

When the Goddess was a Woman

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CHAPTER TWO

DRAUPADĪ'S GARMENTS

One of the *Mahābhārata*'s most famous scenes is the multiplication of the sarees at Draupadī's disrobing. But the passage has never been closely examined either textually or symbolically. Recent developments now make such an examination singularly inviting. For one thing, the Poona Critical Edition provides an excellent guide to the transformations of the text. Secondly, recent scholarship into *Mahābhārata* symbolism has reached a point where certain insights are beginning to converge and distinctions between interpretations are becoming clear. A discussion of the miracle of the sarees provides an occasion both to reap the benefit of others' insights and to clarify the lines of difference between scholarly views. The approach here is stimulated by fieldwork in the cult of Draupadī (Tiraupatīyamman), found mainly in Tamilnadu, in which Draupadī is regarded as a form of Devī or Śakti and the *Mahābhārata* is celebrated as her cult myth.¹ One premise must thus be stated at the outset. The notion that Draupadī is a form of the Goddess is not alien to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, her relation to early concepts of the Hindu Goddess requires careful and detailed study. A second premise will not bear so directly on this study of the epic text, but is worth stating to avoid misunderstanding. The Draupadī cult cannot be traced back farther than about 500 years.² Nonetheless, study of the cult will frequently enliven and expand our knowledge of the epic, particularly its symbolism. Garments figure very prominently in Draupadī's cult. As in the epic, they are used ritually to mark transitions

¹ Fieldwork was carried out in 1975 under an American Institute of Indian Studies grant, and in 1977 on a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend. For an initial statement, see Hildebeitel 1982; see also Hildebeitel 1981.

² The oldest reference I know of is to a Draupadī temple built and dedicated at the north of Gingee town by Tubaki Krishnappa, founder of the Nāyak line of Gingee kings (rule ca. 1490–1520); see C. S. Srinivasachari, *A History of Gingee and its Rulers*, Annamalai University Historical Series, No. 2 (Annamalainagar: The University, 1943), p. 88, n.

or dramatic intervals in the story. This is true in particular of the disrobing scene.³

Draupadī's reluctant entrance into the Kaurava assembly-and-gambling hall (*sabhā*) is preceded by a question which she insists be asked before she will appear: did Yudhiṣṭhira bet her before or after he wagered himself? The question remains moot through the entire episode. To the wisest counsellors it is irresolvable, and it drives Yudhiṣṭhira to silence. For, as J.A.B. van Buitenen says: "Yudhiṣṭhira cannot very well confirm that she was either won or not, for in either case he would have to confirm a lie: if she was won, he lied about his own stake, for he would still have been free to stake her; if she was not won, because he was no longer free, his staking her was a lie."⁴ Duryodhana, delighting in the chance to catch Yudhiṣṭhira in this predicament, orders Draupadī dragged into the *sabhā*. Here she raises her moot question on her own, and provokes the only responses pro and con that the epic offers. They are found as a carefully constructed pair in the form of a debate between two figures whose names, in this context, have the look of a contrived opposition: Vikarṇa (Dhṛtarāṣṭra's youngest and noblest son) and Karṇa. Whatever the significance of the two names, Karṇa's position here is of the greatest significance. Vikarṇa takes the compassionate view, arguing that the throw is null for three reasons: (1) Draupadī was staked after Yudhiṣṭhira bet himself; (2) it was only due to the prodding of Śakuni that Yudhiṣṭhira bet her;⁵ and (3) the 'blameless' or 'faultless' (*aninditā*) Draupadī is "common to all the Pāṇḍavas" (*sādhāraṇī ca sarveṣāṃ pāṇḍavānām*; 2:61.23–24; on citations, see n. 4). Karṇa outraged at such assertions by a mere youth, offers a point for point rebuttal: (1) it is irrelevant when she was wagered: Yudhiṣṭhira could bet her because Draupadī is "included within his total property" (*abhyantarā ca sarvasve draupadī*; 61.31); (2) Śakuni may have prodded Yudhiṣṭhira, but he did it audibly and her wager was allowed by the Pāṇḍavas (*kīrtitā draupadī vācā anujñātā*

³ See Lawrence Babb, *Walking on Flowers: A Hindu Festival Cycle* (Singapore: Department of Sociology, University of Singapore Working Papers, No. 27), 1974, pp. 8–9.

⁴ J. A. B. van Buitenen, trans. and ed., *The Mahābhārata*, Vol. II: 2. *The Book of the Assembly; The Book of the Forest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 817, note to 2.62.25. All *Mahābhārata* citations are from the Poona Critical Edition (see n. 7), unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Yudhiṣṭhira makes all his bets voluntarily except for the last, his wager of Draupadī; in this instance Śakuni prods him out of his uneasy silence.

ca pāṇḍavaiḥ; 61.33). But everything turns on the twist he puts on Vikarṇa's third point: Draupadī's blamelessness and her polyandry. Karṇa begins by introducing a point concerning Draupadī's condition that Vikarṇa had not mentioned: "Or if you think it was through *adharma* that she was led into the *sabhā* in a single garment, hear my final word. One husband per wife is ordained by the gods, O scion of Kuru; but she, whose submission is to many, is for certain a whore. For her to be led into the *sabhā* is not strange to my thinking, whether clad in one garment or even unclad" (61.34–36). Karṇa's mention of Draupadī's garments is thus gratuitous in the context of the argument with Vikarṇa. But his speech does relate the garments to the subject of Draupadī's chastity, or fidelity to a single husband as ordained by *dharma*. He thus dispels Vikarṇa's third point that, being 'common to all the Pāṇḍavas', the 'blameless Draupadī' could not bet by any single one of them. Hardly 'blameless', she is a 'whore' (*bandhakī*), common to all and protected by none.⁶ It is thus on this pretext, having overturned Vikarṇa's assertions about Draupadī's 'blameless' polyandry, that Karṇa calls out: "O Duḥśāsana... Strip the Pāṇḍavas' and Draupadī's clothes" (61.38).

