involve women directing their grief-born anger outwards toward a target of their vengeance. In all three examples, the woman has suffered some form of injustice in the death of her sons. Draupadī's sons were slain in a night attack against their camp when they scarcely had time to don armour or grab weapons, which is a violation of the rules of warfare. Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana, both sons of Gāndhārī, were slain unfairly by Bhīma. The former was struck below the belt in a mace fight, and the latter had his chest ripped open and his blood drunk, or nearly drunk, by Bhīma.³⁸ Gāndhārī herself mentions that she would not be grieving like this if he had "adopted the path of righteousness (in slaying [her children])" (Roy, 11.15, p. 23). Gāndhārī curses Kṛṣṇa because he had "purposefully

³⁶ More will be mentioned on this dangerous power of the women below.

³⁷ See, for example, 11.16.2-3.

³⁸ There are two different accounts of the blood-drinking. During the actual death, there is little doubt that Bhīma actually consumed the blood. However, in the *Strīparvan*, Bhīma claims that the blood "did not pass down my lips and teeth" (Roy, 11.15, p. 22). In any event, Gāndhārī is still mad about Bhīma's behaviour.

ignored" the destruction of the Kurus, even though he had the strength and ability to stop the war (11.25.36-8).

However, in the examples of women who are striking themselves that I cited above, there is no external target for their rage, since no one committed any form of injustice in these deaths. Almost all of the warriors on the battlefield were slain in fair combat and this is the best death for a warrior to die. As Bhīṣma said to his troops at the beginning of the war, "To die of disease at home is a sin for a *kṣatriya* (warrior). The death he meets with in battle is his eternal duty" (Roy, 6.17, p. 41). Since the deaths of many of the warriors were fair, and these warriors had performed their "eternal duty," then the women have nothing to lash out against. Nonetheless, they still need to vent the incredible rage associated with death, and so we may surmise they attack and mar themselves.

This is supported by another of the examples of a mourning woman striking herself that I cited above, the wife of Duryodhana. As I have mentioned, Duryodhana was slain unfairly by Bhīma, and this caused Gāndhārī to be angry with the Pāṇḍavas. However, by the time Duryodhana's wife is mourning him on the battlefield, her mother-in-law, who is her direct superior in the household, has already taken care of any vengeance. In other words, it is my contention that if vengeance has already been looked after by someone else, then the outlet for the rage is taken away, and the woman strikes herself instead.

The same idea of contained anger and self-infliction holds true for Tārā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well. As I noted above, Tārā strikes herself in grief. However, Rāma had killed her husband from behind while Vālin was engaged with another opponent, Sugriva, which is in violation of the rules of combat. Nevertheless, she does not

blame Rāma for his behaviour, stating that "all he did was to obey Sugriva" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.20, p. 218). Nor does she blame Sugriva. In fact, her relationship with him is never called into question and remains quite congenial throughout Vālin's funeral.³⁹ In spite of the injustice involved in her husband's death, she has no outlet for her rage other than herself.⁴⁰

Another aspect of mourning behaviour that the women engage in is falling down on the ground, either in a conscious or unconscious state. This is an extremely common action that occurs during both formal and informal mourning. In the *Strīparvan*, women are falling on the ground with great frequency. Mourning women stumble and fall over bodies (11.16.14). Other women, not used to seeing the horrors of the battlefield, "fall into a faint" (11.16.50). The sight of the battlefield and the corpses also causes women to faint in other parts of the *Strīparvan* (11.18.5; 18.7).

³⁹ I am not sure why there is no problem between Sugriva and Tārā, or why it is never even mentioned. Rāma is the only person ever called into question for Vālin's death. It may be that since Sugriva only fought Vālin fairly, then he was not condemned for asking Rāma to slay Vālin from behind. As well, the fate of the monkeys' lineage depends on the kingship of Sugriva, so to take vengeance on him may not be the best course of action for Tārā to take.

⁴⁰ It is also worth noting that there might be another aspect of this self-striking, although this one is speculation. The women may be striking themselves because they failed their husbands. A proper Hindu wife (*pativrata*) is supposed to precede her husband in death. If she does not, she is thought to have caused his death by not undertaking the proper vows and rituals for his protection. Hence, she may wish to punish herself when he dies. In the classical tradition, a wife who wishes to prove herself as being virtuous would follow her husband in death by immolating herself on his funeral pyre in a practice known as *sātī*. However, in the *Mahābhārata*, there is only one instance of *sātī*, and it is not in the *Strīparvan*. Not one of the wives of the "one billion, six hundred and sixty million twenty thousand men" (Roy, 11.26, p. 42) that died in the battle committed *sātī*. Hence, self-punishment might take another, less severe form in hitting oneself.

It is also interesting to note that although none of the women commit *sātī*, when they are later on given the opportunity to follow their husbands to the celestial realms after the sage Vyāsa had summoned the dead bodily to the banks of the Ganges, many of them accepted, jumped into the water, and died, attaining celestial bodies and joining their husbands. See Roy, 15.33, pp. 241-2.

Women fall down "bewildered" or "afflicted" by grief (11.18.14; 24.12). Draupadī is seen "fallen on the ground weeping" by Kuntī (11.15.12). When describing the battlefield to Kṛṣṇa, Gāndhārī comes across Duryodhana, and "grief-stricken upon seeing her son, [she] suddenly fell on the ground" (11.17.1). His wife actually "falls on the chest of the heroic king of the Kurus" (11.17.28). The wives of Bhūrīśravas also "fall down wretchedly toward him on the ground" (11.24.12). Gāndhārī falls down again after she has finished describing the scene (11.25.34). Karṇa's wife falls down three times in a short span of time (Roy, 11.21, p. 34). Droṇa's wife is also "fallen upon the Earth" (Roy, 11.23, p. 37).

The same behaviour is found in the women in other sections of the *Mahābhārata* and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well. The moment that Draupadī arrived at the battlefield in the *Sauptikaparvan*, she "fell down, afflicted by grief" (Roy, 10.11, p. 31). In the *Droṇaparvan*, when Draupadī and Uttarā mourn Abhimanyu with Subhadrā, "they fainted away and fell down on the earth" (Roy, 7.78, p. 148). During Pāṇḍu and Mādrī's cremation, Pāṇḍu's mother "fell hard to the ground" seeing the bodies burn (van Buitenen, 1.118.24). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Tārā first sees her husband's body, she "was overcome by distress and fell to the ground" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.19, p. 216). After hearing his last words, she fell to the ground again, "submerged in an ocean of grief" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.22, p. 222).⁴¹

The text itself makes it fairly clear that the women fall because grief has overwhelmed them. The power of death is so great that the women forget themselves

⁴¹ Vālin was not quite dead when Tārā arrives on the scene. However, no one seems to realize this until he opens his eyes in chapter 22. He finally dies in the same chapter. There is no difference in Tārā's behaviour before or after his real death.

and their high-caste status, and they collapse. As with striking oneself, falling down is a natural reaction to the shock and horror of the death of a relative or loved one. There are no metaphors or other indications within the text indicating that falling means anything more than this.

Another aspect of falling down has already been dealt with in the previous chapter. As I mentioned, by falling down on the battlefield, the women cause themselves to come in contact with various pollutants, from blood to bones and carrion. Since I have explored this idea in the previous chapter, I will not repeat the argument here.

Another action that the mourning women perform is to sit around or hold the bodies of the slain. Obviously, this action is only done in the presence of the corpse, and thus only occurs during the formal mourning period. In the *Strīparvan*, the women frequently surround the body of a loved one, or hold it in their arms. Gāndhārī tells Kṛṣṇa to "behold these women surrounding the champions who were slain in battle" (11.17.22). One woman stands "grasping the prominent-nosed, lovely- earringed head...of her own relative" (11.18.10). Uttarā "sits next to her husband" as she laments him (11.20.5). During the lament, she is seen "lifting his blood-soaked hair with her hand and placing his head in her lap" (11.20.15). The wives of Bhūrīśravas wail "having surrounded their husband" (11.24.11). One of his wives places his severed arm in her lap before she laments (11.24.16). The wives of Chitrasena are seen "sitting, with beasts of prey, around his fair form" (Roy, 11.19, p. 31). Karmā's wives sit around him as well (Roy, 11.21, p. 34). The same is true of Jayadratha's wives, Śalya's wives, Jayatsena's wives, the wives of the ruler of Kosala, and Dhṛṣṭaketu's wives (Roy, 11.22, p. 35; 23, p. 36; 25, p. 40).

There is only one example of a mourning woman holding a corpse in other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. Just after Pāṇḍu's death, his wife Mādri "held the dead king in her arms" (van Buitenen, 1.116.14). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā embraces her husband's body after she has fallen on the ground (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 217). During her lament, she notes that his "lovely wives surround [him]" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 218). Just before Vālin's cremation, Tārā begins to lament while "taking his head in her lap" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230).

Sitting around and holding the dead has a variety of meanings for these women. Firstly, the mourning women are again symbolically linked with the scavengers that prey on the corpses. As at least one of the examples above states, the women sit around the dead "with beasts of prey." Like the women, these beasts are frequently described as surrounding the dead, or conducting mass feedings on them. As Gāndhārī laments Duryodhana, she states that "vultures surround him" (11.17.12). She also notes that "birds sit completely around Śakuni" (11.24.25). Another son of Gāndhārī is "surrounded and waited upon by vultures" (Roy, 11.19, p. 31). Hence, by surrounding the bodies of the slain, the mourning women are imitating the scavengers, thereby affirming the inauspicious connotations the two groups share that was first seen with the wailing.

In addition, holding the deceased also increases the exposure of the women to the pollution of the corpse. Once again, we see the aura of inauspiciousness and dangerousness heightened by the actions of the mourning women.⁴²

⁴² It is interesting to note that the practices of Aghori ascetics are similar to these actions of the women. As Jonathan Parry has noted, these ascetics meditate while sitting on a corpse and carry a skull around with them (Parry, 1982, p. 89). However, many of these practices only gained their meaning and significance with the onset of Tantric literature, which is far

Another aspect of sitting around the corpse and holding it has to do with the denial of the warrior's death by the mourning women. The women do not just touch the corpses, but they hold it, caress it, and place the head or other body part in their laps. These are very intimate gestures that seem more appropriate as the actions of a wife towards her living husband. By behaving in this way, the mourning woman is denying that her husband is dead, and that she may no longer hold him as she once did. As will be seen in the next chapter, this conclusion is substantiated in the laments that the women make.

There is one more meaning for the practice of the mourning women sitting around the dead. In the description of Śalya's wives sitting around his body, they are compared to "a herd of she-elephants in their season around their leader sunk in [mud]" (Roy, 11.23, p. 36). In other words, these mourning women are likened to a group of female animals at their most fertile peak who cannot get near their mate. This comparison emphasizes two things. Firstly, it highlights the lack of fertility in the lineages of the mourners. The husbands are out of reach and cannot impregnate the fertile women to help continue the clan. Secondly, it adds to the fertile and erotic connotations that began with the connections between the mourning women, menstrual blood, and the desirability of a woman clothed in a single garment.

Further evidence for the fertile and erotic connotations of mourning women appearing in groups is found in another comparison between the women and groups of animals, although the women are not specifically sitting around the deceased men at the time. When the women are preparing to leave for the battlefield, they are

latter chronologically than the *Mahābhārata*. Therefore, since any further comparison between them runs the risk of being anachronistic, I have decided to leave it as noted similarity.

running around "like a group of colts in the yard" (11.9.12). Later on, Gāndhārī describes her daughters-in-law as looking "like a herd of beautifully-maned fillies" (11.16.57). Similar comparisons are made of Draupadī when she is in her period of liminality in the *Virāṭaparvan*. She is told that she "is endowed with every grace like a filly of Kashmir" (van Buitenen, 4.8.11). This statement is made during a long description of Draupadī's beauty. The female horse is an important symbol in the mythologies of Śiva and various ascetics, to whom the women have already been linked. Through an analysis of many of the myths of Śiva and the ascetics Aurva and Dadhīci involving mares, Wendy O'flaherty has shown that the mare is both an image of female resentment owing to imposed chastity, and a symbol of ascetic power being expended (O'Flaherty, 1980, pp. 233-5). For the mourning women, who we have seen are thought to possess such power, both meanings may be appropriate. In other words, the women are both frustrated sexually, and willing to expend their pent-up power, perhaps in destruction.

The destructive aspect of the horse symbolism is supported by the *Mahābhārata*. It claims that "the equine mouth that roves through the ocean, vomiting ceaseless flames of fire" exists within women (Roy, 13.38, p. 6). The same horse head is mentioned elsewhere as the one that "at every joint of time emerges in a golden hue and fills the world with water" (van Buitenen, 5.97.5).⁴³ One could say that frustrated fertility is destructive, not only for a lineage, but for the world.

Overall, by sitting around the dead and holding them, the mourning women continue to exhibit their inauspicious and polluted status. As with wailing, the women

⁴³ This latter reference refers to the flooding of the world at the end of the Losing Age (*Kaliyuga*).

are linked to the scavengers that are consuming the corpses. Moreover, through their symbolic links with female elephants and horses, the frustration that the women experience owing to a lack of fertility is emphasized. Passages that connect women to the doomsday horse-fire also suggest that this frustrated fertility may become a destructive force.

The next action to be discussed is the smelling of the deceased's head or body by the mourning woman. The smelling is generally done when the woman is holding the corpse, and thus is only mentioned when there is direct interaction between a mourner and a body. As a result, the occurrences of smelling in the text are fairly rare. However, it is not a random or normal action, and therefore deserves discussion.

There are only two examples of smelling in the *Strīparvan*. In the first, Duryodhana's wife "affectionately smells her blood-soaked son" (11.17.26). Additionally, Karṇa's wife "cometh and smelleth the face of her lord" (Roy, 11.21, p. 34). Smelling is not mentioned at all in the *Droṇaparvan*, *Aśvamedhaparvan*, or *Śalyaparvan* examples that I have been using above. The main reason for this lack is the absence of any interaction between the mourners and the corpses in these sections. The mourning takes place without a body, and thus there is nothing to smell. One does find smelling in the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s account of the death of Vālin. Before her final lament to her dead husband, Tārā is "smelling the face of that King of the Monkeys" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.23, p. 222).

In a footnote to the above passage quoted from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the translator Hari Prasad Shastri claims that the smelling of the head is "a traditional salutation." This conclusion is been substantiated by the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad*, which notes that

"when a man returns from a journey, he should sniff his son's head" (*Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.10). As with the holding of the corpse, this action provides another instance of the denial of death that is expressed by the mourning women. They do not want to believe that someone to whom they were extremely close has died, so they continue to treat the person as if he were alive.

I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the dangerous power that the women in mourning have, and the possibilities for its use. So far, I have made continuous claims that the women appear to have power, or have an aura of power, but I have only implicitly stated its uses. I have stated the source of the power in the previous chapter. The women gain power by being chaste wives, or *pativrātās*. As long as a woman is entirely devoted to her husband, her power will increase.

The main way in which this power is used is in curses.⁴⁴ In the *Mahābhārata*, women are not capable of curses unless they are in a liminal condition and have their social restrictions and norms taken away. A liminal woman is a woman capable of anything, including harm, so it is not surprising to find her wielding her power in the form of curses. This is one of the reasons why such women are considered dangerous.

There is only one curse hurled in the *Strīparvan*, and that is by Gāndhārī. She is extremely upset with the role that Kṛṣṇa played, or failed to play, in the war. As a result, she declares:

⁴⁴ Jonathan Parry notes that in modern-day Banares the chief mourner uses the power he accumulates to re-create a body for the deceased (Parry, 1982, p. 86). However, in the *Mahābhārata*, the role the women play in the actual funerary services is unclear. As far as I am aware, only the men perform the *śrāddha* rites in which the deceased gains the new body. Hence, it is doubtful that the power of the mourning women in the *Strīparvan* would be used in the way that Parry states it is for the Banares mourners.

