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The Duality of Shakuni: Trauma, Manipulation and Moral Conflict in *The Mahabharata*

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Abstract

The Mahabharata is an epic that shapes the understanding of morality within the Hindu community. Foremost among its villainous characters is Shakuni who is portrayed as the personification of evil and the cause of the Kurukshetra war. This study examines the character of Shakuni and his experiences to understand the causes behind his supposed evilness and present his underexplored traits of goodness. Through content analysis of *The Mahabharata* by John D. Smith and other fictional and folk renditions of the epic, Shakuni's duality has been examined and interpreted. The study analyzes themes of trauma, manipulation and moral conflict by using Caruth's trauma theory, Jung's theory of collective unconscious and archetypes, and Freudian psychoanalysis to uncover Shakuni's maleficence as a consequence of circumstances rather than an inherent trait. Findings reveal that the traumatic experiences of losing loved ones and subjection to humiliation led to a change in Shakuni's identity and unveiled the universal tendency to deceive or trick others to fulfil his revenge driven actions. It also evoked a conflict within his innate tendencies and ideal self, which resulted in the expression of his trauma in the form of vengeance. This study concludes Shakuni as a character with duality; an amalgamation of both positive and negative attributes, contrary to his popular depiction as a corrupt and vicious character, providing a basis for further exploration on the polarity of seemingly dishonorable characters.

Keywords: Duality, Shakuni, manipulation, moral conflict, *The Mahabharata*, trauma

Introduction: Unveiling the Duality of Shakuni in *The Mahabharata*

The Mahabharata is a Hindu epic held historically and religiously significant, among the followers of Hinduism. The epic narrates the infamous Kurukshetra war; the conflict between two sets of cousins (the Pandavas and the Kauravas), highlighting the events that led to the war, the eighteen-day-long war itself, and the aftermath of the war. Originally believed to have been composed by the sage Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa, *The Mahabharata* is said to have been narrated throughout the generations by different bards,

ultimately leading to the development of eighteen books (*parvans*) describing the overall narratives. It is revered mainly because of its reflections and emphasis on ‘*Dharma*’, an idea of “what is right for a person to do” (Smith xviii). Over the years, it has been abridged and translated into many languages for easier access and understanding for the general audience. Prominent characters of *The Mahabharata*, such as Krishna, Draupadi, and Karna, have been extensively analyzed for their distinguished personalities, whereas several characters have been limited to the traditional perception of being evil. Therefore, with *The Mahabharata*, abridged and translated by John D. Smith as the primary source, the study aims to unveil the duality of the vilest villain of the epic, Shakuni.

This research intends to explore an underrepresented character of the epic, Shakuni; the maternal uncle of the antagonist Duryodhana, who devises plans and strategies to ensure the downfall of the Pandavas. He is commonly portrayed as one of the strongest allies of the Kauravas, and equally villainous for being the mastermind trickster constantly utilizing his intelligence, manipulation, and illusory skills for fueling the conflict within the Kuru dynasty. Shakuni, often considered as “Duryodhana’s most trusted advisers” and the “co-author of the catastrophe of *Kuruksetra*” (Smith xxvii), was the Prince of Gandhara Kingdom and the elder brother of Duryodhana’s mother, Gandhari. Alongside Krishna, he is often considered to be the other genius of the epic, continuously contributing to the destabilization of the Kuru clan through his shrewd machinations. Shakuni is held accountable for some of the pivotal events, beginning with the conspiracy to kill the Pandavas in a lac palace; plotting “the disintegration of the political structure by exploiting the weakness of the Emperor Yudhishtira for dice game” and ensuring the Pandavas’ loss through his doctored dice in two successive matches (Mohanty 151). This very game of dice resulted in the disrobing of a menstruating Draupadi in a courtroom full of men, the major trigger that led to the initiation of the war. For his actions, he is described as a deceptive, manipulative, cunning, and treacherous character of *The Mahabharata*.