I. Textual Transformations

Among the many passages excised from the *Mahābhārata* story in the reconstituted text of the Poona Critical Edition, none is so popular as Draupadī's prayer to Kṛṣṇa in this moment of distress. But an examination of the Northern and Southern variants of this story fully justifies Franklin Edgerton's judgment: "the evidence of the manuscripts is entirely conclusive"⁷ that the gesture is interpolated. Edgerton's comments focus mainly on questions of style and continuity, but he also cannot avoid some of the theological implications of the alteration. "No prayer by Draupadī; no explanation of the miraculous replacement of one garment by another; no mention of Kṛṣṇa or any superhuman agency. It is apparently implied (though not stated) that

⁶ It is actually Bhīma who introduces this term in the episode when he angrily denounces Yudhiṣṭhira for treating Draupadī worse than a common gambler would treat a whore (2.61.1).

⁷ Vishnu S. Sukthankar and S. K. Belvalkar, general eds., *The Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*, Vol. II, *The Sabhāparvan*, edited by Franklin Edgerton (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1944), p. xxviii.

cosmic justice automatically, or 'magically' if you like, prevented the chaste and noble Draupadī from being stripped in public. It is perhaps not strange that later redactors felt it necessary to embroider the story. Yet to me, at least, the original form, in its brevity, simplicity, and rapid movement, appeals very forcefully."⁸ The evidence accumulated in the Critical Edition leaves no grounds to refute Edgerton's conclusions: the passage has continuity without Kṛṣṇa's interference, and the tendency of later redactors (both Northern and Southern) to embroider the story is evident. The varied interpolations, however, must have a history, and one which may inform us as to how the miracle was interpreted in terms of its theology and symbolism.

Rarely does the *Mahābhārata* offer better materials for historical reconstruction of the textual process. To begin with, the Southern and Northern variants of Draupadī's plea to Kṛṣṇa differ from each other, and show many variations within themselves. Moreover, both North and South provide 'prime' and 'excellent' manuscripts⁹ that entirely omit the plea.

The reconstituted Critical text now reads (2.61):

40. Then Duḥśāsana, O king, forcibly tore off Draupadī's garment in the middle of the *sabhā*, and began to undress her.
41. But whenever one of Draupadī's garments was removed, O king, another garment like it repeatedly appeared.
42. Then there was a shout of approval there, a terrible roar from all the kings, having watched that greatest wonder in the world.

It is after verse 40 that most of the interpolations were made. The main Southern variant, to which shorter additions were frequently made, has the distressed Draupadī repeatedly call out 'Govinda' and 'Kṛṣṇa', and then recite a one *śloka* prayer which several versions refer to as a song (*gītā*) taught to her by the sage Vasiṣṭha (548*, *apud* 2.61.40):

Holder of the conch, wheel, and mace, whose residence is Dvārakā, Govinda, Lotus-Eyed, protect me who have come for refuge. (*rakṣa māṃ śaraṇāgatām* 547*; cf. 548*)

⁸ *Ibid.* p. xxix.

⁹ The terms are Edgerton's, referring to the Northern Śāradā codex and two Southern manuscripts, one in Grantha script and one in Malayalam; *ibid.*, pp. xi and xxix.

One sees here a fully developed and intentionally highlighted *bhakti* theology and iconography, perhaps even colored by Śrī Vaiṣṇava overtones.¹⁰

The chief Northern variant (543*), familiar from the Roy and Dutt translations of the *Mahābhārata* from the Vulgate, and commented on by Nīlakaṇṭha,¹¹ is actually found “in only a few Devanagari manuscripts”.¹² It is, however, much longer than the main Southern variant, and has many more contextual references to other facets of the *Mahābhārata*. Draupadī also refers to Kṛṣṇa as “Beloved of the Gopī Folk” (*gopījanapriya*; 543*, line 2; also 542*, line 1), one of the very few references to Kṛṣṇa’s childhood among the cowherds in any recension of the epic¹³ and a likely indication that the passage was interpolated by bards familiar with the work of Northern Paurāṇikas. The passage goes to bizarre lengths, however, to bring Kṛṣṇa to Draupadī’s aid.¹⁴ At his residence in Dvārakā, “having heard the words of Yājñaseni [Draupadī], Kṛṣṇa was deeply moved. And having abandoned the couch where he slept, the benevolent one came there on foot out of compassion” (543*, lines 10–11). From Dvārakā to Hāstinapura, Kṛṣṇa had to cover some 800 miles as the crow flies. To cover that distance ‘on foot’ (*padbhyām*) in time to rescue Draupadī is more than would normally be required even of a deity.

Most likely the demands on Kṛṣṇa were as much textual as devotional. Immediately following the statement that he came on foot is a

¹⁰ On *śaraṇāgati* in South Indian Vaiṣṇavism, see Robert C. Lester, ‘Rāmānuja and Śrī Vaiṣṇavism: The Concept of Prapatti or Śaraṇāgati’, *History of Religions* 5 (1966), 266–282.

¹¹ Kisari Mohan Ganguli, trans., and Pratap Chandra Roy, Publisher, *The Mahābhārata* (1884–1896; repr. most recently in 12 vols., New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970); Manmatha Nath Dutt, trans., *A Prose English Translation of the Mahābhārata* (Calcutta: H. C. Dass, 1895–1905). See also Ramachandra Kinjawadekar (ed.), *Shriman Mahābhāratam, with Bhārata Bhawadeepa by Nīlakaṇṭha* (6 vols.; Poona: Chittrashala Press, 1929–1933).

¹² Edgerton, *Sabhāparvan*, p. xxix.

¹³ See Sadashiva L. Katre, ‘Kṛṣṇa, Gopas, Gopīs, and Rādhā’, in H. L. Hariyappa and M. M. Patkai (eds.), *Professor P. K. Gode Commemoration Volume* (Poona: Oriental Book Agency, 1960), Part 3, pp. 83–85.