O [Kṛṣṇa], since this destruction of the Kurus was purposefully ignored by you, then let you now obtain the fruit of that action. With that merit which was acquired by me through service to my husband, I will curse you, O [Kṛṣṇa]. The Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, who are family, killed one another while being ignored by you. As a result, O [Kṛṣṇa], you will destroy your own relatives. When the thirty-sixth year from now arrives, O Madhusūdana, your relatives, sons, and ministers will be slain, and you will die a contemptible death. Furthermore, your women whose sons, relatives, and friends are slain, will run around, just like these Bharata women. (11.25.38-42)

This curse explicitly mentions that Gāndhārī is using her power as a *pativratā*, the "merit acquired...through service to my husband", in order to curse Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, it is clear in this passage just how dangerous mourning women are, since Gāndhārī is capable of cursing an entire lineage to death. This curse is not given lightly, either, since it does come true in the *Mausalaparvan*. The anger of one woman ensures the grief of many others. However, the other women do not issue curses. Their power remains a potential threat. As with the doomsday mare that they all are said to contain, these women can unleash terrible destruction. Only Gāndhārī chooses to do so.⁴⁵

More can be learned about the function of this curse in the *Mahābhārata* by examining the connections the mourning women have with menstruating women. The other major curse in the *Mahābhārata* given by a woman is in the *Sabhāparvan*. Draupadī, who is furious with the way in which she was molested by Duryodhana and his cohorts while she was menstruating, utters a curse:

⁴⁵ I am unsure why Gāndhārī would be the only woman among the Kurus to utter a curse. The text does not indicate a reason. It may be that Gāndhārī has cursed the only available target. As will be shown in the next chapter, the women are generally in opposition to Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti* ideology that is the source of the various wrongdoings in the battle. Since Gāndhārī already condemned Kṛṣṇa and his whole family to death, the other women have no reason to hurl curses. However, this is largely speculative, and will not be dealt with further

They because of whom I got this way, thirteen years from now their wives will have their husbands dead, their sons dead, their kinsmen and friends dead! Their bodies smeared with the blood of their relatives, their hair loosened and themselves in their courses, the women shall offer up water to the dead, no less, as the Pāṇḍavas enter the City of the Elephant! (van Buitenen, 2.71.19-20)

This curse is very similar to Gāndhārī's. Both women condemn an entire lineage to death at a later date. Both women emphasize that other women will end up as they are at the time of their curses. Moreover, many of the central plot elements are instigated at least partly by these curses. The battle between the two sides of the family becomes inevitable after Draupadī's molestation and the utterance of her curse. Draupadī has claimed that the great war will happen and it does. Because of Kṛṣṇa's role in the war, Gāndhārī curses his family to die, which it does. Kṛṣṇa is also killed by this curse, and returns to the divine realms, which is the instigator of the Pāṇḍavas' final journey to the wilderness and eventually to heaven.⁴⁶

Given these similarities between the curses, it is my contention that they serve as one cause of major elements within the central plot of the *Mahābhārata*. They start the war, destroy two families,⁴⁷ and cause the death of an incarnation of God, which leads to the retirement of the main characters and their eventual deaths. The dangerous power that the women contain might not destroy the entire world, as the fire of the doomsday mare does, but it does wreak havoc and devastation on the lives of many millions of people.

⁴⁶ Just after hearing about the destruction of Kṛṣṇa and his clan, the Pāṇḍavas "resolved to retire from the world for earning merit" (Roy, 17.1, p. 273).

⁴⁷ Aśvatthāman destroys the Pāñcālas in the *Sauptikaparvan*. I am unaware of any curses that caused this destruction. However, it is instigated because Aśvatthāman is extremely upset over his father's death.

In this chapter, I have shown that the actions and behaviour of the mourning women in the *Strīparvan* provide them with socially-acceptable outlets for the intense rage and sorrow felt during grieving. Their actions also indicate that the women are still denying the reality of the deaths, since they continue to treat the corpse as if it were alive. In addition, through symbolic connections with the scavengers on the battlefield, the women add to the dangerous, polluting, and inauspicious connotations that began with their change in appearance. The comparisons between the women sitting around the dead and female elephants in season, as well as the symbolic links between the women and groups of female horses serve to emphasize the frustrated fertility of the women. In addition, the women use the power that they have accumulated by being loyal and chaste wives. This use takes the form of cursing, which sets up a sort of chain reaction of destruction of all the families.

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter, I will discuss the laments that the mourning women in the *Strīparvan* utter. I will begin by detailing their structure and contents and will comment on the significance of these contents. The contents of the laments are fairly standard. They can be divided into five broad subjects: denial of the warrior's death, acknowledgement of the warrior's death and descriptions of his former life, the fate of the warrior, the sexuality and/or beauty of the women, and finally the placing of blame for the warrior's death, as well as any censuring of others.

The purpose of this section is to show that the laments perform four functions for the women and the text. Firstly, by contrasting the past and present situations of the corpse and the mourners, and by discussing the fate of the dead person, the laments form part of the rite of transition, between the rites of separation and the rites of incorporation.⁴⁸ In addition, the laments provide the women with an outlet for their grief and a way to gain some consolation concerning the fate of their loved ones. Thirdly, the laments continue to express the theme frustrated fertility that was first seen during the discussion of the actions of the mourning women. Finally, the laments serve as a commentary in the text that places blame on those that the women believe are responsible for the tragedies of the battle. By blaming certain people for certain reasons, the women emphasize their support for *kṣatradharma*. The laments

⁴⁸ This structure for rituals was presented in chapter one above

also comment on the inadequacy of the religious teachings to alleviate the grief of the women. This commentary places the mourning women in a position in which they represent the aspects of the epic that deal with human responsibility for human action, and adherence to the proper social order.

Before I begin my analysis of the laments in the *Strīparvan*, I need to make comments about their frequency within the sections of the text I am examining. The *strīparvan*, the second small book (chapters 9-25) within the major *Strīparvan*, contains thirty six laments. In fact, the entire description of the battlefield that Gāndhārī gives to Kṛṣṇa (chapters 16-25) is in the structure of many different laments to the warriors. Many of these laments are quite brief, merely mentioning the heroism of a particular king, or a few good qualities of Gāndhārī's sons other than Duryodhana and Duṣṣāsana. Here, I will only deal with a few of the laments in all of the sections, in particular those laments that are the most detailed, or those that include blame-placing. These include Gāndhārī's general lament for all the warriors, her lament for her son Duryodhana, and Uttarā's lament for Abhimanyu. Other laments will be cited only to emphasize a specific point. I will also call on the most detailed laments outside of the *Strīparvan* to add support to my conclusions. These include Subhadrā's lament of Abhimanyu in the *Droṇaparvan*, Kṛṣṇa's recalling of this lament in the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, and Tārā's three laments for Vālin in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

The first theme in the laments to be discussed is the denial of the warrior's death. The mourning women frequently describe the men as if they were alive, address them directly as they would have before death, and/or question the lack of response from the corpse to their laments. There are a few exceptions to this denial, including Gāndhārī, who never seems to forget that the warriors are dead, and only

addresses Kṛṣṇa during her laments.⁴⁹

Uttarā denies her husband Abhimanyu's death in various parts of her lament. In the first place, most of her lament is in the form of a speech delivered directly to her husband. This observation is not enough to indicate that she denies her husband's death, but it is only the first point. More evidence is provided in the way in which she talks to him. In the first sentence of her lament to her husband, she asks him if he is "hurt lying upon the ground," since he is used to lying down on deerskins (11.20.11). Clearly, the dead would not have to worry about whether they are comfortable or not. She goes on to ask him if he is sleeping out of exhaustion, and whether or not this is the reason for his failure to answer (11.20.13). She is using questions to address him, which implies that she expects an answer. The text supports this conclusion when it notes that Uttarā is questioning him "as if he were alive" (11.20.15). Hence, Uttarā's lament shows her in denial of her husband's death, preferring to think of him as sleeping.

Although there is little indication that Subhadrā denies Abhimanyu's death during her laments in the *Droṇaparvan*, Kṛṣṇa's recounting of her laments in the *Aśvamedhaparvan* reveals a different picture. When she meets Draupadī, she asks her, "Where are all our sons? I desire to behold them" (Roy, 12.61, p. 123). Encountering her daughter-in-law Uttarā, she inquires,

Where has thy husband gone? When he comes back, do thou, without

⁴⁹ I am unsure why she is not affected in the same way as the other women. By only addressing Kṛṣṇa, it is almost as if she is "closer to God" than the other women, having more insight on the nature of death. However, the text says little to substantiate a conclusion like that. Moreover, she participates in all other forms of lamentation and mourning, so it is more likely that her addressing of Kṛṣṇa alone is due to the fact that she is observing the battlefield from afar through divine sight

losing a moment, apprise me of it. Alas, O daughter of Virāṭa, as soon as he heard my voice, he used to come out of his chamber without the loss of a moment. Why dost not thy husband come out today? (Ibid)

After mentioning a few more of his past activities, she asks, "Oh, why dost thou not answer me today?" (Ibid). Her denial seems so great that the first thing Kuntī says to her when she arrives is "thy youthful son has yet been slain" (Ibid). It is worthy to note as well that this was not the first time that Subhadrā was made aware of Abhimanyu's demise. Before any of these questions and Kuntī's reply, the text notes that "after the fall of [Abhimanyu], ...Subhadrā, stricken with grief, indulged in loud [wails] when she saw Kuntī, like a female osprey" (Ibid). Subhadrā knew of her son's death before her questioning and is therefore in denial. She prefers to think of him as absent from the immediate area rather than dead.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā denies the death of her husband Vālin in her first lament to him. She interprets his lying on the ground as his stating a preference for the Earth as his lover rather than her. She claims that he is "embracing it, whereas to me thou dost not utter a single word" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.23, p. 222). She asks him a little later on why he does not wake up, hearing her cries (Ibid, p. 223). As with Uttarā, the questioning of the body and the assumption that the warrior is sleeping is made by Tārā, thereby denying her husband's demise.

In an interesting paradox, the lamenting women also acknowledge the deaths of the warriors. This subject of the laments is far more common than the denial of death, being present in nearly every lament, including the shorter ones. This acknowledgement of death is generally done by juxtaposing the warrior's previous heroic deeds and rich life with his present lifeless condition.

Gāndhārī uses the comparison of past luxury and present death in her general

lament to the warriors. Addressing Kṛṣṇa, she laments:

Look at the tigers among men who, possessed of uncontrollable anger and in the power of Duryodhana, are dead like extinguished fires. All of them had delightful, soft, spotless beds. Now, dead, they lie upon the bare ground. At one time they were continuously lauded by praising bards. Now they listen to the terrible, inauspicious sounds of jackals. These famous heroes who, anointed with sandalpaste and aloe, used to lie in beds now lie in the dust. (11.16.30-33)

There is emphasis here on the fact that the corpses are lying on the ground in the dust as opposed to on luxurious beds while being anointed with auspicious substances. There is a juxtaposition here between beds and bare ground, praising bards and howling jackals, and sandalwood/aloe and dust. This is similar to the contrast between the mourning women being ornamented normally, and replacing their cast-off ornaments with blood while mourning. As I have noted in the first chapter, the latter situation is indicative of a separation from normal society and an entrance into liminality. The same is true of the deceased. They have moved from being living warriors who sleep in beds, listen to bards, and get anointed in auspicious substances, into the liminal condition of being dead bodies that sleep on the ground, listen to jackals, and are anointed with dust. Thus, not only are the deaths of the heroes acknowledged, and their previous lives mentioned, but the heroes' transition from a proper social role to a liminal corpse is also brought forth in Gāndhārī's initial lament.

Gāndhārī's lament for Duryodhana also contains the juxtaposition of past and present. She states that "formerly, kings sitting around him pleased him. Now, as he lies on the surface of the earth, dead, vultures surround him. Previously, women fanned him with the best of fans. Now, birds fan him with flaps of their wings" (11.17.12-13). As with the previous example, the luxurious life the warrior led is

placed next to the state of his corpse. Gāndhārī is acknowledging her son is dead while also acknowledging Duryodhana's passing from being a powerful king surrounded by kings and women into a liminal corpse surrounded by vultures.

Uttarā is very direct in her acknowledgement of Abhimanyu's death when she first addresses Kṛṣṇa in her lament. Rather than the formulaic "previously...now" statements that were found in Gāndhārī's two laments, Uttarā instead compares Abhimanyu to his maternal uncle Kṛṣṇa. She laments, "this one whose eyes are like yours is dead. In strength, heroism, and glory, he was your equal, O [Kṛṣṇa], and he was even more handsome than you. Now he lies dead on the ground" (11.20.9-10). This acknowledgement of death seems to emphasize the tragedy of Abhimanyu's death by stating how great he would have been if he were alive. To be as good a warrior as Kṛṣṇa is quite phenomenal, considering that the *Mahābhārata* frequently calls Kṛṣṇa one of the best warriors in the world.⁵⁰ However, Abhimanyu was killed by a group of experienced warriors, which is in violation of the rules of battle. His past potential glory is held against the reality of his tragic death. Although the style of this lament is somewhat different from the others, the result is still the same in that Uttarā declares his demise by comparing his present lifeless condition to the past when he was full of strength and glory. The only element missing from this lament is the symbolism of the transition of the deceased from the bounds of structured society into the liminal condition of the corpse.

In Subhadrā's lament for Abhimanyu in the *Droṇaparvan*, the formula of

⁵⁰ See, for example, Arjuna's statement that Kṛṣṇa is capable of killing Duryodhana's whole army alone (van Buitenen, 5.7.32), or Bhīṣma's claim that Kṛṣṇa is supreme among warriors because he has defeated all of them with his glory (van Buitenen, 2.35.9).

"previously...now" is used again to acknowledge a death through comparison of past luxury with present lifelessness. She notes that

previously, your bed was overlaid with the whitest and costliest sheets. Now, deserving as you are of every luxury, how do you sleep on the bare earth, pierced by arrows? Previously this hero of mighty arms was waited upon by the foremost of beautiful women. Now, fallen on the field of battle, how can he pass his time in the company of jackals? Formerly, he was praised with hymns by singers and bards and panegyrists. Today, he is greeted by fierce and yelling cannibals and beasts of prey. (Roy, 7.78, p. 146)⁵¹

Even though Subhadrā describes Abhimanyu as sleeping on the earth, she acknowledges his death in the next sentence by describing him as "fallen on the field of battle." The same type of juxtapositions are used here as were found in Gāndhārī's *Strīparvan* laments, thereby indicating their prevalence as a formula at least within the *Mahābhārata* as a whole. As with previous examples, the past luxury and current poverty of the hero are used to acknowledge his death. Moreover, the transition from a social being to a liminal corpse is present, with oppositions between bed and earth, women and jackals, bard's songs and animal's howls used as indicators of this change.

The acknowledgement of death through the formulaic comparison of the past and present state of the deceased by the lamenting woman is also present in one of Tārā's laments in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In her first lament, after repeatedly mentioning that Vālin is dead, she mentions that "thou art lying enveloped in the blood that flows from thy limbs, as thou wert formerly with the silk scarf of thy couch" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.23, p.

⁵¹ I have modified this translation slightly to bring out the formulaic style in the lament. I have placed the time referent at the beginning of the sentence rather than integrating it into the middle of the line as the Roy translation has done.

223).⁵² His death is recognized by emphasizing the change between his past life and his current condition. Moreover, as with most of the previous example, the transition between his former social status and current liminal state is noted by opposing silk scarves and blood.

The third subject that the laments address is the fate of the warrior after death and the condition of those he left behind. The fate of the warrior is inevitably a positive one, no matter what sort of life the warrior may have led while alive. The confidence of the mourners in this regard likely stems from the fact that all of the dead are warriors that died in battle, even if it was through somewhat dubious means, as in the cases of Abhimanyu, Droṇa, Bhīṣma, Karṇa, and Bhūrīśravas. Death in battle is the best death for warriors to achieve, and hence their fate is assured. As Vidura tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra near the beginning of the *Strīparvan*, "For a [warrior] in this world, there is not a better road to heaven than battle!" (Roy, 11.2, p. 4).

Gāndhārī does not mention anything about the fate of the warriors in her general lament. However, in her lament to her son, she is definitely concerned with his fate after death, addressing it twice during the lament. Near the beginning of the lament, she notes that her son has "gone to a place difficult to attain. Thus, facing forward, he lies in a bed frequented by heroes" (11.17.11). In other words, having fought in battle without turning his back and fleeing ("facing forward"), he now lies dead on the ground, an outcome that happens to many warriors ("a bed frequented by heroes"). The result of this death is that he has gone to the celestial realms that

⁵² In the second lament, she does not use the formula, but does acknowledge his death. This is done immediately after she denies his death, stating "thou smilest even in death" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230).

warriors go to when they die ("a place difficult to attain"). She reiterates this fate at the very end of her lament, stating "surely this king has attained the worlds won with the strength of one's arms" (11.17.30).