Although Vyasa’s *Mahabharata* does not shed enough light on the background and purpose of Shakuni, countless regional renditions and mythical narratives question the vilified representation of Shakuni. The most significant of these is Sarala Das’ *Mahabharata*, composed in the fifteenth century, which was widely acclaimed in Oriya. “The Oriya *Mahabharata* by Sarala Das views Sakuni not as the master conspirator who brought about the great war, but as a victim who suffered because of the court politics of the Kauravas” (Sinha et al. 1). This version of *The Mahabharata* gives Shakuni a motive behind all his wrongdoings, presenting him as a traumatized son and brother seeking revenge from the perpetrators of his family’s agony. In this rendition of the epic, Gandhari, who had a planetary defect, was married to a tree that was ultimately cut off in an attempt to deflect its negative consequences on her marital life with Dhritarashtra. However, upon realizing that he was the son of a widow, Duryodhana held the King of Gandhara and his hundred sons, including Shakuni, captive in a dungeon. They were given only one meal per day as a means of torture, ensuring their eventual demise. Since their death was imminent, Shakuni due to his intelligence, diplomatic skills, and political capabilities, was selected as the sole member to feed on the single meal, to survive and ensure the downfall of the entire Kuru clan. He is considered to have carved his dice out of the bones of his loved ones and made it his strongest weapon against the Kuru dynasty (Mohanty 148; Sinha et al. 5). Shakuni’s dissatisfaction with the Kauravas seems to have stemmed from the very fact that his sister Gandhari was made to marry the blind Prince Dhritarashtra on account of the military and political vulnerability of the Gandhara Kingdom.

Having endured the agonizing pain of losing his family as well as the happiness of his sister due to the Kauravas, he vowed to seek revenge and be sure of the complete

annihilation of their contentment. This version of the Sarala *Mahabharata* has inspired numerous other works highlighting the backstory of Shakuni with the objective of perceiving him as more than just a villain without a purpose. These works give an insight into Shakuni's experience with trauma, manipulation, and moral conflict—how he was also a recipient of injustice and not just the inciter of it. Ashutosh Nadkar's *Shakuni: Master of the Game* has been narrated from Shakuni's perspective. He deliberately decides to move to Hastinapura and seek revenge from the *Kauravas* when he and his father are left defenseless and compelled to hand Gandhari over to marry the blind Dhritarashtra. His hatred, mainly directed towards Devavrata Bhishma, drives him to conspire against the cordial relationship between Dhritarashtra and Pandu, creating a hunger for power which he proceeds to pass on to their sons, the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas*. Similarly, Ganesh Gogoi's *Revenge of Shakuni*, is a play which demonstrates how Shakuni prompted Duryodhana to fight the Kurukshetra war in spite of being completely aware of the fact that the *Pandavas* would be victorious. He is presented as “the youngest of one hundred ghosts” while Duryodhana is described as “the eldest of one hundred alive” (111). It portrays how he sacrificed his life and his kingdom to ensure the downfall of the Kuru kingdom and rob them of any chance of a happy, thriving, or complete family. He stands as a hero in his own respect.

This study centralizes on the themes of trauma, manipulation, and moral conflict in relation to Shakuni, aiming to uncover the often-overlooked aspects of his character beyond his villainous portrayal. It seeks to answer the following questions: How do the themes of trauma, manipulation, and moral conflict contribute to a deeper understanding of the dual nature of Shakuni? Additionally, how can theories such as Caruth's trauma theory, Jung's theory of collective unconscious and archetypes, and Freudian psychoanalysis be applied to analyze the interplay of trauma, manipulation, and moral conflict in shaping Shakuni's character? Through these inquiries, the study aims to explore the psychological and emotional complexities that inform Shakuni's actions and motivations.

It also aims to understand Shakuni beyond his traditional portrayal as a villain, exploring the rational and acceptable aspects of his character. By examining the duality of his experiences with trauma and manipulation, the research explores his internal and external moral conflicts revealing the intricacies that shape his actions and motivations.

The researcher hypothesizes that the duality embodied by Shakuni in terms of trauma, manipulation and moral conflict helps establish him as an individual who cannot be limited to the narrow confines of a villainous representation. Similarly, Caruth's concept that trauma alters identity, and resists narrative representation but its impact can resurface later in unexpected ways helps understand duality in terms of Shakuni's experience with trauma and analyzing the dominance of the trickster archetype in Shakuni helps understand the duality in terms of manipulation. Lastly, it is hypothesized that Freud's division of the human psyche into the Id, Ego, and Superego, alongside the conflict among them, sheds light on the external and internal moral conflict experienced by him.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study. It employs content analysis and theoretical analysis on both primary and secondary sources. The primary text is *The Mahabharata*, abridged and translated by John D. Smith and published by Penguin Classics in 2009, whereas secondary sources for the study include books such as *Shakuni: Master of the Game* by Ashutosh Nadkar, *Revenge of Shakuni* by Ganesh Gogoi, and relevant literature and scholarly articles. For theoretical analysis, three theories are applied to examine the three themes: the trauma theory, the theory of collective unconscious and archetypes, and the psychoanalytic theory. Theoretical analysis examines the three themes of trauma, manipulation, and moral conflict.