¹⁴ Here it is like one other passage which the Poona Critical Edition shows is also an interpolation; see my ‘The Burning of the Forest Myth’, Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Hinduism: New Essays in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 221–222. That article presents a statement on the use of the Critical Edition which holds also for this article.

curious verse (544*). It is found extensively in the Northern recension,¹⁵ sometimes after the long interpolation just cited, more often directly after verse 40, with the long interpolation omitted. It shows its anomalous character by being the only verse among those either interpolated or accepted into the Critical text that is in the *triṣṭubh* rather than the *śloka* meter. Theologically, however, it is consonant with a *śloka* verse (553*, *apud* 2.61.41) also interpolated widely in the Northern recension, and found almost uniformly in the same manuscripts as 544*. It would thus appear that the interpolated verses 544* and 553* together constitute the ‘original interpolation’ in the Northern recension.¹⁶ Set into the reconstituted narrative, the altered passage would then read as follows:

40. Then Duḥsāsana, O king, forcibly tore off Draupadī’s garment in the middle of the *sabhā*, and began to undress her.
 544* Yājñasenī invoked Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, and Nara for protection. Then Dharma, concealed, the magnanimous, having a multitude of garments, covered her.
 41. Whenever one of Draupadī’s garments was removed, O king, another garment like it repeatedly appeared.
 553* Thereupon garments of many colors and whites appeared, O lord, by hundreds, due to the protection of Dharma...

In verse 544* Draupadī does invoke Kṛṣṇa under the first three names mentioned, but the fourth—Nara—usually refers to Arjuna. But the help seems to come more directly from Dharma. In verse 553*, her rescue is more clearly “due to Dharma’s protection” (*dharmasya paripālanāt*) alone, with no mention of any other figure. To be sure, Dharma, like Nara, could refer to Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu. But in the *Mahābhārata* Dharma is also a deity on his own. He is incarnate in Yudhiṣṭhira and Vidura, and on two occasions acts in disguise. The ‘concealed’ (*antarhita*) Dharma who rescues Draupadī here is certainly reminiscent of the figure by that name who disguises himself as a Yakṣa and a dog to test

¹⁵ As Edgerton observes (*Sabhāparvan*, p. xxix), the Śāradā Codex alone omits it, although one Kaśmīrī manuscript has it ‘written on the margin’ (Edgerton’s italics).

¹⁶ They appear in all the same Northern Maithilī, Devanāgarī, and Bengali mss. 544* appears in one more Kaśmīrī ms than 553*. Both appear together in the only Southern ms in which either appears, G5 (Grantha script), with the apparent exception of 553* being present in a Telegu ms which Edgerton claims not to have seen (?); see *Sabhāparvan*, p. xvi. On the basically Northern character of these verses, see *ibid.*, p. xxix.

the Pāṇḍavas at other moments of mortal peril.¹⁷ But 'dharma's protection' would seem also to have a more impersonal connotation. This apparently initial double interpolation was perhaps what Edgerton had in mind when he spoke of 'cosmic justice' automatically rescuing the chaste Draupadī. Justice (*dharma*) may be set in motion by a prayer to Kṛṣṇa, but it is available to Draupadī precisely because she herself is just, virtuous.

Most likely these interpolated verses proved devotionally uninspiring to later Northern redactors, who must have sought uniformity in the ambiguous references to Kṛṣṇa, Nara, and Dharma by prefacing verse 544* with a long and explicit plea to Kṛṣṇa culminating in the totally unambiguous yet ridiculous assertion that he came to Draupadī's rescue 'on foot'. I would further suggest that Kṛṣṇa's intercession, once accepted and standardized in the Northern recension, became part of an oral tradition and was then interpolated into the Southern recension in the form of a simple devotional 'song'.

II. *Inexhaustible Garments*

The two Northern verses concerning Dharma thus probably provide the oldest intra-textual interpretation of the disrobing scene. Now what does it mean here that Dharma "has a multitude of various garments" (*dharmo...vividhavastrapūgaḥ*; 544*, lines 3–4)?¹⁸ The likely answer is the most obvious. Dharma is often associated with garments, as in the compound *dharmakañcuka*, "having the garb (or armor) of virtue". The English idiom 'cloak of virtue' is identical in purpose. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s most pivotal ethical scene, the wounded Vālin uses

¹⁷ On the Yakṣa disguise, see Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 186–90, 247–48. The dog disguise is taken to test Yudhiṣṭhira on his way to heaven in the epic's final book. There is a significant controversy over who the deity Dharma is: a 'rejuvenated' Vedic Mitra (Georges Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, vol. I: *L' idéologie des trois fonctions dans les épopées des peuples indo-européens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 172; Yama, known in the epic as Dharmarāja (Madeleine Biardeau, 'Études de mythologie Hindoue (IV), Part II: Bhakti et avatāra', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 63 (1976), p. 172); or an independent deity (Jan Gonda, 'The Vedic Mitra and the Epic Dharma', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1971), pp. 120–133, throughout in disagreement with Dumézil, but also, p. 125, asserting that the epic 'scarcely knows Dharma as Yama').