In her lament to her dead husband, Uttarā seems entirely confident that Abhimanyu has gone to a celestial realm. She mentions it as part of her description of her husband's behaviour after his death: "having gone to the World of the Ancestors (*pitṛloka*), whom else will you address like me?" (11.20..23). In this case, a celestial realm is actually named. She also notes that Abhimanyu has gone to "worlds won with weapons" (11.20.21).

Subhadrā spends a large part of her lament of her dead son describing the various fates she hopes he attains. There are far too many of them to be listed here; a couple of examples will have to suffice. In a declaration similar to previous examples of mourning women lamenting the fate of the dead warriors, she states "that end which is theirs that are brave and unretreating while engaged in battle, or theirs that have fallen in battle, having slain their foes, let that end be thine" (Roy, 7.78, p. 147). However, the majority of the desired fates have little to do with being a warrior or dying in battle. For example, she also laments "let that end be thine which is theirs that look upon all creatures with an eye of peace, or theirs that never give pain to others, or theirs that always forgive" (Ibid, p. 148). Essentially, she covers almost every good characteristic a person could have that would give them entrance to a celestial realm after death.

In Kṛṣṇa's recounting of Subhadrā's laments in the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, it is not Subhadrā, but Kuntī who declares Abhimanyu's fate in her response to Subhadrā's lament. After telling Subhadrā that Abhimanyu is dead, Kuntī goes on to say, "Do not

grieve. Irresistible in battle, thy son has, without doubt, attained to the highest goal" (Roy, 14.61, p. 123). In this example, the fate of the warrior is explicitly used to comfort a mourning woman. More will be said on this comforting of the women below.

There is no mention of Vālin's fate in the two laments Tārā gives after his death.. The only mention of his fate comes in the lament given while he is still alive. Tārā declares, "Without doubt, O Warrior, thanks to thy great exploits, thou hast founded another and more glorious Kishkindha in heaven!" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.20, p. 217). Once again, the lamenting woman is absolutely sure of her husband's fate, which is invariably a good one.

The fourth subject dealt with in the mourning women's laments is the beauty and/or sexuality of the women, and occasionally of the men. The women frequently describe the beauty of the other women during their laments.⁵³ Past sexual activities are also mentioned in some of these descriptions. In addition, the mourning wives express frustration that they are no longer able to engage in sexual activity with their husbands.

In the *Strīparvan*, Gāndhārī frequently describes the beauty of the women she is observing. During her general lament of the warriors, she states the women are "like a herd of beautifully-maned fillies" (11.16.57). The significance of this statement was discussed in the previous chapter. I showed that being compared to female horses is a sign of frustrated sexuality and fertility. Here, I would like to add that

⁵³ Using a woman's physical beauty in order to address her or describe her is a fairly standard convention in most Sanskrit literature. Women are frequently address by other characters as "Fair-hipped woman" or "Slim-waisted one." However, the extent of the descriptions and their juxtaposition with past sexuality indicates that these descriptions go beyond mere convention.

these horses are described as having beautiful manes, which stresses the positive and attractive side of the appearance of the mourning women.⁵⁴

Gāndhārī's general descriptions of her mourning daughters-in-law throughout the text also emphasize their beauty. She describes one of them as "a lady of flawless limbs and slim waist" (11.18.5). She depicts them as a group to Kṛṣṇa as "young women, with beautiful breasts and bellies, born in good families, modest, with dark hair, eyes, and eyelashes" (11.18.13). They also have "flawless faces", and shine "like fully-blooming lotuses" (11.18.15).

Gāndhārī reserves the most detailed description of one of her daughters-in-law for Duryodhana's wife. During her lament for him, Gāndhārī describes his wife as she is now and also mentions her past activities with her husband:

Behold these women surrounding the champions who were slain in battle. This is even more painful to me than the slaying of my son. Look, O Kṛṣṇa, at the full-hipped mother of Lakṣmaṇa⁵⁵ embracing Duryodhana, her hair loose, looking like a gold sacrificial altar. Certainly, when this great-armed one was living, this intelligent young woman used to enjoy herself, held in the embrace of her beautiful-armed husband....The distressed woman, radiant as the heart of a lotus, is wiping the faces of her husband and son. She appears beautiful, the image of a lotus. (11.17.22-24; 17.29)

The first element of this passage that is of importance is that Gāndhārī finds the mourning of the women "even more painful" than the death of her eldest son. She had already hinted at this chief sorrow of hers when she asked earlier, "What could be more miserable for me to see than all of these women in a such a state of disarray?"

⁵⁴ See chapter one for the use of this phrase to refer to the unbound hair of the women.

⁵⁵ Lakṣmaṇa is the son of Duryodhana. To the best of my knowledge, Duryodhana's wife is never named in the *Mahābhārata*, and is frequently referred to only as the mother of Lakṣmaṇa.

(11.16.58). In Gāndhārī's view, the deaths of the heroes are not as great tragedies as the fact that the dead have left these beautiful women behind who are no longer able to enjoy sexual activities with their husbands.

Gāndhārī describes Duryodhana's wife as very pretty, being "full-hipped", "radiant as the heart of a lotus", "beautiful, the image of a lotus", and looking "like a gold sacrificial altar."⁵⁶ She also mentions that his wife "used to enjoy herself" held in Duryodhana's embrace. The verb used here for "enjoy" is *√ram*, which carries sexual connotations, especially for someone held in an embrace. Thus, in the lament, Gāndhārī both describes Duryodhana's wife's beauty and her past enjoyment of sexual pleasure with him.

Gāndhārī also laments the loss of Uttarā's dalliances with Abhimanyu by stating, "Formerly, this famous, shapely, desirable, passionate, and modest woman, excited by the intoxication of mead, embraced the son of Subhadrā, having kissed his face which looked like a blooming lotus and had a neck covered like a conch shell" (11.20.6-7).⁵⁷ Not only is Uttarā's beauty emphasized, but her desire to participate in sexual activities is stressed. In addition, the handsomeness of Abhimanyu is mentioned, which adds to the sexual tone of these lines.

While lamenting her fallen husband, Uttarā is concerned about the activities that her husband may undertake in heaven. She has already noted that her husband

⁵⁶ The word for "gold sacrificial altar" is *rukṃavedī*. This altar generally has two raised ends and is narrow in the middle, being somewhat similar to an hourglass in shape. Hence, it is used as a simile to emphasize the shapeliness of a woman.

⁵⁷ Famous, shapely, desirable, and passionate are *yaśasvinī*, *rūpavatī*, *kāmyā*, and *bhāminī* respectively. *Bhāminī* also means "angry", but it makes little sense for this woman to be angry while embracing and kissing her husband.

was "even more handsome" than Kṛṣṇa (11.20.10), whose beauty is well-known. She adds to this by stating:

Now, O Tiger among Men, having gone to the World of the Ancestors, whom else will you address like me, with praise and soft smiles? Surely you will assault the hearts of celestial nymphs in heaven with your great beauty and your words accompanied by smiles. O Son of Subhadrā, winning worlds of meritorious deeds, meeting with celestial nymphs and diverting yourself with them, will you in time remember my good deeds? Your union of this kind here with me was ordained for six months. In the seventh, O Hero, you died. (11.20.23-26)

In this passage, Uttarā emphasizes the attractiveness of her husband, which will "assault the hearts of celestial nymphs in heaven." However, she is also jealous of the possible activities that her husband will undertake with these celestial nymphs. The word for "meeting with", *sam -ā + vi*, can also mean "to unite with in marriage." The "union of this kind" seems to refer to marriage, and the sexual implications that "diverting oneself" with one's wife involve. Clearly, Uttarā is frustrated that her extremely handsome husband is no longer with her, and that her time with him was so short. She is afraid that he will forget about her in heaven, since he has celestial nymphs to engage with him in activities like those he and his wife used to share.

Another example of mourning women describing past sexual behaviour with their dead husband occurs while the wives of Bhūrīśravas are lamenting him. One wife, after taking his arm that was cut off in battle and placing it in her lap, reminisces, "This is the hand that pulled off girdles, squeezed full breasts, caressed navels, thighs, and buttocks, and loosened the knots of skirts....that hand was cut off while he was distracted fighting with another in battle" (11.24.17-18). Not only does she vividly recall past sexual activities between Bhūrīśravas and his wives, but she is also expressing her frustration. Just after remembering these activities, she notes that

the arm has been cut off. It will never caress her again.

In addition, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā's laments to Vālin contain elements of frustration for the absence of her husband. In her first lament to him, she states, "Now, O Proud Lord, beguiled by their youthful and seductive beauty, thou art moving the hearts of [celestial nymphs]" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.20, p. 217). Although it is not stated as clearly as it is in Uttarā's lament, the frustration of a wife whose husband is still able to have lovers while she may not is evident in this passage. This kind of jealousy is also present when Tārā asks him, "Is the earth thy cherished love, since even in dying thou dost lie by her and scornest me?" (*Ibid*). An almost identical passage is found in her second lament (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.23, p. 222).⁵⁸ She is upset that she has been rejected as her husband's lover, and this is expressed in her laments. In her third lament, she adds to these expressions of frustration when she asks, "Dost thou no longer love these women whose radiant looks resemble the moon?...Dismiss thy ministers as thou wert wont to do, O Vanquisher of thy Foes, and we will go in the woods with thee in happy dalliance" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230). One notes that the beauty of the other mourning wives of Vālin is stressed in this line, as is the desire of Tārā to go off in the woods for some "happy dalliance". In death, Vālin is accused of rejecting beautiful and loving wives for other lovers, and for not responding to their pleas to go in the woods. Thus, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* we find themes similar to those in the *Strīparvan*. The beauty of the mourning women is mentioned, and the frustration of the women, who are not being loved by their husband is emphasized.

The last subject in the laments that I will deal with is the placing of blame for

⁵⁸ She says, "Hast thou then chosen the earth as thy love rather than myself, since thou now liest embracing it, whereas to me thou dost not utter a single word?"

the deaths of the warriors. By blame-placing I mean any explanation for the cause of the death of the warrior, including naming his actual slayer, some misdeed committed by the warrior, or accusing time, fate, or Death personified. This blame-placing also involves the censuring of others who may have committed some wrong in the slaying of a warrior. The search for an explanation for the death is generally done in laments that are addressed to specific warriors, or groups where the cause of their death is the same. As a result, this topic is absent from general laments like Gāndhārī's lament for all the warriors.

In almost every lament, the actual slayer of the dead warrior is named, even if only in passing. It appears to be important for this name to be said, since it is done in all but the shortest laments. It does not matter whether the warrior was slain fairly or not; the killer is almost always mentioned. Gāndhārī notes that Duryodhana was "slain by Bhīmasena who raised his mace" (11.17.15). She adds that her other sons were "mostly slain by Bhīmasena with his mace in battle" (11.18.1). She makes similar declarations for Bhūrīśravas, Śakuni, Karṇa, Valhika, Jayadratha, Śalya, Bhagadatta, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Bṛhadbala, the sons of Dhṛṣṭadyumna, the five Kekaya brothers, Drupada, and Dhṛṣṭaketu.

The same type of declarations are found outside the *Strīparvan*. In the *Droṇaparvan*, during Subhadrā's lament for Abhimanyu, she notes that she does not yet know who the killer is, "By whom, alas, hast thou been helplessly slain?" (Roy, 7.78, p. 146).⁵⁹ Not knowing who the killer is, she still notes that someone has killed him. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā declares that Rāma killed Vālin in the first two of her

⁵⁹ This lament was given on the day of Abhimanyu's death, and the exact circumstances of it were still unknown to some, including Subhadrā.

laments. In the first, she states, "Having without cause struck down [Vālin] who was engaged in combat with another, though this is censurable, [Rāma] has no regrets" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 218). In the second, she claims that "a single arrow, discharged by Rāma freed him from all fear" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.23, p. 223).

In all of these cases except Subhadrā's lament, the warriors were slain by one of the Pāṇḍavas, Rāma, Sātyaki, Droṇa, or Dhṛṣṭadyumna, all of whom are or were among the best warriors on the battlefield. Hence, the declaration of the slayer of the warrior not only highlights the immediate cause of death, but it also notes that the hero achieved the highest form of death for a warrior at the hands of the best among his caste.

The causes of death beyond the immediate slaying are also dealt with by the women in their laments. The women frequently cite the standard Hindu theories on the cause of death, including time, fate, and Death/the Destroyer personified. In the didactic portions of the *Mahābhārata*, these explanations for death are continually cited by powerful ascetics, priests, and, in a few cases, by God.⁶⁰ The main idea behind blaming fate, time, or Death is that death is inevitable, and hence one should not grieve. One finds these ideas expressed in Vidura's discourse on grief given to Dhṛtarāṣṭra in the *Strīparvan*. He states:

Life is sure to end in death....When one's time comes, O king, one cannot escape....Death drags all creatures, even the gods. There is

⁶⁰ For good descriptions of these occurrences, see Long, J.B. 1980. "The Concepts of Human Action and Rebirth in the *Mahābhārata*" in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*. Ed. by W.D. O'Flaherty. Berkeley: University of California Press, and Holck, F.H. 1974. "Sūtras and the Mahābhārata Epic" in *Death and Eastern Thought*. Ed. by F.H. Holck. New York. Abingdon Press.

none dear or hateful to Death....There is none dear or hateful to Time,
O best of the Kurus! Time is indifferent to none. All are equally
dragged by time. (Roy, 11.2, pp. 3-4)

During the lament for her son Duryodhana, Gāndhārī blames time as the cause by saying, "This destroyer of foes, best of those who were anointed on the head, now lies in the dust. Behold the reversals of time!" (11.17.10). She uses the same line about time when she is lamenting the death of the lord of Avanti (Roy, 11.22, p. 34). In her final lament to the dead warriors, this sentence appears again, and is followed by the declaration, "There is nothing difficult for destiny to bring about, since even these bulls among men, these heroes, have been slain by warriors" (Roy, 11.25, p. 41). Gāndhārī also calls on the actions of Death as one reason for Abhimanyu's death when she notes that "having been Death for others, [Abhimanyu] fell under the power of Death" (11.20.2). In another of Gāndhārī's laments, Jayadratha is claimed to have "fallen under the power of Death" (11.22.17). In the final *Strīparvan* example, Uttarā, blaming fate for the death of her husband, laments that her marriage with Abhimanyu "was ordained for six months. In the seventh month, O Hero, you died" (11.20.26). Death personified, fate, and time are all used as causes of death in the *Strīparvan*.

The blaming of Death/Destroyer and fate is also present in laments outside of the *Strīparvan*.⁶¹ In Subhadrā's lament to Abhimanyu in the *Droṇaparvan*, she claims that "without doubt, the conduct of the Destroyer cannot be understood even by the wise, since although though hast [Kṛṣṇa] for thy protector, thou wast yet slain" (Roy, 7.78, p. 147). In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā claims that it is "irrevocable fate" that killed her

⁶¹ Time is not mentioned in any of these laments, although it is given as a cause of death in responses to these laments, which will be dealt with below.

husband (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 217). In her second lament, she blames fate again, noting that "fate has favoured Sugriva" by allowing him to defeat Vālin (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.23, p. 222). In her final lament, she states that "death, in the guise of Rāma, has struck thee down" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230).

Another cause of death that the women use in their laments is the bad moral character of the warrior they are lamenting.⁶² Needless to say, this is not a common form of blame, since it defames the warrior it is used for. Moreover, Gāndhārī is the only woman to use the misdeeds of the deceased in her laments in the *Mahābhārata*, and she confines it to her sons. In her lament to Duryodhana, she notes that he "died because of dishonesty" (11.17.16). In addition, she states that "out of disrespect for his elders, Vidura, and his father, this dull-witted, unfortunate boy has fallen under the power of Death" (11.17.18). In this passage, Death is only thought to gain control of Duryodhana because of his bad character. He disrespected his elders, and this led to his death. She is even harder on her son Duḥśāsana, claiming it was his molestation of Draupadī, his insulting of the Pāṇḍavas, his listening to the words of Śakuni, and his disregard for the warnings of his mother that killed him (Roy, 11.18, p. 30).