The application of these theories in other studies of a similar nature ascertains their validity in applying them to the study.

Firstly, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory has been utilized to understand the duality in Shakuni's character in terms of his experience with trauma. Caruth in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, discusses the interconnections between literature and trauma and majorly referring to Freud's explanation of trauma to present it as a "wound inflicted not upon the body but the mind" (3). Her theory conceptualizes that trauma alters identity and memory, and resists narrative representation, but its impact can resurface later in unexpected ways and therefore is recurrent in nature.

Secondly, Carl Jung's theory of collective unconscious and archetypes explores the theme of manipulation in Shakuni. Specifically, his article "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" has been referenced for this theoretical analysis. Jung theorizes that in addition to the personal unconscious, that is derived from personal experiences and acquired throughout the course of life, there is an inborn, universal layer of the unconscious known as "the collective unconscious" (2). This collective unconscious has contents or behaviors that are similar throughout different individuals, which are known as archetypes. Jung discusses different types of archetypes to understand human behavior, one of which is the trickster archetype, whose existence has been asserted by him through innumerable examples of the trickster figure in mythological, cultural, and religious narratives or practices.

Lastly, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory unfolds the internal and external moral conflicts experienced by Shakuni to reveal his duality. The study uses *The Penguin Freud Reader* to understand moral conflict in Shakuni. Freudian psychoanalysis theorizes that the psyche consists of the Es (Id), Ich (Ego), and Uber-Ich (Superego). He also considered that neurosis or negative pathological symptoms arise when the ego is unable to create a balance between the id and the superego i.e., "conflict between what the drive demands and what reality forbids" (64). This principle of the conflict within one's consciousness is essential in understanding the conflict experienced by Shakuni which can also be further supported by Freud's views on mourning. Freud considered mourning to "the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of a person" (310). He also discusses how mourning the loss of someone can cause an individual to refrain from indulging in any task that is not associated with the memory of the deceased. It can cause a person to turn away from reality while "the lost object persists in the psyche" (312). Freud's views on mourning and conflict within the psyche correlates to Shakuni's loss of his family and his consequential actions and motivations for revenge.

Literature Review

Shakuni is often viewed as the wicked character who engineers the humiliation and annihilation of the Pandavas through aggression, cheating, and devious stratagems. In S. Maity's study exploring the significance of the game of dice in *The Mahabharata*, he establishes the two games of dice between the Kauravas and the Pandavas as the pivotal point in the epic, which "sows the seeds of the Kurukshetra war" (11). The games are considered to be significant as the events that portrayed the divinity of Krishna, humiliated Draupadi, leading to the Pandavas vowing to destroy the Kauravas, and therefore setting the preface for the great war aimed at the restoration of dharma. However, the study also holds Shakuni accountable for these events of action: "[T]he cunning and scheming Shakuni devices the ploy of inviting Pandavas to a game of dice to defraud them of their wealth" (11). The initiation as well as the execution of the plan to dishonor the Pandavas was carried out by Shakuni, who also provokes Yudhishtira to stake his wife Draupadi when everything else had been already lost. Maity asserts "When he [Yudhishtira] has nothing to put on

stake Shakuni advises him to put his wife Draupadi on stake by saying that ‘what if by putting her on stake he wins back all his lost wealth’ (11). This not only establishes the relevance of Shakuni’s character but also embodies him as the vile mastermind behind the war.

In his study of *The Mahabharata*, Kumar Mohanty presents Krishna and Shakuni as “the two minds manipulating the politics of power in the epic” (148). While Krishna is considered as a political visionary, Shakuni as a “hero in his own right”. The study draws references to Sarala’s *Mahabharata* which provides a compelling context to Shakuni’s personality and presents an uncommon and unconventional portrayal of his character.