¹⁸ Several Northern scribes were evidently also puzzled by this question, and amended the text to read 'Dharma covered her with various beautiful garments' (thus the Roy and Dutt translations), '...pairs of garments', or '...meritorious garments'; see Critical Edition, notes.

similar terms in excoriating Rāma for his treachery in shooting at him from ambush: Rāma, says the dying monkey king, is “a sinner wearing the garment of the good, covered entirely with the deceptive dress of virtue” (*satām veśādharam pāpam...dharmacchadmābhisamvṛtam*; Baroda Critical Edition, *Rām.* 4.17.19). Similar terms are used to describe Yudhiṣṭhira’s major perfidy, his lie to Droṇa leading the latter to drop his weapons thinking his son was slain. According to the son, Aśvatthāman, Yudhiṣṭhira is one “possessed of the banner [or more generally, garb] of virtue” (*dharmadhvajavat*; 7.166.19); and Arjuna admits that Yudhiṣṭhira spoke “untruth in the garb of truth” (*satyakañcukam... anṛtam*; 167.35). Dharma thus has many garments, many disguises, as in the god Dharma’s appearances as a Yakṣa and a dog. The metaphor corresponds to the oft reiterated epic statement that dharma is ‘subtle’ (*sūkṣmo dharmah*). In the disrobing scene, however, the metaphor becomes reality. Dharma’s garments are not just disguises; they are actual apparel. And they appear in order to confirm that one of the *Mahābhārata*’s most surprising ‘disguises’ of virtue—Draupadī’s polyandry—is indeed virtuous. Vikarṇa is proven right: Draupadī, though wed to many, is faultless. Karṇa is proven wrong. Virtue clothes its own, and is inexhaustible in doing so.

The kernel verses interpolated into the Northern recension may thus introduce the theme of praying to Kṛṣṇa, but their main burden seems to be a rather profound ethical interpretation of Draupadī’s reclothing. Indeed, as far as questions of *dharma* go, these interpolations cannot be far from the spirit of the passage as a whole, even without the interpolated verses. But what about the reconstructed passage as it stands; with no plea to Kṛṣṇa and no reference to Dharma?

Here again the answer may be quite simple, although the symbolism, being a rich one, has many ramifications. The basic insight was provided quite early in the history of *Mahābhārata* scholarship by an advocate of a long since discredited school of interpretation: ‘nature mythology’. According to Alfred Ludwig, the *Mahābhārata* conflict truly begins with Duryodhana’s success in the dice match: his victory signifies the triumph of winter, and the attempt to disrobe Draupadī symbolizes winter’s baring of the Earth.¹⁹ Ludwig’s instinct is certainly

¹⁹ Alfred Ludwig, ‘Über die mythische Grundlage des Mahābhārata’, *Sitzungsberichte der Königl. Böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften. Classe für Philosophie, Geschichte, und Philologie* (1895), p. 12.

right. He has just superimposed a Germanic climatology on India. It is not 'winter' that threatens to disrobe the Indian earth, but the over-bearing sun of the hot season (*uṣṇa*) that precedes the rains. It is not Duryodhana who has ordered Draupadī disrobed. It is precisely Karṇa, son of the Sun. And it is Arjuna, son of Indra—god of rains—who will eventually kill Karṇa.

These points of convergence provide strong evidence that 'nature mythology' is a decisive factor in the scene of Draupadī's disrobing. Karṇa's identification with his father Sūrya is a theme which the epic poets reiterate at every possible chance.²⁰ They did not pick Karṇa's name out of a hat for his role at the disrobing.²¹ As to Draupadī, she is at many points identified with the Earth. For instance, when Yudhiṣṭhira laments his sins at the end of the war, he blames himself for the deaths of Draupadī's five sons, and compares her to the Earth bereft of her five mountains (12.27.21–22).²² And in the long Northern interpolation at the disrobing, Draupadī compares herself to the Earth, or more precisely to the proverbial 'sinking earth' of epic and Purāṇic *avatāra* myths:

Sunk in the Kaurava ocean, lift me up (*mām uddharasva*), O Janārdana, O Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa, Great Yogi, Soul of All, Creator of All. Suppliant to you, protect me, O Govinda, sinking down (*avasīdātīm*) amidst the Kurus (543*, lines 5–7).

In fact, Draupadī's true given name at birth, Kṛṣṇā, probably has as one of its connotations the Earth, 'black' (*kṛṣṇa*) being the Earth's color.²³

²⁰ For discussion of examples, see Dumézil, *Mythe et épopée*, I, pp. 125–144; Biardeau, 'Bhakti et avatāra', pp. 229–230; Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 254–66, 281–85.

²¹ Later renditions of the scene sometimes attribute the fundamental blame for the disrobing to Duryodhana rather than to Karṇa (see G. V. Devasthali, ed, and tr., *Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's Veṅṣamhāram* (Bombay: D. M. Tilak, 1953), pp. 156 and 160), or even specify that Duryodhana gave the command (Villiputtūr Ālvār's *Villi-Pāratam*, in Tamil: see M. V. Subramanian, *Vyāsa and Variations. The Mahābhārata Story* (Madras: Higginbotham's, 1967), p. 90. By such changes in emphasis and alterations, Karṇa is of course absolved and symmetry results in both the disrobing and the hair-pulling of Draupadī being blamed on Duryodhana as cause and on Duṣṣāsana as executor, thus motivating Bhīma's double revenge against these two.

²² See Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 240.

²³ See Biardeau, 'Brāhmanes et potiers', Article liminaire, *Annuaire de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études* 84 (1971–1972), pp. 40–41; Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 66.

The relationship between Draupadī and Karna is presented throughout the *Mahābhārata* as one of continuous opposition.²⁴ When seen in conjunction with the disrobing scene, other passages which oppose them gain in significance. In a passage found in some Northern manuscripts, Draupadī refuses Karna an attempt at winning her in marriage.²⁵ Similarly, Karna rejects Kṛṣṇa's pre-war proposal that Karna assume his rightful place as oldest brother of the Pāṇḍavas, with Draupadī coming to him as her sixth husband (5.138.15).²⁶ Such a startling proposition from Kṛṣṇa's mouth only serves to underline the forces which prevent such a resolution of hostilities. Not only is Karna fiercely loyal to Duryodhana and resentful of Kuntī. By this time Draupadī and Karna hate each other, for he has insulted her in the *sabhā*. But most important, their incompatibility is dictated in all these passages by a cosmological impossibility: a union between the Sun and the Earth. Karna's command to strip Draupadī bare is an image of the *pralaya*, the "dissolution of the worlds". Were he and Duṣṣāsana to have their way, Draupadī would be denuded like the earth prior to its combustion, dessicated by the *pralaya*'s seven suns (sprung from the single Sūrya) and bare "like the back of a tortoise".²⁷