In her first lament in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā blames Vālin's death on his own actions. She states, "Thou didst steal away Sugriva's consort and sent him into exile; it is the fruit of this double fault that thou art expiating" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 217).

The blame-placing of the women in their laments not only searches for the

⁶² This is not quite the same as *karma*. In fact, the word *karma* is not used to discuss the character flaws in various warriors, or the cause of their deaths anywhere in the laments. The *Strīparvan* tends to use the word *kṛta* for "deed" or "action." Moreover, the actions that are cited all occurred in the present life of the warriors. Past lives of the warriors are never brought up in the laments.

causes of death, but addresses the possible wrong-doings of those individuals involved in the death of the lamented warrior. This censuring of those who have been perceived to have committed some infraction is fairly common in the laments. The first example in the *Strīparvan* occurs in Uttarā's lament of Abhimanyu. She states, "Fie on the cruel Kṛpa, Kaṃa, Jayadratha, and both Droṇa and his son by whom you were brought down. What were those bulls among chariot warriors thinking when they killed you, a young man, when alone, to my misery?" (11.20.16-18). To slay one warrior, especially an inexperienced one like Abhimanyu, using many skilled warriors is a violation of the rules of warfare. Uttarā voices her contempt for the actions of the warriors who killed Abhimanyu through her lament by censuring their actions and questioning their behaviour.

The various laments for Bhūrīśravas contain strong condemnations of the actions of Arjuna and Sātyaki in his death. Bhūrīśravas was about to slay Sātyaki when Arjuna cut Bhūrīśravas' arm off with an arrow. Bhūrīśravas then decided to fast to death, since he would be useless in battle. When he sat down on the battlefield unarmed to fast, Sātyaki killed him. Arjuna violated the rules of battle by attacking an opponent from behind when he was engaged with another. Sātyaki also broke these rules by slaying a helpless, unarmed foe who was resolved on dying by other means. This double violation of rules is noted by Gāndhārī when she laments, "How could [Arjuna] have done this hideous deed, cutting off the arm of an inattentive champion who offered sacrifices? However, Sātyaki committed an even more evil act in that he killed someone who was firmly resolved on fasting to death" (11.24.14). The wives of Bhūrīśravas collectively lament about these misdeeds, stating, "You, who follow dharma, lie here, unrighteously slain alone by two men" (11.24.15). Another wife

states, "In the presence of [Kṛṣṇa], by [Arjuna] of unsullied deeds, that hand was cut off while he was distracted fighting with another in battle. What will you say, O Janārdana, in the speaking assembly about this great deed of Arjuna's? Or what will [Arjuna] himself say?" (11.24.18-19). Clearly the women are quite upset with the way in which Bhūrīśravas was slain, and they make their anger known through their laments.

Karṇa's wives also censure Arjuna in their lament. Arjuna had killed Karṇa while Karṇa was engaged in trying to pull his chariot wheel out of the mud. The wives state that "When the wheel of thy car was swallowed up by the Earth, the cruel [Arjuna] cut off thy head with an arrow! Alas, fie [on him]!" (Roy, 11.21, p. 34). As with the previous examples, the women note the wrongdoing and censure the committer of the act.

Gāndhārī censures Bhīma during her lament for Duḥśāsana. She states, "The very wrathful Bhīma perpetrated a most horrible act by drinking in battle the blood of his foe" (Roy, 11.18, p. 30). This statement also indicates that Gāndhārī did not believe Bhīma when he claimed that "the blood did not pass down my lips and teeth" (Roy, 11.15, p. 22).

In the *Droṇaparvan*, Subhadrā chastises the various members of the Pāṇḍavas' army for failing to protect Abhimanyu from death. She says, "Fie on the strength of Bhīmasena, on the bowmanship of [Arjuna], on the prowess of the Vṛṣṇi heroes, and the might of the Pāñcālas! Fie on the Kaikeyas, the Cedis, the Matsyas, and the Sṛījayas, they that could not protect thee, O hero, while engaged in battle!" (Roy, 7.78, p. 147). Subhadrā believes that it was the task of these warriors to protect and defend an inexperienced youth like Abhimanyu, and since they failed in this task, they

deserve to be chastised.

Draupadī's lament for her dead sons in the *Sauptikaparvan* is quite vehement in its censuring of Aśvatthāman. She states:

Hearing of the slaughter of those sleeping heroes by Droṇa's son of sinful deeds, grief burns me as if I were in the midst of a fire. If [Aśvatthāman] be not made to reap the fruit of that sinful deed of his - if, putting forth your prowess in battle, thou dost not take the life of that wretch of sinful deeds along with the lives of all of his followers - then listen to me, O Pāṇḍavas, I shall sit here [fasting to death]! (Roy, 10.11, p. 32)

Not only does she censure Aśvatthāman for the way in which he killed her sons and other relatives, she also demands vengeance.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Tārā alternately censures Rāma and Sugriva for the way in which they killed her husband. She originally claims that "Having without cause struck down [Vālin] who was engaged in combat with another, though it is censurable, [Rāma] has no regrets" (*Rāmāyaṇa*, 4.20, p. 218) This statement is not as vehement as those that are found in the *Mahābhārata*, but it does note that the actions of Rāma in striking down Vālin from behind were wrong. This wrongdoing seems to be made even worse because the perpetrator "has no regrets." However, the force of this censure is taken away a few lines later when Tārā shifts the blame to Sugriva by stating, "Assuredly, Rāma has accomplished a great feat in striking thee down, but he is guiltless, for all he did was to obey Sugriva" (Ibid). Rāma's act may be censurable, but Rāma is not. If anyone is to blame for the way in which Vālin was killed, Tārā feels it is Sugriva, and makes this known through a lament.

Overall, five subjects have been found in the laments of the mourning women. These laments deny the warrior's death, acknowledge the warrior's death through the use of comparisons of his former life to his current condition, state the ultimate fate of

the warrior, describe the sexuality and/or beauty of the women, and finally place the blame for the warrior's death on various people or forces, which also includes the censuring of those who have committed some form of infraction in the death of a warrior.

Having described these elements, I may now explore their meaning. As I mentioned above, there are four aspects of the laments that I have highlighted. Firstly, they help move the dead and the mourners through the stage of transition and prepare them for the final rites of incorporation by contrasting the past and present, and discussing the fate of the dead. Secondly, the laments allow the women to have an outlet for their grief, and provide them with consolation as to the fate of their loved ones. In the third place, the laments express frustrated fertility and sexuality, which continues a theme that was first seen in the discussion of the actions of the mourning women. Finally, the laments provide a moral voice in the text, stating who has committed infractions, and who is to blame for various deaths. This moral voice, which is similar to Duryodhana's, speaks out in support of *kṣatradharma* and is generally opposed to the morality of Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti* (devotion).

The laments of the mourning women help express the transition of the dead and the mourners from their old roles to the new ones. This is done through the acknowledgement of the death and through mentioning the fate of the warriors. In the section above on the acknowledgement of death, I noted that the comparison of past and present helps to emphasize the liminal condition of the deceased. The luxury of the warrior's past life is contrasted with the present condition of the corpse. The warriors used to be surrounded by kings and courtiers. Now they are surrounded by vultures and jackals. They used to lie in clean beds while being anointed with aloe

and sandalpaste. Now they lie on the ground covered in dust and blood.

The expressions of frustrated fertility also present the same kinds of comparisons for both the dead and the mourners, although without the use of the "previously...now" formula. By lamenting that they used to engage in sexual pleasures with their husbands, and by stressing they no longer do, the women are implicitly acknowledging the shift in their own status from wife to widow. In fact, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the acknowledgement of this change of status is quite explicit. In her first lament, Tārā states that "I...deprived of thy support, at the height of misfortune, must pass my life as a widow" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.20, p. 218). Later on, Tārā laments that "a single arrow discharged by [Rāma] on the field of battle has made us all widows" (*Rāmāyaṇa* 4.25, p. 230). Not only do the women acknowledge their own transition from wife to widow, but by noting a lack of sexual behaviour, the women are recognising that they are now cut off from that domain.

• In addition, by stating that the men have ascended to heaven, the "worlds won by weapons", or to the World of the Ancestors (*pitṛloka*), the women are looking ahead to the rites of incorporation that will complete the transition of the dead warriors to the world of the dead. In the *Strīparvan*, these rites consist of the cremation of the body, the *pitṛmedha*, and the *udakakriyā/udakadāna*.⁶³ The relatives also perform *śrāddha* rites in which a new body is created for the deceased by his eldest son or other relative (Knipe, 1977, p. 116). These rites are first mentioned in the

⁶³ I am unsure exactly what the *pitṛmedha* (sacrifice to the ancestors) is beyond it being a sacrifice done to the ancestors after they are incorporated into the celestial realms. Kane's *History of Dharmasāstra* said very little on this sacrifice beyond its being mentioned in the *Satyāśādhā-śrautasūtra* (vol. V, p. 254). The *udakakriyā* or *udakadāna* is the offering of water to the dead person, presumably to honour them. It is done at various times, but usually at the end of the cremation, but before the *śrāddha* rites (Kane, V, pp. 218-19).

Aśvamedhaparvan when Kṛṣṇa's father performs them for Abhimanyu (Roy, 14.62, p. 124). The actual descriptions of these rites is beyond the scope of this paper. What is important is that the deceased is not thought finally to enter heaven until the *śrāddha* rites are complete. Thus, by noting that the warriors have ascended to celestial realms, they are looking forward to a moment when the deceased will be incorporated into his new role as a *pitr*, or dead ancestor.

Overall, these kind of contrasts in the laments, from past and present to frustrated fertility, stress that the warrior no longer occupies his former role as a king, husband, or father, and note the transition which some of the woman are making from wife to widow. In addition, by indicating the ultimate fate of the warrior in their laments, the women are looking ahead to a time when the deceased will occupy his new role as an ancestor in the celestial realms.

Many of the subjects in the laments allow the mourning women to express their grief and provide them with some consolation. By stating the fate of the warrior in the laments, the women gain comfort. In fact, knowing the fate of the warrior is cited as a reason for the cessation of grief altogether. Essentially, if the warrior has achieved the highest goal, why should one grieve over him?

The text supports this conclusion. When Vidura is comforting Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he states, "For a [warrior] in this world, there is no better road to heaven than battle!...They have attained to a high state of blessedness. They are not persons for whom we should grieve" (Roy 11.2, p. 4). In the few occasions that an individual responds to the laments of a mourning woman, similar ideas are expressed. Gāndhārī tells the lamenting Draupadī that "they who have died in battle should not be grieved for" (11.15.19). Kṛṣṇa comforts Subhadrā in the *Droṇaparvan* by stating,

"Grieve not thou for thy son who hath obtained the supreme end" (Roy, 7.77, p. 145). A little later on, he says, "Grieve not, O Subhadrā!...Abhimanyu, that bull among [warriors], hath obtained the most laudable goal" (Roy, 7.78, p. 148). During Kṛṣṇa's recounting of Subhadrā's grief in the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, Kuntī addresses Subhadrā after she has lamented, "Do not grieve. Irresistible in battle, thy son has, without doubt, attained to the highest goal" (Roy, 14.61, p. 123). Hence, we see that on numerous occasions, the notion that the warrior who dies in battle reaches heaven is used to comfort; it may even be given as a reason to stop grieving entirely. Thus, one can conclude that the women assure themselves of this fate of the warriors in order to comfort themselves and help them to deal with the grief they are expressing in their laments.⁶⁴

The use of time, fate, and Death/the Destroyer personified to explain the cause of death serves a similar comforting function in the women's laments. If the death was the fault of an unavoidable force like time, fate, or Death, then one should not grieve, or one should at least find comfort in the fact that the death was inevitable.

Once again, the responses to the laments of the women provide evidence. Gāndhārī consoles Draupadī by stating, "I think that this terrifying and inevitable destruction of the world, impelled by the course of time, was reached because of the very nature of things....Do not grieve, especially when the event was unavoidable and has already passed" (11.15.17; 15.19). Kṛṣṇa tells Subhadrā that "all creatures have but one end ordained by Time" (Roy, 7.77, p. 145). Kuntī comforts Subhadrā by

⁶⁴ The declaring of the slayer of the warrior within the laments might serve a similar function. If the warrior has not only gone to heaven, but has been sent there while standing in battle with one of the best, then some small comfort may be provided in knowing how brave the warrior was when he met his death

claiming, "That slaughter [of Abhimanyu] is due to the influence of Time! O daughter of Yadu's race, mortal thy son was. Do not grieve." (Roy, 14.61, p. 123). The message presented in these statements is that one should not grieve over that which is inevitable or unchangeable. Hence, by blaming the death of the warrior on fate, time, or Death personified in their laments, the women are seeking to comfort themselves, assuring themselves that the events could not have happened in any other way.

The women's laments also continue to highlight the frustrated fertility that was first seen in the actions of the mourning women. The women are frequently described within the laments as being very beautiful, young, and desirable. They mention past sexual activities between husbands and wives. In some cases the lamenting women wonder what their husbands might be doing in heaven with the celestial nymphs while the widows are on earth without husbands. I have already noted that the women are expressing their frustration at being blocked from engaging in the proper activities of a husband and wife. This frustration is only made more tragic through the emphasis on the youth and beauty of the women. They are still quite capable of bearing children, but this will no longer be possible.

The laments also allow the women to place blame on various people for moral infractions, such as those that Arjuna committed in the slayings of Karṇa and Bhūrīśravas. Another liminal group that serves in this function of moral judgement and blame-placing are ascetics and seers, to whom the mourning women have already been linked through their similar appearances. Throughout the *Mahābhārata*, one finds ascetics intervening in key plot situations and making moral judgements that

are generally designed to uphold the social order.⁶⁵ This scrutiny and criticism of society are not unusual; it has been argued that it is within a state of liminality, a state of being outside or on the margins of society, that one can best examine the central values and axioms of that society (Turner, 1969, p. 167).⁶⁶

Vyāsa is an ascetic who frequently makes interventions into the *Mahābhārata* storyline to make some moral judgement or social critique.⁶⁷ The first intervention of this sort occurs in the *Vanaparvan*. Duryodhana, at the urging of Kaṃa, Duḥśāsana, and Śakuni, has decided to kill the Pāṇḍavas while they are in exile in the forest. Vyāsa arrives and tells Duryodhana's father Dhṛtarāṣṭra about the plot. After noting the fallacy of this action, he goes on to say:

It does not please me, strong-armed king, that the Pāṇḍavas have gone to the forest and that they were defeated by Duryodhana's henchmen through trickery....War with one's own kin is condemned, wise king: do not perpetrate lawless infamy!... Rather, let your feeble-minded son go to the forest, king, and live with the Pāṇḍavas, alone and without his helpers. Then if from their association love were to spring up in your son for the Pāṇḍavas, you would have succeeded, lord of men. (van Buitenen, 3.9.2; 8-11)

Vyāsa proclaims that Duryodhana is behaving wrongly, and is risking the destruction of the lineage. Moreover, he has clearly judged Duryodhana to be at fault in the travesty of the dice game that caused Draupadī to be molested and the Pāṇḍavas to

⁶⁵ Ascetics are not the only people to make moral judgements in the *Mahābhārata*, nor are they the only ones to intervene in crisis situations. However, ascetics do it with astonishing frequency, and if it is not an ascetic, it is an incarnation of the god Dharma instead, like Vidura. Moreover, the ascetics have a unique position in making moral judgements, since, to the best of my knowledge, their insights are always proven correct by the text.

⁶⁶ Turner supports this conclusion using the examples of people like St. Francis, Jesus, Gautama Buddha, and Caitanya, all of whom were ascetics of sorts, and all of whom performed some kind of social critique.

⁶⁷ There are many others, most especially Narada, but his example should suffice to make my point.

be exiled. He not only makes a judgement; he also offers a solution that might have saved the family from destruction, had Dhṛtarāṣṭra listened to him.

Vyāsa again offers his judgements and insights while the Kauravas are preparing for war. Vyāsa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Saṁjaya, and Gāndhārī are all attempting to dissuade Duryodhana from his war-mongering course of action. Vyāsa states, "[men] are not content with their own possessions. Again and again, they fall into [Death's] power, bewildered by their lusts. And like the blind leading the blind, they are carried off by their own acts" (van Buitenen, 5.67.13-15). This comment is aimed at Duryodhana, noting his desire for the Pāṇḍavas' kingdom, and that his lust for power will lead him to death.