Mohanty writes:

The agony of Shakuni seeing before his eyes the shrivelled death of his entire family was suppressed by a simulated grin as a veritable mask. He was intelligent, well-read, good with a sword, and . . . his monarchical ambitions for Duryodhan were a surrogate for his own goals of chaos. The contemporary situations encouraged him and he wanted to perpetuate that chaotic situation by manipulating events. (148-49)

Shakuni can be perceived beyond the usual, narrow frame of reference through which he is viewed. His intelligence and political skills are undeniably demanding of the exploration of the motives behind his evil persona.

Various integral themes of *The Mahabharata* have also been examined in numerous studies. The theme of psychological trauma has been studied by Jena and Samantray. The study explores the trauma experienced by different characters through the analysis of various narrative tools and strategies such as flashbacks, repeated expression, flash forward, etc. It provides an extremely important insight on how every character experience trauma on account of various pre-war, the war, and post-war events through various narrative techniques:

The game of dice and its consequences immensely affected the lives of the Pandavas and those who were directly and indirectly witnesses to that traumatic event...[t]he Kurukshetra war is the most horrific traumatic event that the narrative of *The Mahabharata* has represented. This traumatic event affected the lives of several characters, causing psychological trauma for them. (87-88)

Different narrative structures have been identified to classify the Pandavas as traumatic characters whose trauma was induced by Shakuni’s unfair play in the game of dice.

However, narrative tools such as flashbacks have been associated with the guilt that Karna, Duryodhana, Dushasana, and Shakuni felt for inflicting trauma on Pandavas and Draupadi.

The study strives to fulfill the gaps in existing studies by emphasizing on the three major themes in relation to Shakuni and therefore presenting his possibly dual nature through an interconnection formed through these themes between Shakuni’s backstory and his actions in the different narratives of *The Mahabharata*. To the best of our knowledge, the study will be the first of its kind to centralize on the duality of Shakuni through his association to trauma, manipulation and moral conflict across both fictional renditions as well as Sanskrit translated versions of the epic. It will also incorporate applying Caruth’s trauma theory, Jung’s collective unconscious and archetypes, and Freudian psychoanalysis within a single study to explore a singular character.

Understanding Shakuni’s Experience with Trauma

Drawing from trauma theory, which emphasizes how deeply distressing events reshape an individual’s identity and perception of the world, Shakuni’s transformation to a deceitful and treacherous individual can be understood as a psychological response to the injustices he endured. Trauma signifies the response to a highly stressful situation, which

can have a prolonged influence on an individual's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. According to Mitchell Balaev, "The concept of trauma . . . is generally understood as a severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self's emotional organization and perception of the external world" (360). Experiencing a traumatic event is often regarded as altering the course of one's life. Among the various factors reflective of Shakuni's duality, his experience with trauma is a crucial one. The traumatic events in Shakuni's life which could have influenced his personality are often overlooked. Nevertheless, two traumatic events that altered the trajectory of his nature can be identified, and these events are also reflective of his duality in terms of who he was before the traumatic experience and who he became after.

Ashutosh Nadkar's *Shakuni: Master of the Game* which has been narrated from Shakuni's point of view reveals Bhishma's persuasion as such: "[Bhishma] said, 'Hastinapura is so strong that we can abduct your sister right away and turn Gandhara into a crematorium. However, we have come here to build relationships, not to break them' (23). Considering the safety of their country and its people, King Subala and Shakuni were helpless and therefore compelled to give Gandhari's hand to marriage: "Subala was concerned at Dhritarastra's blindness, but when he gave his mind to thoughts of line, of reputation, and of conduct, he gave the virtuous Gandhari to Dhritarastra" (Smith 41). However, when Gandhari learnt that she would be married to a blind man, "[she] took a piece of cloth, folded it repeatedly, and covered her own eyes" (Smith 41). Her resolution to accept darkness and hence live a life devoid of vision served as the first traumatic event in Shakuni's life.

Another traumatic event of Shakuni's life was the killing of his father and brothers by Duryodhana, as narrated in the Oriya *Mahabharata* by Sarala Das. This book is based on the oral recitations of bards in rural parts of Orissa, and highlights the story of Gandhari's planetary defect. Upon the realization that he was the son of a widow, Duryodhana held King Subala responsible for deceiving the Kurus about his daughter's marital status and decided to punish Subala and his sons by imprisoning them and feeding them a single grain of rice.