In offering this interpretation, I must abandon my earlier skeptical tone toward Madeleine Biarreau's remark that Draupadī's refusal of Karna-Sūrya represents a refusal of the solar hero "who symbolizes the conflagration of the world".²⁸ But precision is required. The disrobing scene offers a confirmation that, as I have argued elsewhere,²⁹ the epic

²⁴ This is in contrast with a popular tradition that they are attracted, as is told in a well known Tamil short story: T. M. C. Ragunathan, 'Veṅṛiyan Eṅṛapōtum', in *Ragunathan Kathaigal* (1953). I wish to thank K. Kailasapathy for this reference. See also Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 226 n. 63.

²⁵ 1827*, *apud* 1.17817; for Southern variants, see *ibid.*, 1830*–1834*.

²⁶ See Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 226.

²⁷ This image appears at *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 6.3.23 and *Kūrma Purāṇa* 45.23; see Madeleine Biasdeau, 'Études de Mythologie Hindoue', Part 3, *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 58 (1971), p. 69.

²⁸ See Biarreau, 'Brāhmaṇes et potiers', p. 42, n. 2, and Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 311, n. 38.

²⁹ The argument here extends others already made in Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 309–12 (no model in the *pralaya* myth for the epic's dualistic battle; the allegoric character of *pralaya* symbolism in the epic), 48–49, 109–113 and 278 (Biarreau entirely disposes with the epic and Purāṇic tradition that the *Mahābhārata* occurs at the juncture between the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas; she thus misses the significance of that transition as constituting India's 'heroic age'. For her, the *pralaya* cataclysm that she sees in the *Mahābhārata* 'myth' implies a full destruction and renovation: thus the end of Kali

story has different contours from the *pralaya* myth. At the time of the *pralaya*, the Earth is passive to its dissolution. On the contrary, the primary epic heroine to represent the Earth is not passive; and precisely because of her non-passivity, she is able to rescue herself. If anything, Draupadī's actions are more reminiscent of the earth's role in myths where, as the goddess Earth, she pleads with the gods (by epic times, usually headed by Viṣṇu) to prevent her from sinking (usually from overpopulation) into the great ocean.³⁰ In these myths, the Earth is active, though fully reliant on the male deities for her rescue. Yet even this theme does not provide a satisfactory model for Draupadī's role at the disrobing. Rather than plead to the gods, headed by Viṣṇu, to rescue her as the Earth does in such myths, Draupadī saves herself—and saves the Pāṇḍavas, sons of gods, to boot! In fact, the disrobing scene explicitly inverts the symbolism of the myth of the uplifting of the earth. Thus Karṇa, after the disrobing has failed, taunts the Pāṇḍavas for being saved by a woman:

Draupadī, Kṛṣṇā, has become the salvation (*sānti*) of the sons of Pāṇḍu; when they were sinking, drowning, in the boatless and fathomless ocean, Pāñcālī, going to the other shore, became the Pāṇḍavas' boat (2.64.2–3).

Similarly inverted is a later passage which recapitulates the scene: "Kṛṣṇā lifted up (*ujjahāra*) the Pāṇḍavas, as also herself, as with a ship from a swell of the ocean" (5.29.35). Such passages, particularly

yuga and the beginning of a Kṛta yuga, an Age of Perfection: see Biardeau, 'Bhakti et avatāra', pp. 135–161, 170–174, 203–207).

³⁰ See F. B. J. Kuiper, 'Cosmogony and Conception: A Query', *History of Religions* 10 (1970), pp. 101–102; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 28, 36–37, 258–60; Madeleine Biardeau, 'Études de mythologie hindoue', Part 2, *BEFEO* 55 (1969), pp. 60–68; Michel Defourny, 'Note sur le symbolisme de la come dans le *Mahābhārata* et la mythologie brāhmaṇique classique', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 18 (1976), pp. 19–22. These myths as a type are pre-epic, and have been adjusted to many contexts: the primal creation by a cosmogonic boar (see Kuiper); creation between kalpas by the same (see Biardeau); a myth of overpopulation due to suspension of activities by Yama in the Kṛta yuga (*Mbh.* 3, Appendix I, No. 16, 11. 58–124, after 3.142); the Boar *avatāra* form taken by Viṣṇu to rescue the Earth from the demon Hiranyākṣa (see Biardeau, 'Études', Part 2, pp. 164–165, n. 3, citing Hiranyākṣa's opposition as the chief distinction between the cosmogonic and avatāric boars), plus other instances connected with *avatāras*, including the *Mahābhārata*'s myth of the sinking earth which accounts for the origins of the epic heroes and heroines, born to relieve the Earth by ousting the demons who have infiltrated the lineages of the Earth's kings (1.58; 11.8.20–26). See also Paul Hacker, 'Zur Entwicklung der Avatāralehre', *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens*, Vienna (1960), pp. 47–60, who sees the 'burden of the Earth' myth as the kernel of the *avatāra* mythology.

the taunt from Karṇa, imply that the Pāṇḍavas are inadvertent Śāktas, carried to the 'other shore' and 'lifted up' from the ocean (the verb *ud-hṛ* is especially evocative of the Boar *avatāra* 'lifting up' the Earth³¹) by a woman. It is only the passages interpolated into the disrobing scene that sought to impose the pattern of the usual *avatāra* scheme by having Draupadī pray to Kṛṣṇa for her rescue, and, in one instance, complain about "sinking in the Kaurava ocean" (*Mbh.* 2, 543*, 11. 5–7, cited above).