Vyāsa, along with the seer Narada, also intervenes when Arjuna has finally caught up to Aśvatthāman after the latter had killed the Pāṇḍavas' army while it slept. Arjuna and Aśvatthāman had both manifested Brahmā's Head missile (*brahmāsīras*), extremely powerful weapons capable of destroying the world. Vyāsa confronts Aśvatthāman with these statements:

Why doest thou seek to compass the destruction of such a person [as Arjuna] with all of his brothers?...The Pāṇḍavas should be protected; the kingdom should also be protected. Therefore, O thou of mighty arms, withdraw this celestial weapon of thine. Dispel this wrath from thy heart and let the Pāṇḍavas be safe. (Roy, 10.15, p. 38)

Aśvatthāman chooses to release the weapon into the wombs of all the Kuru women, leaving them barren. Kṛṣṇa promises to revive Abhimanyu's son when he is born, and he also curses Aśvatthāman. Vyāsa supports Kṛṣṇa by saying:

Since, disregarding us, thou hast perpetrated this exceedingly cruel act, and since [you have behaved in this way even though you are a brahmin], those excellent words that [Kṛṣṇa] has said will, without doubt, be realised in thy case, an adopter as thou hast been of [a

warrior's] usages! (Roy, 10.15, p. 40)⁶⁸

Throughout his comments, Vyāsa questions the morality of Aśvatthāman's actions, and ends up sanctioning the curses that Kṛṣṇa places on him. He also absolves Arjuna of any blame in this event. Moreover, Vyāsa condemns Aśvatthāman's deviation from the proper behaviour for a brahmin, since the latter spent most of his time living and fighting as a warrior.

Vyāsa also intervenes in the *Strīparvan*. In his attempts to comfort the grieving Dhṛtarāṣṭra, he notes how Duryodhana was to blame for his own mistakes, and that Yudhiṣṭhira had tried as hard as he could to make peace with him (Roy, 11.8, p. 13). When Gāndhārī is desiring to curse the Pāṇḍavas, Vyāsa intervenes, telling her that "there should be no anger made towards the Pāṇḍavas" and that she herself had claimed truthfully that victory would go to the side that was righteous, namely Yudhiṣṭhira's (11.13.7-10). Vyāsa has judged that the Pāṇḍavas are not to blame for the war, and thus should not be condemned by either of Duryodhana's parents. He feels that it was Duryodhana's own fault that this destruction has occurred.

From the example of Vyāsa, it can be seen that ascetics make moral judgements and assign blame for unrighteous acts. Ascetics are linked to mourning women through appearances, and, in blame-placing and moral judgements, they also perform similar functions in the text. They both provide commentary from outside the structured society. Through this link with ascetics, the judgements in the laments of the women are given a weight that they might not otherwise possess.

If the women's judgements within their laments are important social

⁶⁸ I have made slight changes to the translation since the wording the Roy edition used was extremely awkward.

commentary, then they should be examined in more depth. To undertake this examination, one must look at who the women are blaming and why those people are blamed.⁶⁹

Arjuna is singled out for blame by both the wives of Karṇa and the wives of Bhūrīśravas. In the case of Karṇa, Arjuna attacked him while the former was engaged in getting his chariot wheel out of the mud. This is a violation of the rule of battle that "no one should strike another that is unprepared" (Roy, 6.1, p. 3). Arjuna cut off Bhūrīśravas' arm while the latter was about to kill Sātyaki in fair combat. This is a transgression of the rule of battle that "one engaged with another...should never be struck" (*ibid*). Thus, the women are censuring Arjuna for violating the warrior's code of battle that was set out and agreed upon by both parties before the battle began.

Sātyaki is also censured by Gāndhārī and Bhūrīśravas' wives for killing Bhūrīśravas while he was engaged in fasting to death. Like Arjuna, he has violated the rule not to attack an unprepared foe. Thus, he is also being censured for breaching the warrior's battle code. The same is true of the group that Uttarā censures for the slaying of her husband Abhimanyu. They lured him into a trap and killed him together. This is another transgression of the rule that one should not fight with someone that another is engaged with. As with the previous examples, Uttarā is upset because the warriors violated their code of battle.

⁶⁹ However, it is also interesting to note whom the mourning women do not censure. The wives of Droṇa do not censure Dhṛṣṭadyumna, even though he cut the head off of their husband after he had vowed to fast to death. This lack of censuring may be due to the fact that Droṇa and his wives are brahmins. I know of no instance in the *Mahābhārata* in which a brahmin woman laments. Although she exhibits other mourning signs, Kṛpī, Droṇa's wife, does not lament in any part of the *Strīparvan*.

Aśvatthāman is censured by Draupadī for slaughtering the warriors while they slept. He not only violated the rule stating that the warrior must be prepared, but he also violated rules that declare that anyone who is stricken with panic or not wearing armour should not be attacked (Roy, 6.1, p. 3).

In addition, although she did not state it during a lament, Gāndhārī censures Bhīma for striking Duryodhana below the navel in a mace fight (11.13.17-18). In mace fighting, "no limb below the navel should be struck. This is the precept laid down in the treatises" (Roy, 9.60, p. 176). Hence, Gāndhārī is upset with Bhīma because he killed Duryodhana by violating the rules of battle.

All of these women are angry for the same reason.⁷⁰ The warrior they are lamenting has been slain by someone who transgressed the laws of battle. Thus, the standard by which the women judge the warriors is these laws. Interestingly, these condemnations should very similar to those given by Duryodhana in one of his death speeches:

Many have been the unfair and very sinful acts that have been perpetrated towards Bhūrīśravas, Bhīṣma, and Droṇa of great prosperity! [My defeat] is another very infamous act that the cruel Pāṇḍavas have perpetrated, for which, I am certain, they will incur the condemnation of all righteous men! What pleasure can a righteously disposed person enjoy at having gained a victory by unfair acts? (Roy, 9.64, p. 189)

Like the mourning women, Duryodhana condemns the Pāṇḍavas who broke the rules of battle. This similarity is relevant to the meaning of the women's condemnations, which I will now discuss.

In addition to censuring the Pāṇḍavas' actions, Duryodhana also notes his own

⁷⁰ The only exception to this is Gāndhārī's chastisement of Bhīma for his drinking of the blood of Duḥśāsana.

valour:

Having protected the earth I now approach this conclusion! How fortunate that I never turned back from combat, no matter what happened! How fortunate that I was slain by sinners, and that, too, using the worst trickery! How fortunate that I always fought with courage and perseverance!^[71]...If the Vedas are authoritative, I have conquered imperishable worlds! (9.64.22-27, quoted in Gitomer, 1992, p. 229)⁷²

All of these actions, as David Gitomer as noted, are indicative of one who follows the code of a warrior (*kṣatradharma*) (Gitomer, 1992, p. 229). Duryodhana's devotion to the warrior code is explicitly noted by himself later on when he states, "I am mindful of the power of Kṛṣṇa, whose [majesty] is immeasurable, but he has not shaken me from following the *kṣatradharma*. I have entirely won him [Kṛṣṇa]. I am not to be grieved for at all" (9.64.28-29, quoted in Gitomer, 1992, p. 229). In fact, even the crimes that Kṛṣṇa accuses Duryodhana of can be accounted as proper behaviour for a king following *Arthaśāstra* (science of polity). For example, Kṛṣṇa cites the attempted poisoning of Bhīma and the burning of a house that the Pāṇḍavas were residing in as crimes of Duryodhana's (Roy, 9.61, p. 181). The *Arthaśāstra* suggests that "manifold poisons should be administered in the diet...of the wicked....Spies...may set fire (to the houses of the wicked)" (*Arthaśāstra* 14.1, p. 451). By wicked, the *Arthaśāstra* means anyone who does not uphold "the institution of the four castes" (Ibid). Hence, Duryodhana also supports the duties of a warrior outside of the battlefield, which, as

⁷¹ In spite of Duryodhana's many crimes, he was certainly a brave and virtuous warrior. For example, in the *Vanaparvan*, he stayed to fight the Gandharvas when the rest of his force had fled, even though he was defeated and captured. When Abhimanyu broke Droṇa's tactical formation in the *Droṇaparvan*, Duryodhana was the first major warrior to go out alone and face him, even though he had to be rescued by Droṇa and many others.

⁷² I chose to use David Gitomer's translation here because it is far more fluid and readable than the Roy edition's.

will be shown below, are in direct conflict with Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti* ideology.

Gitomer points out that all of Duryodhana's many crimes can be placed within the field of one fault in that Duryodhana purposefully ignores what is "an indisputable fact" for the *Mahābhārata*: Kṛṣṇa's divinity and rulership of the universe (Gitomer, 1992, p. 224). Both of these views, the priority of *kṣatradharma* and the Vaiṣṇava theological viewpoint that claims Duryodhana is blind in regard to Kṛṣṇa's divinity (the *bhakti* view), are repeated over and over throughout the *Mahābhārata* (Ibid). However, Gitomer adds that this conflict is not a simple division between *kṣatriya* values and Vaiṣṇava devotion, since materials dealing with this conflict in the epic, like various plays, continued to uphold both sides (Ibid, p. 225). Instead, his theory is that the *Mahābhārata* is "a genre, an institution even, where the crises of polity in all their human and cosmological significance are continually brought to the test" (Ibid, p. 231). He claims that the continuing persistent conflict between Duryodhana's *kṣatradharma* and Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti* shows that "the theological solution of *bhakti* continues not only to be profoundly unsatisfactory, but profoundly threatening to the realization of the dharmic person in the dharmic society, the realm of human responsibility for human values" (Ibid, p. 232). He finishes by noting that Duryodhana is not alone in representing his side. Yudhiṣṭhira has his differences with Kṛṣṇa as well, such as his horrible suffering over the way in which the battle was fought, and his own legitimacy as king (Ibid).

What does all of this mean for the mourning women? As I have noted, the women support *kṣatradharma* by censuring those warriors who failed to follow it in battle. This places the women on the side of the conflict represented by Duryodhana's

value-system.⁷³ In fact, according to Yudhiṣṭhira, "that science of polity [(*arthaśāstra*)] which Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of the celestials knew, cannot be regarded to be deeper or more distinguished for subtlety than what woman's intelligence naturally brings forth" (Roy, 13.39, p. 6). *Arthaśāstra* is essentially the laws that tell a king how to rule. It places primary importance on *kṣatriya* values. If women can know it better than the preceptor of the gods, then they are certainly the embodiment of the values of a warrior.

Further evidence of this connection is found in Gāndhārī's cursing of Kṛṣṇa when she finishes her laments. She is extremely upset with Kṛṣṇa, accusing him of ignoring the welfare of both sides. She asks him, "Why were the sons of Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra... disregarded by you? You are powerful, have a strong army, and are capable of being listened to by both sides when you speak" (11.25.36-37). As a result of these accusations, she curses him to destroy all of his own relatives, leaving their women in mourning like the Bharata women now, and he himself will die a contemptible death (11.25.40-42). One notes within this complaint and subsequent curse the lack of any acknowledgement of Kṛṣṇa as divine. He is chastised for not using his army and speaking ability to prevent the war. She is censuring a warrior, not a god. In fact, his reply makes no mention of his status, or even hints at it. He claims that his family are such great warriors that the only way they could be killed is to do it themselves (11.25.44-45). Not only does Gāndhārī criticize Kṛṣṇa for failing to behave as a powerful king should have with his own family, but she also ignores his divinity in these statements, as Duryodhana does throughout the text.

⁷³ The women emphasize the primacy of *kṣatradharma*, but they are not necessarily blind to Kṛṣṇa as God. I will address this point later on.

The lamenting women also ignore Kṛṣṇa's divinity when they address him during their laments. Gāndhārī's entire speech to Kṛṣṇa is in the form of laments, but she never acknowledges his divine status once. Uttarā only tells Kṛṣṇa that Abhimanyu was his equal as a warrior (11.20.9-10). Bhūrīśravas' wife only asks what Kṛṣṇa might say about Arjuna's deeds in an assembly, which, as Gāndhārī notes, is also censuring Kṛṣṇa (11.24.19-20). Hence, like Duryodhana, the mourning women not only support the priority of *kṣatradharma*, they also ignore Kṛṣṇa's divinity.

Having established this connection between Duryodhana's viewpoint and that of the mourning women, I may now explore its implications. The importance in this connection lies in the current activities of the women. They are mourning and are clearly overwhelmed with grief. They attempt to console themselves and each other in their laments by citing various causes of death. However, none of these consolations appears to work. The religious messages and comforts are inadequate to deal with the overpowering human emotion of grief.

For example, Gāndhārī is still extremely upset and grieving by the end of the *Strīparvan*, in spite of Vyāsa's consolations and her own attempts at self-comfort in her laments. Just when she finishes her laments, she "fell on the ground, grief-stricken, patience abandoned, her intelligence and consciousness taken away....[She was] possessed by rage, overwhelmed with grief over her sons, [and her] senses [were] reeling" (11.25.34-35). In the next lines, she curses Kṛṣṇa, who responds as was described above. Kṛṣṇa then goes on to tell Gāndhārī in no uncertain terms that the entire slaughter was her own fault (Roy, 11.26, p. 42). He also tells her to abandon grief because:

A [brahmin woman] bears children for the practice of austerities. The

cow brings forth offspring for bearing burdens. The mare brings forth her young for acquiring speed of motion. The *śūdra* [(servant caste)] woman bears a child for adding to the number of servitors. The *vaiśya* woman [has children] for adding to the number of keepers of cattle. A princess, however, like thee, brings forth sons for being slaughtered. (Ibid)

This statement is double-sided. In the first place, it acknowledges Gāndhārī's support of the *kṣatradharma* by giving her a valid reason not to grieve within her own ideals. Kṛṣṇa is a *kṣatriya* himself, so it is not surprising occasionally to find him using the ideals of his caste.⁷⁴ However, he emphasizes that the warriors are born to die. Their numbers do not increase like the other castes. This casts a shadow over the *kṣatradharma*. Essentially, he is saying to this extremely upset and grieving woman that she must stop grieving the deaths of her sons because every son she will ever bear is only brought forth to be killed. There is little consolation in this line given the way in which Kṛṣṇa states it.⁷⁵ In response to this speech, Gāndhārī, "with her heart exceedingly agitated by grief, remained silent" (Ibid). This is the end of their confrontation. Kṛṣṇa casts doubt upon the *kṣatriya* values that were the basis for Gāndhārī's curse, while Gāndhārī remains "agitated by grief", clearly unconsolated by her own, Vyāsa's, or Kṛṣṇa's efforts. As late as the *Aśvamedhaparvan*, Vyāsa notes "the sorrow that always exists in the heart of Gāndhārī" because of her sons' deaths (Roy, 14.29, p. 234).

Uttarā is another good example of a woman who continues to grieve after the

⁷⁴ Note his attempts to console Subhadrā by telling her that all warriors who die in battle attain celestial realms. Even in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa continuously tells Arjuna to get up, fight, and thereby fulfil his *kṣatradharma*.

⁷⁵ I am not claiming that this would be an invalid comfort for a grieving woman. I am stating that Kṛṣṇa has twisted the comforting device in the way he has presented it.

mourning process is over. After the *śrāddhas* of Abhimanyu had been performed, Uttarā "for many days totally abstained from all food, exceedingly afflicted with grief on account of the death of her husband" (Roy, 14.62, p. 124). She stops hurting herself only because she is reminded that she may be hurting her child.

As a final example, as noted above, Vyāsa states that Gāndhārī is still grieving long after the mourning process is over. In the same section, he makes similar statements about Kuntī, Draupadī, and Subhadrā (Roy, 14.29, pp. 234-35). Even after he summons the dead out of the river in bodily form and they reunite with their family, friends, and wives for one night, the women are still never mentioned to have stopped grieving.⁷⁶ Even after he tells the women that the warriors were all incarnations of some celestial being or another, most of the wives throw themselves into the river and drown, going with their husbands to heaven. This drowning is the only action that causes "their anxieties [to be entirely] dispelled" (Roy, 14.33, p. 242).