However, to ensure the survival of at least one of them, Subala fed the rice grains to Shakuni, his eldest son, and bestowed the responsibility of destroying the Kurus upon him (Mohanty 148). The in-depth study of Oriya *Mahabharata* by Patnaik states:

To avenge the insult and to settle scores, [Duryodhana] invited Subala and his hundred sons to the Kaurava capital for a celebration . . . they were interred in a dungeon, tortured, and kept on one grain of rice a day. When death was imminent, King Subala asked his other sons to give away their share to Śakuni, the eldest, so that he lived on to take revenge from Duryodhana. (qtd. in Sinha et al. 5)

The death of his father and brothers through starvation made a devastating and enduring impact on Shakuni's mind. Sinha et al. note, "Das's work narrates the tragic saga of love and loss experienced by Śakuni, whose father and siblings were unjustly consigned to the Kaurava dungeons. Subala the dying father, extracted a deadly promise from his son Śakuni - that he will decimate the Kuru clan to avenge his sire's death" (5). Shakuni is also considered to have been kicked in the shin by his father prior to his death, causing him to be orthopedically challenged and hence, serving as a reminder of his purpose.

The understanding of these two events in Shakuni's life as traumatic and their role in portraying his ambivalent nature is assisted by Caruth's trauma theory. According to Caruth, a traumatic event is experienced unconsciously, is recurrent in the form of repetitive thoughts, behavioral changes, and nightmares, and cannot be expressed through a traditional mode of linguistic representation. Caruth states:

Trauma seems to be much more than . . . a simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (*Unclaimed* 4)

Caruth suggests that trauma can be expressed through indirect means as it exceeds the capacity of language to be fully captured, similar to how Shakuni's trauma was never verbalized but conveyed through his revengeful deeds.

The actions of Shakuni in terms of creating a power dispute within the Kuru Kingdom, and assisting his nephew Duryodhana in his evil doings despite being aware of the integrity of the Pandavas, to simply fuel unrest and create disruption within the family can be perceived as the expression of his trauma disguised as the feelings of revenge. Implanting the idea of a gambling match in Duryodhana's head Sakuni answered, "Wealth-winner Arjuna, Krsna Vasudeva, Bhima, Yudhisthira, Nakula, Sahadeva, Drupada with his sons – these cannot be defeated in battle by force, not even by the hosts of the gods, for they are great chariot-fighters and mighty bowmen. . . But I know the means by which Yudhisthira himself may be defeated, O king: listen and approve it!" (Smith 124). Shakuni was aware of the strength the Pandavas possessed with their refined qualities and the support of Lord Krishna who provoked Duryodhana to humiliate them with a gambling match, although he anticipated the inevitable catastrophe that his deceitful performance would eventually invite upon Duryodhana and the Kauravas.

Shakuni's monologue in Gogoi's play makes the manifestation of his trauma in the form of revenge apparent as he states:

Consigning to your dark prison cell you led my family of one hundred brothers along with my father to a gruesome death by starvation. I have to settle my score today with an eye for eye leading your ninety-nine little brothers to ghastly death, leaving the age-weary blind Dhritarastra to burn himself alive having been bereaved of his young sons, I turn his life hell, worst than death. My duty is fulfilled today. (Gogoi 148)

His monologue reveals his trauma-driven revenge, vowing to inflict suffering by annihilating his enemy's family. In the introduction of *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth further states, "[S]ince the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (8). Shakuni's revenge response can be viewed in alignment with this notion of Caruth. The trauma he endured did not manifest itself immediately, rather, it was expressed through revenge as its mode of expression and in a time much later than when it actually occurred.

The dual nature of Shakuni's personality, the goodness that was weighed out by his evil deeds, was an outcome of the suffering he was subjected to. Nadkar's Shakuni marks this transformation in his personality as:

That was the day I buried my identity as prince of Gandhara and assumed the role the world would later remember me by: Gandhari's brother, Shakuni. The new Shakuni had only one unwavering goal in life: the complete destruction of Bhishma and annihilation of the Kuru dynasty. My life revolved around looking for ways to injure Bhishma as grievously as he had hurt my father, my sister and my state. I was ready to adopt all means of deceit, duplicity and dissimulation to achieve my ends. (33)

It was only when he had become a victim to extremely scarring events that Shakuni chose the path of evil. As Caruth states, "The traumatized...carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely

possess”, the goodness within Shakuni became possessed by his trauma, and he emerged as a changed individual (5). Shakuni’s transformation aligns with Caruth’s idea that trauma leaves individuals trapped in an unbearable past, shaping their identity in ways beyond their control. He embraced deceit and destruction because his vengeance-driven persona had become a symptom of history he could not fully process.