The epic story thus follows contours which are distinct from *pralaya* themes, and explicitly opposite to themes found in classical myths about the uplifting of the earth. One final point confirms the distinctiveness of the epic tale. As already noted, at the *pralaya* the Sun, or Suns, does bare the Earth; Draupadī's robes, however, are restored. The poets have shown their hand in establishing this distinction. Karṇa orders Duḥśāsana to disrobe Draupadī. *He does not touch her or her garments himself.* Between the *yugas*, where the *Mahābhārata* story is set, the miracle of the sarees thus symbolizes that the Earth holds the power of her own renewal. And Karṇa, the figure of the Sun and potential agent of destruction, remains explicitly distanced from Draupadī. In simplest terms, the restoration of Draupadī's sarees shows that, except at the time of the *pralaya*, the Earth's power to restore her garments is inexhaustible.

On this point, there is a strikingly similar tradition from the Ancient Near East. In their descents to the nether world, the Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Akkadian Ishtar must pass through seven gates, at each one losing garments and jewels, until finally they stand naked before their sister Ereshkigal, goddess of the Underworld. Inanna and Ishtar undergo a death and resurrection before they are able to return, their garments and jewels restored.³² In the Akkadian account, the absence and disrobing of the goddess are clearly connected with infertility on Earth:

Since Ishtar has gone down to the Land of No Return, the bull springs not upon the cow, the ass impregnates not the jenny. In the street the man

³¹ Michel Defourny, 'Le mythe de Yayāti dans la littérature épique et purāṇique' (doctoral thesis, University of Liège, 1973), pp. 165–171, 194–195.

³² S. N. Kramer, trans., 'Inanna's Descent to the Nether World', in James B. Pritchard (ed.) *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (2nd. ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 52–57; E. A. Speiser, trans., 'Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World', *ibid.*, pp. 106–109.

impregnates not the maiden. The man lies down in his (own) chamber, the maiden lies down on her side.³³

The loss and return of garments and their connections with the exhaustibility/inexhaustibility of nature are themes found in the disrobing of Draupadī. Draupadī has not descended to the nether world; rather, the nether world in the form of incarnate Rākṣasas and Asuras has infiltrated this world in the person of the kings who provoke and watch her disrobing in the *sabhā* (see above, n. 30). This is but one of many thematic connections between Indian and Ancient Near Eastern cults and mythologies of the goddess, a complex matter which has generated some significant study but has yet to gain the attention and careful study which it deserves.³⁴

III. 'Nature': Dharma and the Earth

Having revived a 'nature mythology' interpretation of the *Mahābhārata* disrobing scene, some further refinement is in order on Indian concepts of 'nature'. For one thing, the bounty and devastation of the Earth are forever bound up with the principle of *dharma*. When a king rules by the *dharma*, the land is fertile.³⁵ In fact, according to the *Mahābhārata*, a 'just' king need not even rule for the land to be fertile where he lives. Thus Bhīṣma says that wherever the Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira is—even in disguise!—the land is bound to be rich and bountiful and the cattle thriving (4.27.12–27; see also 29.9–10). Indeed, such is the prestige of Matsya or Virāṭadeśa, the kingdom where Yudhiṣṭhira lives while in disguise, that it has been 'located' by local legend at Dharapuram in the Coimbatore district of Tamilnadu, at Sohagpur about a hundred and forty miles east of Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, at Hangal in

³³ Speiser, 'Descent of Ishtar', p. 55.

³⁴ Among many authors who have assumed continuities between Indian Goddess worship and Ancient Near Eastern traditions, the following have contributed important insights: S. K. Dikshit, *The Mother Goddess (A Study Regarding the Origin of Hinduism)* (Poona: International Book Service, n.d.); E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess: An Archaeological and Documentary Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959); Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Śākta Religion* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973); *idem*, *The Indian Mother Goddess* (2nd ed., Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Books, 1977); F. J. Richards, 'Some Dravidian Affinities and their Sequel', *Quarterly Journal of the Mythical Society* 7 (1917), 243–284.

³⁵ See Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 11–20, 69.

the Dharwar district of Karnataka, and at Wai below Mahabaleshwar in Maharashtra,³⁶ even though the Matsyadeśa referred to in the epic was probably in the Punjab! Another look is thus in order at the idea, found in the kernel interpolation of the Northern recension, that Draupadī's garments are provided by Dharma.

Usually where the *Mahābhārata* speaks of garments, it speaks of their color. The reconstituted disrobing passage makes no explicit reference to the color of Draupadī's garments. It even says that the garments which replaced the original had the original's form (*tadrūpam*; 2.61.4 1), a term which could also imply identical color. The two-verse kernel interpolation makes up for this uncertainty by saying in the first verse that the sarees were "various" (*vividha*; 544*, 1.4), and then in the second that Dharma protected her with "garments of many colors and whites" (*nānārāgavirāgāṇi vasanāni*; 553*, *apud* 2.61.41).³⁷ Dharma thus clothes Draupadī in many colors.

Such a thematic convergence of garments, colors, dharma, and the Earth can best be explored in relation to other passages in the *Mahābhārata*. During their period of disguise in Virāṭa's kingdom, Arjuna is called upon to defend Virāṭa's cattle against a raid by Duryodhana and his allies. As Arjuna sets out, Virāṭa's daughter Uttarā and her virgin (*kanyā*) friends make a request:

O Brhannaḍā [Arjuna], bring us bright garments for our dolls, fine, colorful, and various (*bṛhannaḍe ānayethā vāsāṃsi rucirāṇi naḥ/ pāñcālikārthaṃ sūkṣmāṇi citrāṇi vividhāni ca*; 4.35.22cd–23ab).