To summarize thus far, I have shown that the mourning women are similar to Duryodhana in that both uphold the primacy of *kṣatradharma* and both are blind to Kṛṣṇa's divinity. Moreover, I should add that in the case of the mourning women, this ignoring of divinity is generalized to apply to almost all religious teachings on death. In other words, since nothing succeeds in comforting the women, we may say that they are not only bypassing the teachings of Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti*, but all other value systems as well, including the *kṣatriya*s. After all, the women found no comfort in the notion that their men had died in battle and hence had risen to the highest possible

⁷⁶ This omission is made more glaring by the explicit reference to Dhṛtarāṣṭra's grief ending after this river-side meeting. See Roy, 14.36, p. 246. However, to the best of my knowledge, none of the other men stop grieving either.

end for a warrior.

What we are left is women who support *kṣatradharma* by censuring those people in battle who killed others while not adhering to it. To put it in Gitomer's words, the women highlight the "profoundly unsatisfactory" nature of Kṛṣṇa's *bhakti* solution that killed all of their men unfairly in battle by emphasizing the "realm of human responsibility for human values". No matter what Kṛṣṇa with all of his divinity might say, incredible human suffering resulted from the battle. The women blame this suffering mostly on the Pāṇḍavas, who exhibited a lack of responsibility for their actions as *kṣatriyas*, and on Kṛṣṇa, who instigated these acts. The women have been deprived of husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons through means that are unfair for anyone who is trying to uphold the social order. After all, the castes are designed to maintain the proper social order and to violate one's caste duty threatens this order. To place this discussion in a slightly different light, I am stating that the laments of the women are important to some of the major questions that the *Mahābhārata* confronts. The laments emphasize the primacy of proper caste duty, social order, which includes human interaction, and one's own responsibility for own's own ethical behaviour (read here as adherence to caste duties). They add a human level to the text that is almost absent from the more esoteric philosophical teachings that prove inadequate for these bereaved women. By grieving until the very end of their lives, the women continue to state the message that was first made known in their laments.

There is another, interrelated aspect to these characteristics of the laments, which has to do with their relation to laments from other cultures. Lila Abu-Lughod has discussed laments used by the Bedouin women of Egypt. She shows that there is a tension between the Islamic religious discourse of the Bedouin, and the laments and

actions of their mourning women (Abu-Lughod, 1993, p. 202). Their religious tradition claims that death is the result of God's will, and the women pay lip service to this idea in their laments and their stories about death. However, in general, the women oppose the acceptance of God's will, and human attachments, especially between kin, take precedence over religious teachings in their laments (Ibid). By lamenting, singing songs of loss, and becoming so personally involved in the mourning process, Bedouin women assert the weakness of their faith in comparison to the men, who seldom deviate from proper religious behaviour (Ibid, p. 203). Moreover, by ripping their clothes, tearing their cheeks, and going out unveiled during mourning, they cast aside their moral standing, a testament that the power of death causes the women temporarily to forget or ignore their own honour as well as God (Ibid). By lowering their moral standing and placing such an emphasis on human attachments, the Bedouin women "publicly enact their own moral, and ultimately social, inferiority" (Ibid).

One is struck by the similarity between the practices of the Bedouin women and the women in the *Strīparvan*. Both groups alter their appearance for mourning purposes by changing their hair and clothing, and casting off their ornaments.⁷⁷ Both groups replace their old ornamentation for something new and polluting: the Bharata women with the blood of the battlefield and the Bedouin women with dirt thrown over their heads. Both groups strike themselves in grief. Both groups lament, placing the emphasis on human attachments rather than religious discourse.

As a result of these similarities, I would argue that some of the conclusions

⁷⁷ All references to the mourning actions of the Bedouin women are found on p. 190 of Abu-Lughod's article.

that Abu-Lughod applies to the Bedouin are also valid in the case of the women in the *Strīparvan*. In the *Mahābhārata*, to be wearing a single garment has low moral connotations for women, as was shown by Karmā's claim that it is appropriate for Draupadī to be seen in one garment because she is a whore (van Buitenen, 2.61.36-7). In addition, as wives, the women were kept secluded in the women's quarters by their men, as is shown by the statement that the women "who formerly were unseen even by groups of gods, now, with their husbands dead, were seen by ordinary people" (11.9.9) and Gāndhārī's lament that "ordinary people are seeing the women of my jealous sons" (11.18.16). When Draupadī is dragged into the assembly hall in the *Sabhāparvan*, she states that "I whom neither wind nor sun have seen before in my house, I am now seen in the middle of the hall in the assembly of the Kurus" (van Buitenen, 2.62.5). Hence, like the Bedouin women, the Hindu women are debasing themselves morally by wearing few clothes and appearing in public before "ordinary people".

What is interesting about the examples of the Bedouin and the *Strīparvan* women is the strength of their grief and how that is expressed. Both groups of women are grieving so powerfully that religious teachings and comforts are inadequate for them. For the Bedouin women, this situation causes them to appear morally and socially inferior to the men of their society since the men behave as their religion expects them to. Jonathan Parry has come to the same conclusion for the women in modern day Banares. The women behave much like the women in the *Strīparvan*. However, the men behave with restraint, being told to accept the inevitable and to properly perform the funerary rites (Parry, 1994, p. 155). The chief mourner may only express feelings at a single point in the cremation rituals (ibid). Like the Bedouin, the

modern Hindu women assert their inferiority by being excessively emotional and remaining attached to social relationships (Ibid, p. 221). The men are superior simply because they are able to behave as the religious teachings tell them to.

Here, we see a stark contrast with the *Mahābhārata*. The men in the text are as grief-stricken as the women. Yudhiṣṭhira's grief is mentioned so many times after the *Strīparvan* that it has become a fundamental feature of his post-battle characterization in the Hindu tradition. Moreover, as with the women, none of the men ever really gets over his grief, except for Dhṛtarāṣṭra (see n. 27 above). The men also fall down, lament, place blame on others, and seek revenge for wrongs.

As a result of these features of men's grief, the women do not make themselves inferior to the men. Therefore, I would argue that the women are actually making a statement that the religious teachings are inadequate to deal with the massive power of grief. They support *kṣatradharma*, although even this gives them little comfort. Hence, I would argue that the women are claiming that there is no real way for the wound in society to heal, since there is sparse comfort to be found. However, the social order must be maintained to ensure that such a tragedy will not happen again. If *kṣatradharma* had been followed, these deaths would not have happened. By placing themselves in conflict with *bhakti*, the women emphasize responsibility for one's actions in this world, as opposed to the fate of the soul in the next.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has discussed various themes concerning death in the *Strīparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*. By exploring the appearance, actions, and laments of these bereaved women in this text, I have tried to draw some general conclusions.

Firstly, mourning women perform certain actions, like wailing, striking themselves, and falling down, as expressions of grief. The same theme can be found in many of the women's laments. By comparing past and present and talking about the fate of the dead warrior, the women have a verbal outlet for their grief. These comparisons, as well as the discussions of the fate of the warrior, offer the women some form of consolation. The same function is served by blaming the death on various metaphysical forces like time, fate, and Death personified. However, I also demonstrated that these comforts tend to be inadequate to cope with the overwhelming force of death and grief.

Denial of death was another theme seen in the *Strīparvan*. Various actions, like holding the corpse and smelling the deceased's head, indicate that the mourner has yet fully to acknowledge the death of her loved one. Many of the lines in the laments substantiate this conclusion because they are in the form of questions asked to the deceased. Moreover, they are questions that anticipate answers.

Metaphorical and symbolic links between the women and various other liminal beings, including menstruating women, ascetics, liminal divinities, and battlefield

scavengers, lend to the women polluted and inauspicious qualities. However, these same links also lend to the women an aura of dangerous power. This power was accumulated by the women through their devotion to their husbands and their resulting chastity. It is used within the text mainly to hurl curses. As I have demonstrated, these curses start a snowball effect that carries the plot to its final destructive end. What began as an angry and molested menstruating woman's curse that the other women would one day be in her condition while standing over the corpses of their husbands, ended with another curse that destroyed Kṛṣṇa and his family. In this way, the women's curses are largely responsible for the great deal of human suffering and grieving that takes place in the epic.

The women were also shown to possess erotic characteristics in their appearance, with some metaphors comparing their actions to those of animals like horses and elephants whose fertility is frustrated. In the laments, the beauty of the women is emphasised and their inability to cavort sexually with their husbands is regretted. In addition, this sexuality takes on destructive aspects through its metaphorical connection with the doomsday fire. As a result, the power that we have seen unleashed in the curses may be related to this fire. The women might not destroy the world, but the more repressed their fertility becomes, the more likely it is for destruction to become worse. Draupadī is forced to live as an ascetic for thirteen years and this repressed fertility becomes the curse that destroys the Kuru and, inadvertently, the Pāñcāla women. Gāndhārī, being one of the Kurus whose family is destroyed, then curses Kṛṣṇa to destroy his own family. When this destruction is finally over, the world has gone into the moral decline of the *kaliyuga*.

I have also demonstrated that the women's laments contain accusations and

censurings of warriors who violated *kṣatradharma* in the killing of the lamented warrior. Through links between the mourning women's value systems and that of Duryodhana, I have shown that the women are desirous of maintaining the social order according to the caste structure. They place a priority on *kṣatradharma* as a system of moral judgement. As a result, the women emphasize the responsibility of humans for their own moral actions, which is contrary to the theological solution of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*.

I have also shown that none of the metaphysical comforts for the grieving women is adequate for comforting these women. Essentially, all of the women in the *Strīparvan* take their grief to the grave. Many of them willingly kill themselves to be with their husbands in heaven. All of these actions are a testament to the power of death. Religious teachings are hard-pressed to compete against death's power. Instead, the women place a primacy on maintaining the social order in the hope that such a catastrophe will not occur again.

Having summarized my conclusions, I may now indicate a direction for further research. A similar study of men's grief in the *Strīparvan* needs to be undertaken. As I indicated in notes throughout the text, many of the men's mourning and grieving practices are similar to those of the women. Men wail, fall on the ground, weep, and lament. Men's laments have a similar style to those of the women. Both men and women find religious teachings to be partially inadequate for coping with grief. However, men do not change their appearances, and there seem to be fewer or no connotations of inauspiciousness, danger, or eroticism/fertility in men's mourning. Men tend to have philosophical discourses given to them to relieve grief. Moreover, men are far more likely to take the anger they feel in grief and vent it by seeking

revenge. In fact, many of the major events in the *Mahābhārata* are motivated by this revenge in grief. I would not be surprised to discover a background of snowballing vengeance that parallels the women's curses. The Pāṇḍavas swear revenge on Duryodhana's group, which results in the war. Aśvatthāman swears revenge for the death of his father, and wipes out the Pāṇḍava-Pāñcāla army in his grief. Exactly what these various similarities and differences mean could be important to an understanding of death in the *Mahābhārata*. A thorough study of men's grief in the *Mahābhārata* may bear the fruit that could engage these themes and perhaps bring them into dialogue with the various aspects of women's mourning that I have dealt with throughout this thesis.

APPENDIX

Translated Selections from the *Strīparvan*

Strīparvan 9

Janamejaya said:

- 1 When Lord Vyāsa left, what did King Dhṛtarāṣṭra do, O Seer? You should explain this to me.

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 2 Having heard that, O Best of Men, having reflected for a long time, having said "Cause the chariot to be yoked" to Saṁjaya, the lifeless one replied to Vidura,
- 3 "Quickly bring Gāndhārī and all of the Bharata women, taking the woman Kuntī and other women who are there."
- 4 Having thus spoken to Vidura, the best knower of dharma, the virtuous one, his knowledge destroyed by grief, entered the vehicle.
- 5 And Gāndhārī, afflicted with grief, impelled by the speech of her husband, ran with Kuntī and the women to where the king was.
- 6 Having approached the king, full of grief, calling to each other, they greeted each other and wailed.
- 7 Vidura comforted them and became more pained than they were. Then he

caused them whose throats were choked with tears to mount the chariots and they went forth from the city.

8 Then a loud noise arose in all of the Kurus' dwellings. All of the city, even the children, became afflicted with grief.

9 Those women who formerly were unseen even by groups of gods were now, with their husbands dead, seen by ordinary people.

10 Letting loose their very beautiful hair and taking off their ornaments, the women, wearing a single garment, rushed to and fro as if without protectors.

11 They left their homes that had the form of white mountains, like spotted doe leaving caves in a mountain, their herd-leader dead.

12 Then the wild and grief-stricken multitude of women ran, O King, like a herd of colts in the yard.

13 Having grasped each other's arms, they cried out to sons, brothers, and fathers, as if displaying the annihilation of the world at the end of the Age.

14 Lamenting and weeping, running here and there, knowledge stricken down by grief, they did not know what to do.

15 Those women who previously were modest even among friends were now without shame before their mothers-in-law, wearing a single garment.

16 They who formerly comforted each other for the smallest grief, now, agitated by grief, disregarded each other, O King.

17 The wretched king, surrounded by thousands of weeping women, departed from the city towards the battlefield.

18 Artisans, merchants, and members of the third caste of all kinds of occupations followed the king outside the city.

- 19 Pained on account of the annihilation of the Kurus, a great cry arose among the wailing women that agitated all the worlds.
- 20 Living beings thought that perhaps destruction had arrived, like the burning of creatures when the time of the end of the Age has arrived.
- 21 Then the devoted citizens, hearts greatly sorrowful because of the Kurus' annihilation, wailed vehemently, O Great King.

Strīparvan 11

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 1 When the whole army was killed, the dharmic king Yudhiṣṭhira heard that the old father Dhṛtarāṣṭra had gone forth from Hāstinapura.
- 2 Then, accompanied by his brothers, grief-stricken because of his son's death, lamenting, he approached the one immersed in grief on account of his sons' deaths, O Great King.
- 3 He was followed by the heroic Dāsārha, the great-souled Yuyudhāna, as well as Yuyutsu.
- 4 Draupadī, stricken with great sorrow, emaciated with grief, followed him as well, along with the Pāñcāla women who had met her there.
- 5 Near the Ganges he saw a host of pained women, wailing like a flock of ospreys, O Best of the Bharatas.
- 6 The king was surrounded by thousands of pained, weeping women, arms raised, saying favourable and unfavourable things.
- 7 "Where is the righteousness of the king? Where is his kindness now that he

has crushed fathers, brothers, preceptors, sons, and friends?

- 8 "Having caused Droṇa and Grandfather Bhīṣma to be slain, and having killed Jayadratha, O Great-Armed One, how do you feel?
- 9 "Indeed, what need is there for you with a kingdom now that you can no longer see fathers, brothers, the dreadful Abhimanyu, and the sons of Draupadī, O Bhārata?"
- 10 Having passed through these women who were wailing like ospreys, the great-armed, dharmic King Yudhiṣṭhira greeted his elder father.
- 11 Then, having saluted their father according to dharma, the Pāṇḍavas, slayers of their enemies, announced all their names.
- 12 The grief-stricken father, hurt by the annihilation of his sons, embraced with an unfriendly heart the Pāṇḍava who had caused the end of his sons.
- 13 Having embraced the dharmic king and having comforted him, O Bhārata, the wicked-souled one sought after Bhīma like a fire with a desire to burn.
- 14 This fire of anger, fanned by the wind of grief, desired to burn Bhīma as if wanting to consume a forest.
- 15 Having perceived his inauspicious intention towards Bhīma, Hari, throwing Bhīma down with his two hands, presented Dhṛtarāṣṭra with a Bhīma made of iron.
- 16 Hari of great intelligence knew in advance Dhṛtarāṣṭra's real purpose. Hence, Janārdana of great wisdom had made an arrangement.
- 17 Grasping him with his two hands, the powerful king broke the Bhīmasena made of iron, considering it to be Wolf-Belly.
- 18 Having broken the iron Bhīma with the strength and spirit of ten thousand

- elephants, the king, whose chest was crushed, gushed blood from his mouth.
- 19 Then, wet with blood, he fell on the ground, like a coral tree whose top is weighted by blossoms.
- 20 Then the learned *sūta* Saṁjaya embraced him. He said "Don't act thus" to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, being very comforting and soothing.
- 21 The high-minded Dhṛtarāṣṭra, his anger dispelled, fury gone, repeatedly cried "Oh! Oh Bhīma!," filled with grief.
- 22 Knowing that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's anger was gone and that he was pained by the slaying of Bhīmasena, the excellent Vāsudeva said this speech to him,
- 23 "Do not be sorrowful, O Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Bhīma was not killed by you. An iron statue was destroyed by you, O King.
- 24 "Knowing that you were afflicted with great anger, O Bull of the Bharatas, the son of Kuntī was taken away by me, gone from the midst of death's fangs.
- 25 "There is no one equal to you in strength, O Tiger among Men. What man can prevail against the punishment of your arms, O Great-Armed One?
- 26 "Just as no living being, obtaining death, is ever released from it, so no living thing, reaching the middle of your arms, is ever let go.
- 27 "Therefore, that iron statue of your son Bhīma which I had created was presented by me to you, O Kauravya.
- 28 "Your mind was turned away from dharma because of the anguish of grief over your sons. Thus, you desired to kill Bhīmasena.
- 29 "And it is not proper, O King, that you would slay Wolf-Belly. Your sons will never live again, O Great King, no matter what you may do.
- 30 "Thus, that which was done by us who think properly, approve of it all. Do not

maintain your mind in grief."