As a result, Shakuni became one of the most trusted advisers of Duryodhana and assisted him in his vile and treacherous actions against the Pandavas. Smith states, “So it was that Duryodhana with Karna and Subala’s son Sakuni attempted to kill the Pandavas with a variety of tricks” (53). He was considered the “co-author of the catastrophe of Kurukshetra”, all of which signifies that he could have knowingly led the Kauravas to their destruction (Smith xxvii). Gogoi’s Shakuni, in the face of his death, owns up to his treachery as means of ruining Duryodhana and his brothers, “I have not left the Kauravas as Kauravas anymore; their pride is levelled to the dust and I have not left Duryodhana an emperor anymore; I left him a beggar on the street, broken hearted to lament in the Bharat cremation grounds” (Gogoi 148). His evil doings were not a product of his inherent maleficence but instead a consequence of his experiences.

Caruth’s trauma theory, when paralleled with Shakuni’s experiences and character progression, gives a clear picture of his duality. It clarifies how the distressing occurrences of his life were severely traumatizing and how their expression over the years transformed him into a person who was unlike his usual self. It assists us in understanding that Shakuni’s perceived wickedness was an outcome of anguish rather than its cause. His treachery was simply an indirect articulation of trauma, causing his thoughts and actions to deflect from normalcy to duplicity.

Shakuni as a Manipulable Person and a Manipulator

The concept of manipulation is often understood as the act of influencing something or someone to facilitate one’s own personal motives. Manipulation is considered to have a “deceptive non-coercive influence” and “may entail a certain kind of moral failure or infelicity” (Coons and Weber 4-10). One of the most prominent and defining characteristics of Shakuni in *The Mahabharata* is his manipulation skills, which set the foundation for the Kurukshetra war. His trickeries to use Duryodhana as his pawn leading the Kauravas to their downfall, and his deception in the pivotal gambling matches ensuring the provocation of the Pandavas and the onset of the war were so profound and calculated that he is often described as “an incarnation of Dvapara; the name of the second-worst throw in dice, and of the second-worst of the four ages of the world, personified as a powerful evil being” (Smith 21). He is regarded as the symbol of evil and treachery.

Considered synonymous to trickery and deceit, Shakuni is often labelled as a master manipulator for engineering the feud between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. His manipulation of convincing people with his words and getting what he wanted done is evident through several events. For instance, when Duryodhana expresses his jealousy towards the Pandavas and their fine establishment in Indraprastha, he comes up with the plan of deceiving them through a gambling match. Realizing that the Kuru elders would never approve of it, he convinces Dhritarashtra to invite Yudhishtira for the match. He says: “Great king, Duryodhana has become pale, wan and thin; you should know that he is downcast and anxious, bull-like heir of Bharata; and yet you do not properly investigate the unbearable grief that an enemy is causing your eldest son!” (Smith 124). Well aware that Dhritarashtra’s vulnerability lies in his son’s sorrow, Shakuni sows the seed of his manipulation in him. Shakuni also proposes the solution to Duryodhana’s sorrow by pleading Dhritarashtra to permit the gambling match as he persuades:

I will tell you the way to acquire the wonderful fortune you have seen in the hands of Pandu's son. I am known throughout the whole earth for my skill at dice...I know their secrets, I know how to wager, I know the subtleties of the game. Kunti's son is fond of gambling, but he does not know how to play; if he is challenged, he is sure to come. Challenge him to gamble with you! (Smith 126)

Influenced by the excellent manipulation of Shakuni, despite knowing the evils of gambling, Dhritarashtra gave in to this proposal due to the profound love he had for his son.