Arjuna then replies that he will bring back 'heavenly bright garments' (*vāsāṃsi divyāni rucirāṇi*; 25, with variants). He soon overwhelms each of his opponents, then stupifies them momentarily with the sound of his conch, and sends Uttarā's brother to fetch their robes. When Arjuna returns to Virāṭa's court, he hands these garments to Uttarā: the 'very white' (*suśukla*) robe of Kṛpā, the 'resplendent yellow' (*pītaṃ*

³⁶ On Dharapuram, see P. K. Nambiar and K. C. Narayana Karup, (eds.), *Census of India*, 1961, Vol. IX, Madras, Part XI-D, *Temples of Madras State*, iii, Coimbatore and Salem (1968), pp. 108–109; on Sohagpur, see V. R. Ragam, *Pilgrim's Travel Guide*, Part II, *North India with Himalayan Regions* (Guntur: Sri Śita Rama Nama Sankirtana Sangam, 1963), p. 262; information about Hangal and Wai obtained orally. Another Karnataka site for Matsyadeśa is at Madugula: see Sir Walter Elliot, *Local History*, Vol. II (manuscript: India Office Library, London), pp. 72–74.

³⁷ Following Nīlakaṇṭha, who takes *virāga*, in the sense of 'without color', as 'pure white' (*kevalaśveta*); Kinjawadekar (ed.), *Shrīman Mahābhārata* (see n. 11), Vol. 1, *Sabhāparvan*, p. 111.

ruciram) garment of Karṇa, and the 'blue' (*nīla*) robes of Aśvatthāman and Duryodhana (4.61.13).

As Heino Gehrts has seen, there is a continuity between the garments removed from Draupadī and the garments given to Uttarā. Gehrts interprets the garments in both scenes as symbolic of the womb and of embryonic rebirth, corresponding to the use of garments to represent the amnion and chorion in the Rājasūya sacrifice.³⁸ Draupadī's removed garments are thus for Gehrts the precondition for the Pāṇḍavas' rebirth. The bestowal of the garments on Uttarā represents that their rebirth will be through her, rather than through Draupadī. And indeed it will, for Uttarā becomes the wife of Arjuna's son Abhimanyu, and thereby mother of Parikṣit, the sole survivor of the Pāṇḍava line.³⁹ Actually, there may be further evidence of a connection between the two episodes. Not only are the garments which the girls obtain 'various', 'colorful', and even 'heavenly' like those of Draupadī. The girls' plea to Arjuna seems to contain an unmistakable allusion to Draupadī. The word they use for 'dolls' is *pāñcālikā*. The literal meaning of the term is "of or relating to the people of Pañcāla", and is equivalent to the meaning of Pāñcālī as a common name for Draupadī. Presumably the people of Pañcāla were as well known for their dolls or puppets as they were for their epic heroine. Actually, the word *pāñcālī* itself can also mean 'doll or puppet'.⁴⁰ The pointedness of the use of such a term in the girls' request becomes clear in relation to another passage that connects Draupadī with puppets. When she complains that suffering and pleasure result from all creatures being manipulated by the Placer (Dhātṛ) like puppets (3.31.21–29), she uses an entirely different term—*yoṣā*—with an identical meaning. It is thus possible to read the girls' plea as follows: "O Bṛhannaḍā, bring us bright garments for the sake of what comes from Pañcāla (*pāñcālikārtham*), fine, colorful, and various." The term *pāñcālikārtham* is open to several possible meanings, but the basic ambiguity of reference to both 'dolls' and 'Draupadī' seems undeniable. "For the sake of what comes from Pañcāla" has obvious reference to Draupadī's garments. The fact that the maiden

³⁸ See Heino Gehrts, *Mahābhārata: Das Geschehen und seine Bedeutung* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1975), pp. 206–207, 224–225; J. C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1957), pp. 92, 97–98; I have discussed Gehrts's theories more fully in a review, in *Erasmus* 29, No. 3–4 (1977), columns 86–91.

³⁹ See Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 336–53.

⁴⁰ Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1958), s.v. *Pāñcālī*.

Uttarā asks for these garments of regeneration in the disguised Draupadī's hearing is all the more poignant. Draupadī's disguise as 'chambermaid' (*sairandhrī*) involves her wearing "a single large black very dirty garment" (*vāsas... ekaṃ kṛṣṇam sumalinam mahat*; 4.8.2), no doubt an image of impurity and death. And at the end of the war, Aśvatthāman's curse will prevent her from having more children after her own have been slain. But Uttarā, who receives these variously colored heavenly garments and then immediately thereafter marries Arjuna's son Abhimanyu, will, after the war and her husband's death, give birth to Parikṣit and thus to the regeneration of the Pāṇḍava line. For her, the association of the garments with 'dolls' no doubt anticipates the transformation from girl to woman and the forthcoming processes of giving birth and becoming a mother.

The symbolism of regeneration, fertility, and auspiciousness associated with the garments at the miracle of the sarees is thus, as Gehrts has seen, given a specific gynecological meaning in the gift to Uttarā. But Arjuna's victory over the Kurus in the latter episode also involves a symbolic foreshadowing of related themes in the war. One of the most frequent similes used to describe the battlefield at Kurukṣetra is the comparison of the Earth to a woman. Among such passages, a good number refer to the Earth's covering of bodies, limbs, garments, ornaments, and battle gear as being like a woman's adornments. To the vanquished the Earth appears stark. At the end of the fighting, when Duryodhana makes his final retreat from the field, he sees the Earth 'empty' (*dr̥ṣṭvā sūnyāṃ ca medinīm*; 9.28.16). Thus he says to Yudhiṣṭhira before his final duel with Bhīma:

The Earth shorn of jewels with her warrior bulls slain, I do not wish to enjoy, like a widowed woman (*kṣīnaratnāṃ ca pṛthivīm hataḥsatriyapuṃgavām / nābhyutsahāmy ahaṃ bhoktuṃ vidhavām iva yoṣitam*; 9.28.16).

As Draupadī was shorn and symbolically widowed to the Pāṇḍavas, so the Earth is shorn of jewels and a widow to the defeated Duryodhana. But in the midst of battle the Earth has a different look:

The Earth shone forth like a wanton young woman (*pramadā*) adorned with diverse kinds of ornaments (*vibabhau mahī / nānārūpair alaṃkāraiḥ pramadevābhyaṃkṛtā*; 6.92.65).