Strīparvan 13

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 1 Then, dismissed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, all of the brothers, the bulls of the Kurus, went towards Gāndhārī with Keśava.
- 2 Knowing that the dharmic King Yudhiṣṭhira had killed his enemies, the irreproachable Gāndhārī, grief-stricken over her sons, desired to curse him.
- 3 Knowing her evil intention towards the Pāṇḍavas, the seer Vyāsa, son of Satyavatī, had perceived it right from the start.
- 4 Having done ablutions in the Ganges with pure, fragrant water, the highest seer came to that place as quickly as thought flies.
- 5 He perceived there the minds of all beings, seeing with a humble mind and divine sight.
- 6 The great sage, speaker of what was good for others, said at the right moment to his daughter-in-law, "Casting off the time for a curse, bring out the time for tranquility.
- 7 "There should be no anger made towards the Pāṇḍavas, O Gāndhārī. Reach for tranquility. Restrain this passion and listen to this speech of mine.
- 8 "For eighteen days, you were spoken to by your son who desired victory, 'O Mother, wish me well who wage war with my enemies.'
- 9 "And you, O Gāndhārī, being asked time and again by him who strove for victory said, 'Where dharma is, there is victory.'

10 "I do not remember, O Gāndhārī, a speech of yours gone by that was untrue.
Thus was your resolve.

11 "Remembering dharma and having spoken with words, O Intelligent One,
control your anger, O Gāndhārī. Do not be thus, O True-Speaking One."

Gāndhārī said:

12 O Lord, I am not indignant. Nor do I want the Pāṇḍavas destroyed. My heart
is forcibly agitated by grief over my sons.

13 Just as the sons of Kuntī are to be protected by her, in the same way are they
to be protected by me. Just as they are guarded by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, so are they to
be guarded by me.

14 The annihilation of the Kurus was set in motion by the transgression of
Duryodhana, Śakuni Saubala, Kaṁṇa and Duḥśāsana.

15 Neither the Terrifier, Wolf-Belly Pārtha, Nakula, Sahadeva, nor Yudhiṣṭhira has
ever offended anyone.

16 The Kauravas, fighting and cutting each other up, were slain there together,
accompanied by others. I find in this nothing disagreeable to me.

17-18 However, Bhīma, having challenged Duryodhana in a mace fight and knowing
that one to be superior in instruction and skilled in battle in various ways, hit
him below the navel while Kṛṣṇa looked on. It is that act that causes my anger
to grow.

19 To save their lives in battle, how can heroes somehow abandon dharma that
has been fully explained by great-souled knowers of dharma?

Strīparvan 15

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 1 Having spoken thus, Gāndhārī, hurting over the slaying of her sons and grandsons, angrily asked after Yudhiṣṭhira, saying "Where is the king?!"
- 2 Yudhiṣṭhira, Indra among kings, approached her, trembling, with folded hands, and said this sweet speech to her,
- 3 "O Queen, I am Yudhiṣṭhira, cruel slayer of your sons. I am deserving of curses, being the cause of the destruction of the earth. Curse me.
- 4 "Having killed such friends, there is no use for life, kingdom, or wealth for me who is foolish and hostile to friends."
- 5 Then, to that one nearby who spoke fearfully, Gāndhārī said nothing, letting out many great sighs.
- 6 When King Yudhiṣṭhira, with his body bent, was about to throw himself at her feet, the queen, knower and observer of dharma, saw the tips of his toes from between the folds of her blindfold.
- 7 Then the king, whose nails were beautiful, had diseased nails. And seeing that, Arjuna went behind Vāsudeva.
- 8 Gāndhārī, anger departed, comforted like a mother the Pāṇḍavas, who were moving restlessly here and there.
- 9 Given leave by her, together the broad-chested ones approached their mother Pṛthā, mother of heroes.
- 10 Seeing her sons after a long time, the queen, overwhelmed with anxiety over her sons, brought forth tears and covered her face with her garment.

- 11 Then, having shed tears with her son, Pṛthā saw that they were sorely wounded in many ways by a multitude of weapons.
- 12 Touching her sons one by one again and again, she wailed, stricken with misery. And thereupon, she saw Draupadī Pāñcālī, whose sons were slain, fallen on the ground weeping.

Draupadī said:

- 13 O Noble Lady, where have all your grandchildren gone, along with the son of Subhadrā? Today, they will not approach you who are miserable, not having seen them for a long time. Deprived of my sons, what use do I have for the kingdom?

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 14 Having caused her to stand up, long-eyed Pṛthā comforted Yājñasenī, who was crying, tormented by grief.
- 15 Then, accompanied by her sons and Draupadī, Pṛthā, who was herself more stricken, approached the stricken Gāndhārī.
- 16 Thereupon, Gāndhārī said to the famous woman with her daughter-in-law, "O Daughter, do not be grief-stricken in this way. Look at me who is also suffering.
- 17 "I think that this terrifying and inevitable destruction of the world, impelled by the course of time, was reached because of the very nature of things.
- 18 "That which Vidura said when Kṛṣṇa tried his failed conciliation, that great speech of the highly intelligent one has now happened.

- 19 "Do not grieve, especially when the event was unavoidable and has already passed. They who have died in battle should not be grieved for.
- 20 "Just as you are, so am I. Who will console me? This foremost family was annihilated by my fault alone.

Strīparvan 16

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 1 Having spoken thus, Gāndhārī, remaining there, saw the entire battlefield of the Kurus with divine sight.
- 2 She was devoted to her husband, very fortunate, and observed all vows. She was intent upon formidable austerities and perpetually spoke the truth.
- 3 She who had obtained the power of divine knowledge with a boon granted by the virtuous great seer Vyāsa variously lamented.
- 4 The wise woman saw the awesome and terrifying battlefield of the heroes of men from afar just as if she was nearby.
- 5 It was strewn with bones and hair, inundated with rushing rivers of blood, and was scattered with many thousands of bodies on all sides.
- 6 It was covered with the blood-fouled, headless bodies and bodiless heads of elephants, horses, and chariot warriors.
- 7 Teeming with the dead of heroes of men, horses, and elephants, it was frequented by jackals, ravens, crows, and other scavengers.
- 8 Gratifying man-eating demons, filled with osprey, and attended by vultures, it resounded with the inauspicious cries of jackals.

- 9 Then, given leave by Vyāsa, King Dhṛtarāṣṭra and all the sons of Pāṇḍu went with Yudhiṣṭhira.
- 10 And when they reached the Kuru women, they made Vāsudeva their leader, as well as the king whose relatives had all died. They all went together to the battlefield.
- 11-12 Having approached Kurukṣetra, those women whose lords were slain saw their dead sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands there being eaten by carrion-eaters, jackals, birds, crows, ghosts, goblins, demons, and multitudes of other night-walkers.
- 13 Then, seeing the slaughter that resembled the sport of Rudra, the wailing women descended from the worthy vehicles.
- 14 The Bharata women, beholding that which was previously unseen, were stricken with misery. Some stumbled over bodies while others fell down on the ground.
- 15 Among the exhausted and helpless Pāñcāla and Kuru women, not a wisp of consciousness remained. There was great misery.
- 16-17 Seeing the terrible battlefield that resounded in all directions with the cries of those whose hearts were stricken with suffering, the dharma-knowing daughter of Subala, calling over the lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, highest of men, beholding the slaughter of the Kurus, said this pitiable speech,
- 18 "O Lotus-Eyed One, look at my daughters-in-law whose lords are slain. Their hair is dishevelled and they wail like ospreys, O Mādhava.
- 19 "Those women approaching the field, remembering these bulls among the Bharatas, run separately towards their sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands.

- 20 "O Great-Armed One, the battlefield is covered with mothers of heroes whose sons have been killed. And in some places, it is filled with wives of heroes whose champions have been slain.
- 21-23 "It is adorned with Bhīṣma, Karṇa, Abhimanyu, Droṇa, Drupada, and Śalya, tigers among men, well-decorated with coats of mail and breastplates like blazing fires, jewels, armlets, bracelets, and garlands of the great-souled ones, as well as with iron spears cast by the arms of heroes, shining sharp swords, and bows and arrows.
- 24 "Here and there, groups of carnivores are standing, rejoicing, playing, and lying.
- 25 "O Heroic Lord, behold the battlefield of such sort. Seeing it, I am burning with grief, O Janārdana.
- 26 "I could not have conceived of anymore than I could have imagined the annihilation of the Kurus and Pāñcālas, which is like the destruction of the five elements, O Madhusūdana.
- 27 "Horrible vultures and birds of prey by the thousands drag the bodies wet with blood, hold them down, and devour them in their armour.
- 28 "Who could bear to think about the destruction of Jayadratha, Karṇa, Droṇa, Bhīṣma, and Abhimanyu?
- 29 "O Madhusūdhana, I have seen the almost invincible be killed and made to be eaten by vultures, scavengers, hawks, dogs, and jackals.
- 30 "Look at the tigers among men who, possessed of uncontrollable anger and in the power of Duryodhana, are dead like extinguished fires.
- 31 "All of them had delightful, soft, spotless beds. Now, dead, they lie upon the

- bare ground.
- 32 "At one time they were continually lauded by praising bards. Now they listen to the terrible, inauspicious sounds of jackals.
- 33 "These famous heroes who, anointed with sandalpaste and aloe, used to lie in beds now lie in the dust.
- 34 "These dreadful, inauspicious vultures, jackals, and crows play with their ornaments, crying out again and again.
- 35 "These proud men in battle hold bows, gold arrows, swords, and shining maces, seem pleased, as if living.
- 36 "Many green-garlanded heroes of beautiful complexion, with eyes like those of bulls, lie there, pushed together by carrion-eaters.
- 37 "Again, other iron-armed champions, embracing their maces, lie with their faces towards them, as if the maces were beloved women.
- 38 "Carnivores do not violate others who wear coats of mail and shining weapons, thinking them to be alive, O Janārdana.
- 39 "While the great-souled ones are being dragged by carrion-eaters, their bright, golden garlands are being scattered on all sides.
- 40 "These awful jackals play with thousands of necklaces taken from the middle of the throats of the glorious dead.
- 41-42 "Those whom learned bards previously delighted every morning with adulation and service, them these misery-stricken, beautiful women piteously lament, greatly pained by grief and suffering, O Tiger of the Vṛṣṇis.
- 43 "The beautiful faces of these highest women, look like a bunch of withered red lotuses, O Keśava.

- 44 "Having stopped crying, these women of the Kurus, overwhelmed, miserable, and contemplating, approach various bodies.
- 45 "The faces of the Kuru women are coppery-red from rage and tears, like the colour of the sun, or of gold purified with fire.
- 46 "Having heard their non-sensical lamentations, the women do not understand one another's wailing.
- 47 "These wives, sighing, wailing, and lamenting for a long time, trembling, abandon the living out of misery.
- 48 "Many women, seeing the bodies, wail and lament. Others strike their own heads with delicate hands.
- 49 "The earth appears to be filled with groups of fallen heads, hands, and dead bodies, all mixed together with one another.
- 50 "Thereupon, seeing the headless bodies and the bodiless heads that are a delight to the terrible carrion-eaters, unused to such a sight, the women fall into a faint.
- 51 "Having placed together a head with a body, not knowing what else to do, realizing that this head is not this one's, they are miserable.
- 52 "Placing together one by one other arms, thighs and feet cut off by arrows, the women, filled with unhappiness, are fainting again and again.
- 53 "Looking at other headless bodies devoured by animals and birds, some Bharata women do not even recognize their husbands.
- 54 "Others are striking their heads with their hands, O Madhusūdana, seeing their brothers, fathers, sons, and husbands slain by their foes!
- 55 "The earth, filthy with blood and flesh, leaves no place to walk on, with its arms

holding swords and earringed heads.

56 "Previously unused to misery, these irreproachable women are miserably plunging into the earth strewn with brothers, fathers, and sons.

57 "Look at the many groups of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's beautiful-haired daughters-in-law, O Janārdana, who are like a herd of beautifully-maned fillies.

58 "O Keśava, what could be more miserable for me to see than the fact that all these women are in such a state of disarray?

59 "Certainly evil was practiced in past lives by me who sees dead sons, grandsons, and brothers, O Keśava." Afflicted thus and lamenting, she saw her dead son.

Strīparvan 17

Vaiśampāyana said:

1 Then Gāndhārī, grief-stricken upon seeing Duryodhana, suddenly fell on the ground, like a plantain tree cut down in the forest.

2 Having regained consciousness, seeing Duryodhana lying there wet with blood, she wailed again and again.

3 And having embraced him, Gāndhārī wailed miserably. Afflicted with grief, senses agitated, she lamented, crying "Oh! Oh, son!"

4 Burning with grief, drenching her son's large, hidden-collar-boned, necklace and brooch adorned chest with tears, she said this speech to Hṛṣīkeśa, who was near her:

5 "When the annihilation of kinsmen in this battle was near at hand, O Lord, this

best of kings, hands folded, said to me, O Vārṣṇeya, 'Mother, in this battle against kinsmen, grant me victory.'

6 "When this was said, O Tiger among Men, I myself, knowing of the approaching disaster, said, 'Where dharma is, there is victory.

7 "'If you, fighting, are not deluded, O Little Son, then you will surely obtain the worlds won with weapons like an immortal, O Great One.'

8 "Formerly, I said this. I did not grieve for him, O Lord. However, I grieve for the miserable Dhṛtarāṣṭra whose relatives were slain.

9 "Look at my son, O Mādhava, lying on a hero's bed. He was impatient, the best of warriors, skilled in archery, and arrogant in battle.

10 "This destroyer of foes, best of those who were anointed on the head, now lies in the dust. Behold the reversals of time!

11 "Certainly the hero Duryodhana has gone to a place difficult to attain. Thus, facing forward, he lies in a bed frequented by heroes.

12 "Formerly, kings sitting around him pleased him. Now, as he lies on the surface of the earth, dead, vultures surround him.

13 "Previously, women fanned him with the best fans. Now, birds fan him with flaps of their wings.

14 "This great-armed one, strong, ever valiant, lies here felled by Bhīmasena in battle like an elephant slain by a lion.

15 "Look, O Kṛṣṇa Bhārata, at Duryodhana lying wet with blood, slain by Bhīmasena who raised his mace.

16 "The mighty-armed one who previously led eleven armies in war has died because of dishonesty, O Keśava,

- 17 "Duryodhana, a great archer and a great chariot warrior lies here, killed by Bhīmasena like a tiger felled by a lion.
- 18 "Out of disrespect for his elders, for Vidura, and his father, this dull-witted, unfortunate boy has fallen into the power of Death.
- 19 "My son the king, to whom the earth belonged without a rival for thirteen years, lies dead on the ground.
- 20 "O Kṛṣṇa Vārṣṇeya, not long ago I saw the earth filled with elephants, cattle, and horses because of the rule of the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.
- 21 "Now, O Great-Armed Mādhava, I see her abandoned by elephants, cattle, and horses on account of the rule of another. What am I living for?
- 22 "Behold these women surrounding the champions who were slain in battle. This is even more painful for me than the slaying of my son.
- 23 "Look, O Kṛṣṇa, at the full-hipped mother of Lakṣmaṇa embracing Duryodhana, her hair loose, looking like a gold sacrificial altar.
- 24 "Certainly when this great-armed one was living, this intelligent young woman used to enjoy herself, held in the embrace of her beautiful-armed husband.
- 25 "How can my heart not split into a hundred pieces seeing my son killed in battle along with his son?
- 26 "The irreproachable woman affectionately smells her blood-soaked son. The lady with lovely thighs also cleans Duryodhana with her hand.
- 27 "Does this determined woman grieve for her husband and her son? For she stands there by them, especially looking at her son.
- 28 "The long-eyed one, striking her own head with her hands, falls on the chest of the heroic king of the Kurus, O Mādhava.