The gambling match which eventually did take place is where Shakuni's manipulation is most evident for, he manipulated the hesitant Yudhishthira to gamble by challenging him. When Yudhishthira is skeptical of playing against Shakuni and requests him to avoid any form of deceit or dishonesty, Shakuni manipulates him:

The calculating man who knows the ways of deception, whose cunning never falters in his struggles with the dice, and who has the intelligence to understand gambling: he is the man who emerges unscathed from the match. You fear that wagering with dice will ruin you utterly...Put aside your misgivings and gamble with us, prince; lay your stake, do not delay! (Smith 131)

Yudhishthira's pride makes it impossible for him to refuse Shakuni's challenge, causing him to participate in the match that ruined him and his family. The most significant of all his manipulation was when he provoked Yudhishthira to wager Draupadi when everything else had already been lost. Shakuni spoke "One stake is left to you unlost, your own beloved queen. Wager Draupadi, the Pancala princess; win yourself back with her!" (Smith 140). This trickery was what ultimately led to the Mahabharata war, as he manipulated his doctored dice to win over every throw, even the one in which Draupadi was staked.

Jung suggests that the trickster archetype is a presentation of the primitive consciousness of human beings, but can also appear in the modern man, especially when "he feels himself at the mercy of annoying 'accidents' which thwart his will and his actions with apparently malicious intent" (168). Shakuni had experienced traumatic events, the impact of which were expressed in the form of revenge. His purpose of revenge used manipulation as a device to attain fulfillment. As Shakuni expresses, "I was ready to adopt all means of deceit, duplicity and dissimulation to achieve my ends...My heart was filled with hatred towards the Kuru dynasty, but by then I had mastered the art of looking like an innocent flower while actually being the deadly serpent that lay coiled beneath it" (Nadkar 33-34). He fostered his manipulation skills, motivated by the malicious intent of revenge, which was but a byproduct of the trauma he had to endure. This makes him a perfect portrayal of the trickster archetype. Jung, however, universalized the trickster archetype, claiming that it is not a personal acquisition, but rather an integral part of the collective unconscious. He states:

Anyone who belongs to a sphere of culture that seeks the perfect state somewhere in the past must feel very queerly indeed when confronted by the figure of the trickster. He is a forerunner of the saviour, and, like him, God, man, and animal at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being, whose chief and most alarming characteristic is his unconsciousness. (169)

The image of the trickster is relevant to people of almost every culture because it represents a sort of duality that is inherent in every human being and recognized by all traditional beliefs and practices. Shakuni too was a mere representation of the intents and tendencies that exist within all of us.

This is evident through Shakuni's manipulation by other characters; one of the most prominent being the one carried out by his nephew Duryodhana. Despite his purpose to destroy the Kaurava clan, instances of moral duality can be observed in Shakuni when he is reluctant to cause the virtuous Pandavas any sort of harm. After observing the lavish and

mighty palace of the Pandavas in Indraprastha, Duryodhana expresses his jealousy and frustration to his uncle Shakuni. Despite his attempts to explain to Duryodhana that his brothers are his allies and will prosper in any situation whatsoever, he is manipulated by Duryodhana to devise a plot for the humiliation of the Pandavas. Duryodhana manipulates Shakuni by stating,

I shall enter fire, or swallow poison, or drown myself, for I cannot live so! What man of mettle in this world could bear to see his rivals prosper and himself fail? If today I tolerate this new-found fortune of my rival, then I am neither woman nor non-woman, neither man nor non-man! (Smith 122)

Persuaded by the lamentation of his nephew, despite his wish to not harm the Pandavas, Shakuni was manipulated to plan a gambling match assisted by his doctored dice; an event which required him to unleash his trickster self.

These instances of manipulation, deception, and trickery displayed by other characters of further stress the idea that trickster tendencies are a part of the collective humankind. However, its qualities are often reduced to a personal trait when associated with a particular character.

Freudian Psychoanalysis and Moral Conflict in Shakuni

Freud's psychoanalytic theory revolves around the unconscious processes that guide human behavior and actions. He put forward his ideas on the different aspects of human life and experiences that can shape the unconscious of an individual. In his writings on "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud emphasized the influence that losing a loved one can have on a person's life. According to him, "Mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal and so on . . . [and] it produces severe deviations from normal behaviour" (310-11). Freud also believed that serious mourning is characterized by a "painful mood", loss of interest in worldly activities other than reminiscing what has been lost, inability to replace the loved one and "turning away from any task that is not related to the memory of the deceased" (311). However, mourning does not include a disorder of self-esteem. Shakuni's portrayal in the different renditions makes it evident that he was going through a serious mourning experience.

Shakuni was mourning the loss of his sister's freedom and sight to the marriage with a blind man and majorly, he was mourning the loss of the lives of his beloved father and ninety-nine brothers at the hands of the Kauravas. Similar to how Freud suggested that "inhibition and restriction of the ego is a manifestation of exclusive devotion to mourning, leaving nothing over for other interests and intentions", Shakuni developed an unnatural need to seek revenge from the perpetrators who induced the losses in his life (311). The suffering caused by the loss he experienced became the sole determinant of his life purpose and overall personality. Nadkar's *Shakuni: Master of the game* portrays how Shakuni was deeply affected by his sister's decision to blindfold herself upon realizing she had to marry a blind man: "Gandhari had pledged to tie a piece of cloth over her eyes to blind herself like her future husband, Dhritarashtra. . . I was convinced that it was her way of surrendering to the doom that awaited her. She had probably resolved to blindfold herself so that she would never have to see the face of her husband or of the members of his family" (31-32).

This decision was perceived by Shakuni as a loss of his sister's freedom and also his personal loss as a protective brother who could not ascertain a secure future for his sister. As a result, he made a sacred, secret pledge to seek retribution for everything that was happening. He also "decided to maneuver the political moves of Hastinapura from that day on" to be able to destroy the kingdom (Nadkar 33). His inability to move past his losses and

his dedication to avenging those who caused them exceeded all his other desires in life, making his experience a case of serious mourning.

Shakuni's conflict in morality is most evident when he counsels Duryodhana to not be envious of the Pandavas but instead consider them as his biggest allies of support. When Duryodhana expresses his resentment upon seeing the wealth and power of Yudhisthira during his visit to Indraprastha, Shakuni explains:

Duryodhana, do not be angry with Yudhisthira, for Pandu's sons always enjoy good fortune. More than once before now you have taken them captive with a variety of schemes, but through their good fortune [they] have escaped. . .and heroic Krsna Vasudeva is their ally in gaining mastery over the earth. . .as for the lack of allies of which you spoke . . . that is not so, for these mighty chariot-fighters your brothers are your allies. (Smith 123)

Shakuni's advice reflects the goodness within him, the desire to let go of his revengeful purposes and ensure understanding between the brothers for once. However, when Duryodhana is adamant on his desire to destroy the Pandavas, we see the revengeful side of Shakuni take over, who in spite of knowing the invincibility of the Pandavas and the eventual fate of his nephews, plans the gambling match that would lead to the war.

Shakuni's monologue criticizing Duryodhana in Gogoi's play reflects on his duality making it obvious that he was aware of the morally grey decisions he had to take to cause pain to the Pandavas for serving his greater purpose of seeking revenge:

At times even the devil is also capable of quoting scriptures! When I cast the doctored dice, where did you lock away your integrity? While disrobing the menstruating Draupadi, when humanity was about level with the ground, where did your sense of human grace relax! When my old father and ninety-nine elders howled for a handful of food languishing in your dark cell, why did humanity not flash in you! (120-21)

Shakuni was aware that his actions were condemnable and therefore he deserved a fatal ending. He did not approve of his actions and also criticized Duryodhana for complying with his evil schemes. Regardless, he was responsible for its initiation and effective implementation. It makes his dual nature transparent and also brings to light the moral conflict, which was both a cause and a consequence of his actions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Shakuni's character is far more complex than the one-dimensional villain often depicted in conventional portrayals. His traumatic experiences—Gandhari's forced marriage and the massacre of his family transformed him into a vengeful schemer, yet his duality reveals both the scars of his suffering and remnants of his former morality. His masterful manipulation, though used for deceit, reflects a universal human capacity for treachery when driven by loss, as seen even in morally upright characters like Bhishma. Shakuni's internal moral conflicts such as counseling Duryodhana against hostility or hesitating during Draupadi's humiliation highlight his lingering integrity, overshadowed by his vengeful actions. Ultimately, Shakuni embodies the duality of human nature, shaped by circumstance, where good and evil coexist, proving that his cruelty was not inherent but a tragic response to unimaginable trauma.

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