- 29 "The distressed woman, radiant as the heart of a lotus, wiping the faces of her husband and son, appears beautiful, the image of a lotus.
- 30 "If the doctrines and revelations exist, then surely this king has attained the worlds won by the strength of one's arms.

Strīparvan 18

Gāndhārī said:

- 1 Look, O Mādhava, at my hundred untiring sons, mostly slain by Bhīmasena with his mace in battle.
- 2 That which is more miserable to me today is that my young daughters-in-law, hair loose, sons slain in battle, run around here.
- 3 These unfortunate women, who were once moving on the surfaces of palaces, touching then with feet adorned with ornaments, now are touching the blood-soaked ground.
- 4 And driving away vultures, jackals, and crows, stricken with grief, they are walking and swaying as if drunk.
- 5 This lady of flawless limbs and slim waist, falls down, exceedingly miserable upon seeing this terrible slaughter.
- 6 Seeing this princess, mother of Lakṣmaṇa, daughter of a king, O Great-Armed One, my heart knows no peace.
- 7 These other beautiful-armed women, seeing brothers, husbands, and sons dead on the ground, fall down, having grasped their arms.
- 8 Listen, O Unconquered One, to the crying of these old and middle-aged

women whose relatives were slain in that dreadful slaughter.

9 Look, O One of Great Strength, at these women, resting, stricken by confusion and exhaustion, leaning against the bodies of horses and elephants and chariot pits.

10 Behold, O Kṛṣṇa! Another lady stands, grasping the prominent-nosed, lovely-earringed head, severed from its body, of her own relative.

11 I think that a massive evil was done in previous births, O Faultless One, by these flawless women and by me of little wisdom.

12 Thus, this punishment of us is done by the dharmic king, O Janārdana. Indeed, there is no destruction of good and evil acts, O Vārṣṇeya.

13 Look at these young women, with beautiful breasts and bellies, born in good families, modest, with dark hair, eyes, and eyelashes.

14 Behold, O Mādhava, the ladies have fallen, stuttering like swans, bewildered by grief and suffering, and shrieking like cranes.

15 The painful sun burns the flawless faces of the women that are shining like fully-blooming lotuses.

16 Today, ordinary people are seeing the women of my jealous sons who were as proud as intoxicated elephants.

Strīparvan 20

Gāndhārī said:

1-2 He whom they regard as one and a half times the value of you and his father in strength and valour, arrogant as a gigantic lion, who alone split apart a hard-

- to-break formation of my son's army, having been Death for others, himself fell under the power of Death.
- 3 O Kṛṣṇa, I see that the splendour of the infinitely-glorious Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna, does not end even when he's dead.
- 4 This strong and flawless daughter of Virāṭa, daughter-in-law of the Gāṇḍīva archer, pathetic, laments her heroic husband,
- 5 O Kṛṣṇa, this wife, daughter of Virāṭa, sitting next to her husband, rubs him with her hand.
- 6-7 Formerly, this famous, shapely, desirable, passionate, and modest woman, excited by the intoxication of mead, embraced the son of Subhadrā, having kissed his face that looked like a blooming lotus and had a neck covered like a conch shell.
- 8 Removing his gold-adorned, blood-smearred armour, O Kṛṣṇa, she looks at his body.
- 9 Seeing him, the young woman addresses you, O Kṛṣṇa, "O Lotus-Eyed One, this one whose eyes are like yours is dead.
- 10 "In strength, heroism, and glory, he was your equal, O Faultless One, and he was even more handsome than you. Now he lies dead on the ground."
- 11 Having said this, she addresses her husband, "Today, is the body of you who lay on exceedingly soft deerskins hurt lying on the ground?
- 12 "Throwing down your two strong arms, which have the form of elephant trunks, with gold armlets, and hardened skin from the shooting of bow-strings, you lie here.
- 13 "Having variously fought, do you sleep now from exhaustion? And so you do

not answer me who is afflicted and lamenting?

14 "Noble One, having left behind the noble Subhadrā, your father and uncles who resemble the thirty gods, and me who is afflicted with suffering, where will you go?"

15 Lifting his blood-soaked hair with her hand and placing his head in her lap, she asks him, as if he were alive, "You are the nephew of Vāsudeva and the son of the Gāṇḍīva archer.

16-18 "How did those great chariot warriors slay you standing in the midst of battle? Fie on the cruel Kṛpa, Karṇa, Jayadratha, and both Droṇa and his son by whom you were brought down. What was in the minds of all of those bulls among chariot warriors who killed you, a young man, when alone, to my misery? Indeed, how, O Hero, did you who have protectors obtain death, as if helpless, while the Pāṇḍavas and Pāñcālas were watching?

19 "Having seen you killed in battle by many others as if helpless, how does the heroic Arjuna, tiger among men, live?

20 "Neither winning a large kingdom nor defeating enemies will give pleasure to Pṛthā's sons without you, O Lotus-Eyed One.

21 "Through dharma and self-restraint, I will follow you quickly to your worlds won with weapons. Protect me there.

22 "Again, when the proper time has not arrived, it is difficult to die. Otherwise, how could I be so unfortunate to go on living after seeing you dead?

23 "Now, O Tiger among Men, having gone to the World of the Ancestors, whom else will you address like me, with praise and soft smiles?

24 "Surely, you will assault the hearts of celestial nymphs in heaven with your

great beauty and your words accompanied by smiles.

- 25 "Winning worlds of meritorious deeds, meeting with celestial nymphs, O Son of Subhadrā, and diverting yourself with them, will you in time remember my good deeds?
- 26 "Your union of this kind here with me was ordained for six months. In the seventh month, O Hero, you died."
- 27 The women of the family of the Matsya king dragged away the miserable Uttarā, who had spoken thus and whose wishes were in vain.
- 28 Dragging the grief-stricken Uttarā, they themselves, seeing Virāṭa dead, became more afflicted than her, wailing and lamenting.
- 29 Vultures, jackals, and crows tear the blood-soaked Virāṭa, who is lying, cut to pieces by the arrows of Droṇa.
- 30 The helpless, suffering, dark-eyed women are unable to abandon Virāṭa, whom is being torn by birds.
- 31 The beauty of the women of pale appearance, who were burnt by the heat of the sun, is gone because of their exertions and fatigue.
- 32 Look, O Mādhava, at these dead youths, Uttara, Abhimanyu, the dextrous Kāmboja, and the handsome Lakṣmaṇa, lying in the middle of the battlefield.

Strīparvan 24

Gāndhārī said:

- 1 Behold, O Mādhava, the son of Somadatta, slain by Yuyudhāna, being torn by many birds nearby.

- 2 Somadatta, O Janārdana, tormented by grief over his son, appears as if he is blaming the great archer Yuyudhāna.
- 3 The irreproachable mother of Bhūriśravas, overwhelmed by grief, consoles her husband Somadatta,
- 4 "Fortunately, O Great King, you do not see this awful ruin of the Bharatas, this horrifying destruction of the Kurus, resembling the end of the Age.
- 5 "Fortunately, today you do not see your heroic son, whose standard was a sacrificial pole, who was the sacrificer of uncountable sacrifices, and who gave many thousands of gifts, dead.
- 6 "Fortunately, O Great King, you do not hear the abundant, terrible lamenting of your daughters-in-law on the battlefield, like cranes on the white-capped sea.
- 7 "Your daughters-in-law are running around, wrapped in a single garment, dark hair dishevelled, children and husbands slain.
- 8 "Oh, fortunately, you do not see this tiger among men, felled by Arjuna, arm cut, being eaten by wild beasts.
- 9 "Fortunately, today you do not see here all your widowed daughters-in-law and Bhūriśravas and Śala who were killed in battle.
- 10 "Fortunately, you do not see the gold umbrella of your great-souled son whose standard was the sacrificial pole broken in his chariot pit."
- 11 Those dark-eyed wives of Bhūriśravas are wailing, having surrounded their husband who was slain by Sātyaki.
- 12 Alas, O Keśava, these women, lamenting a great deal, afflicted with grief over their husband, fall down wretchedly toward him on the ground.
- 13 How could the Repeller have done this hideous deed, cutting off the arm of an

inattentive champion who offered sacrifices?

14 However, Sātyaki committed an even more evil act in that he killed one while that one was firmly resolved on fasting to death.

15 These women of the one with a sacrificial pole standard are crying out, O Mādhava, saying, "You, who follow dharma, lies here, unrighteously slain alone by two men."

16 This slim waisted wife of the one with a sacrificial pole standard, having placed her husband's arm in her lap, is lamenting miserably,

17 "This is the hand that pulled off girdles, squeezed full breasts, caressed navels, thighs, and buttocks, and loosened the knots of skirts.

18 "In the presence of Vāsudeva, by Pṛthā's son of unsullied deeds, that hand was cut off while he was distracted fighting with another in battle.

19 "What will you say, O Janārdana, in the speaking assembly about this great deed of Arjuna's? Or what will the Diademed One himself say?"

20 Having censured you thus, this extremely beautiful woman is quiet. Her co-wives share her grief as if she was their daughter-in-law.

21 Here is the mighty Śakuni, King of Gāndhāra, truly valiant, the maternal uncle of the Pāṇḍavas, slain by his nephew Sahadeva.

22 He who used to be fanned with two fans with golden handles, he is lying here being fanned by birds with their wings.

23 He who assumed hundreds and thousands of forms, the deceptions of that trickster were burnt by the glory of the Pāṇḍavas.

24 He who was knowledgeable in deceit fraudulently defeated Yudhiṣṭhira in the assembly hall and won the large kingdom and his life.

- 25-26 O Kṛṣṇa, birds sit completely around Śakuni who learned his tricks for the annihilation of my sons, and who was intent on this great feud with the Pāṇḍavas for the destruction of my sons, himself, and his followers.
- 27 O Lord, just as the worlds won with weapons are for my sons, indeed, so also are the worlds won with weapons for this foolish one.
- 28 And even there, how can this wicked man not cause my honest sons to quarrel with their brothers, O Madhusūdana?

Strīparvan 25

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 34 Having said thus, grief-stricken, her intelligence and consciousness taken away, Gāndhārī, abandoning patience, fell on the ground.
- 35 Then, body possessed by rage, overwhelmed with grief over her sons, senses reeling, she reproached Śauri.

Gāndhārī said:

- 36-37 O Kṛṣṇa Janārdana, why were the sons of Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who were hostile and destroying one another, disregarded by you? You are powerful, have many followers, and are listened to by both sides when you speak.
- 38 O Great-Armed Madhusūdana, since this destruction of the Kurus was purposefully ignored by you, then let you now obtain the fruit of that action.
- 39 With that merit which was acquired by me through service to my husband, I will curse you, O Difficultly-Attained Wielder of the Discus and Mace.

- 40 While being ignored by you, the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas, who are family, killed one another, O Govinda. Therefore you will destroy your own relatives.
- 41 When the thirty-sixth year from now arrives, O Madhusūdana, your relatives, sons, and ministers will be slain, and you will die a contemptible death.
- 42 Furthermore, your women whose sons, relatives, and friends are slain, will run around, just like these Bharata women.

Vaiśampāyana said:

- 43 Having heard that terrible speech, as if with a little smile, the great-souled Vāsudeva said to Queen Gāndhārī,
- 44 "There is no other known to men except me, O Beautiful One, who could be a destroyer of the host of the Vṛṣṇis. I am fully aware of this. You only tell me what I already know, O Baroness.
- 45 "They cannot be destroyed by men, gods, demons, or any other. The Yādavas will obtain destruction that is caused by each other."
- 46 When Dāsārha said this, the Pāṇḍavas, minds terrified, became extremely agitated and without interest in living.

REFERENCES CITED

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. "Islam and the Gendered Discourses of Death" in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 25, pp. 187-205.
- Babb, Lawrence A. 1975. *The Divine Hierarchy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- van Buitenen, J.A.B., trans. 1980. *Mahābhārata: 1. The Book of the Beginning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1981. *Mahābhārata: 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall 3. The Book of the Forest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1981. *Mahābhārata: 4. The Book of Virāṭa 5. The Book of the Effort*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burton & Burton, eds. 1970. *Funk & Wagnalls Wildlife Encyclopedia, vol. 13*. New York: B.P.C. Publishing.
- Doniger, Wendy & Smith, Brian K., trans. 1991. *The Laws of Manu*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fagles, Robert, trans.. 1990. *Homer: The Iliad*. New York: Penguin Books.
- van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Granoff, Phyllis. 1979. "Mahiṣāsūramardī: An Analysis of the Myths" in *East and West*. New Series, vol. 29, nos. 1-4, pp. 139-151.
- Harris, Olivia. 1982. "The Dead and the Devils among the Bolivian Laymi" in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Ed. by M. Bloch & J. Parry. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 45-73.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 1976. *The Ritual of Battle: Krishna in the Mahābhārata*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1988. *The Cult of Draupadī 1, Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- . 1991. *The Cult of Draupadī 2: On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Holck, F.H. 1974. "Sūtras and the Mahābhārata Epic" in *Death and Eastern Thought*. Ed. by F.H. Holck. New York: Abingdon Press. pp. 53-78.
- Hopkins, Edward W. 1972. *The Social and Military Position of the Ruling Caste in Ancient India, As Represented by the Sanskrit Epic*. Varanasi: Oriental Publishers.
- Kane, Pandurang Vaman. 1968. *A History of Dharmaśāstra: Ancient and Medieval Civil and Religious Law in India*. Vol. 4. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Kastenbaum, R.J. 1995. *Death, Society, and Human Experience*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Katz, Ruth Cecily. 1989. *Arjuna in the Mahābhārata: Where Krishna Is, There Is Victory*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Kinsley, David R. 1976. *The Sword and the Flute: Kālī and Kṛṣṇa, Dark Visions of the Terrible and Sublime in Hindu Mythology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1986. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Knipe, David M. 1977. "Sapīṇḍīkarana: The Hindu Rite of Entry into Heaven" in *Religious Encounters With Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*. Ed. by F.E. Reynolds & E.H. Waugh. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 111-124.
- Long, J. Bruce. 1977. "Death as a Necessity and a Gift in Hindu Mythology" in *Religious Encounters With Death: Insights from the History and Anthropology of Religions*. Ed. by F.E. Reynolds & E.H. Waugh. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, pp. 73-96.
- . 1980. "The Concepts of Human Action and Rebirth in the Mahābhārata" in *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*. Ed. by W.D. O'Flaherty. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 38-60.
- Mahābhārata*. 1933-66. Ed. by V.S. Sukthankar et. al. Vols. 12 & 17. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Middleton, John. 1982. "Lugbara Death" in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Ed. by M. Bloch & J. Parry. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 134-54.

- Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1981. *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy D. 1973. *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1980. *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Olivelle, Patrick, trans. 1996. *Upaniṣads*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pargiter, F.E., trans. 1904. *Markandeya Purāṇa*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society.
- Parry, Jonathan. 1982. "Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic" in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Ed. by M. Bloch & J. Parry. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 74-110.
- . 1994. *Death in Banaras*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy, Pratap Chandra, ed. & Keshari Mohan Ganguli, trans. 1883-96. *The Mahābhārata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa*. Vols 5-12. Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co.
- Shamasastri, R., trans. 1967. *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra*. Mysore: Mysore Printing.
- Shastri, Hari Prasad, trans. 1957. *The Ramayana of Valmiki, vol. II: Aranyakanda, Kishkindakanda, Sundarakanda*. London: Shanti Sadan.
- Tiwari, Jagdish Narain. 1979. *Disposal of the Dead in the Mahābhārata: A Study in the Funeral Customs in Ancient India*. Varanasi: Kishor Vidya Niketan.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Watson, James L. 1982. "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society" in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Ed. by M. Bloch & J. Parry. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 155-86.
- Woodburn, James. 1982. "Social Dimensions of Death in Four African Hunting and Gathering Societies" in *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Ed. by M. Bloch & J. Parry. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 187-210.