Wet with red blood sprung from the bodies of men, horses, and elephants, the Earth was like an all-accessible resplendent girl attired in burnished gold, garlands, and red garments (... *bhūmiḥ / raktāmbarasraktapanīyayogān / nārī prakāśā iva sarvagamyā*; 8.68.34).

and finally, most interestingly:

Or as a dark young girl would wear garments in white dyed with red safflower, likewise was the Earth (*yathā vā vāsasī śukle mahārajanarañjite / bibhṛyād yuvatīḥ śyāmā tadvad āsīd vasumdhara*; 8.36.9).

The last passage is certainly the most suggestive. The Earth, like a dark young girl clothing herself in white garments dyed red, reminds one of Draupadī in the *sabhā*: the 'dark' (*kṛṣṇā*) woman who clothes herself with sarees of apparently various colors. As Nīlakaṇṭha indicates, the tradition is that the colors were not only various, but included 'pure white' (*kevalaśveta*).⁴¹ These three colors—black, red, and white—have a long history in India (and elsewhere) as the three basic colors of 'nature' or *prakṛti*.⁴² The garments which Arjuna brings back for Uttarā are also white, yellow, and blue, the two latter being frequent variations of red and black which seem to accentuate positive, auspicious, and even divine associations.⁴³ It would thus seem that the garments also represent the fundamental 'qualities' (*guṇas*) of nature. Like Draupadī's garments, the *guṇas* are inexhaustible. As the three constituent strands of *prakṛti*, they form the basic 'fabric' of material continuity from creation to dissolution, from one universe to the next.⁴⁴ Draupadī's identification with the Earth is thus only one facet of her fuller identification with *prakṛti*, 'nature'. As the epic's primary embodiment of the Hindu Goddess, she represents all of nature, not just the Earth. The Goddess represents *prakṛti* as composed of five elements: ether, air, fire, water, and earth. And these, in turn, are reducible to the three *guṇas*.⁴⁵ Insofar as Draupadī is identified with the Earth,

⁴¹ See above, n.37.

⁴² On their use in color symbolisms, see Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 60–76; Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 59–91; Brenda E. F. Beck, 'Color and Heat in South Indian Ritual', *Man* 4 (1969), pp. 553–572.

⁴³ The major Hindu deities concerned with *mokṣa* are commonly shown with blue skin: Śiva, Viṣṇu and his *avatāras*, and the Goddess.

⁴⁴ According to the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, *prakṛti* with its three *guṇas* is one of the 'three unborns', along with the Lord (*Īśvara*) and the soul. According to the Sāṃkhya, it is the red *guṇa*, *rajas*, which stimulates the re-creation at each *kalpa*.

⁴⁵ In the preceding interpretation I have attempted to delimit the discussion of garment symbolism to themes which either bear directly on the epic, or provide striking parallels to pertinent aspects of the epic story. But this discussion of *prakṛti* and the *guṇas* may remind one of Hellenistic notions that the soul is clothed in garments of different colors as it descends to earth through the planetary spheres: see Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion among the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Dover, 1960), pp. 108–109. The closest Indian counterpart to this idea is the Jaina concept of the colors of matter infiltrating the soul, a doctrine once attributed to Bhīṣma in

however, one must appreciate the *Mahābhārata*'s attentiveness to the goddess Earth's mythology. The Earth is a more dynamic figure in the *Mahābhārata* than the myth of her plea to the gods would by itself reveal. In the passages which speak of her wearing as garments the blood, limbs, and accoutrements of the warriors, there is an evident complexity to her character. In one aspect she is a promiscuous girl, alluring, wanton or intoxicated (*pramadā*), accessible to all (*sarvagamyā*). But in another aspect she is a goddess of destruction, taking the warriors to her only in their death, and repeatedly glutted in scenes of carnage with a proverbial river of blood that bears the dead to the realm of Yama.⁴⁶ In these images, one finds a fulfillment of Arjuna's prophesy that the "earth will drink the blood" (*bhūmiḥ pāsyati śonitam*; 2.68.31) of those who taunted Draupadī in the *sabhā*. All this has much to do with Draupadī, who leaves the *sabhā* for exile in "a garment wet and smeared with blood" (*śonitāktādravasanā*; 2.7.1.18) vowing to see the blood of her tormentors staining the garments of their wives (19–20).

Through all this emphasis on blood and gore, however, one should not lose sight of the fact that the *Mahābhārata* war is a war fought for the establishment of the *dharma* (*dharmasamsthāpana*; *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.8), and that Kurukṣetra is a *dharmakṣetra*, a 'field of dharma' (*ibid.*, 1.1). Twice during the war (three times in the Northern recension), Kṛṣṇa 'shows the battlefield'—or more literally 'battle-earth' (*raṇabhūmi*, *yuddhabhūmi*; 7.123.41; 8.41.59)—to Arjuna, and tells him at great length that the Earth which looks so ghastly is mysteriously beautiful and resplendent (7.123.30–41; 8.14.26–59; 8, Appendix I, No. 16). Kṛṣṇa's revelations to the epic's greatest warrior concern the

the *Mahābhārata*: see V. M. Bedekar, 'The Doctrine of the Colours of Souls in the *Mahābhārata*: its Characteristics and Implications', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 48–49 (1968–69), pp. 329–338. The earlier comparison of Draupadī's disrobing with the descents of Inanna and Ishtar may also remind one of Salome's 'dance of the seven veils'. These two comparative suggestions were offered by W. Randolph Kloetzli. The ritual symbolism of garments and nakedness is also a comparative theme that has been barely covered (see n. 3).

⁴⁶ See 6.55.11–12 and 121–125, 85.25, 99.33–38; 7.13.8–18, 20.31–37, 68.47–48; 8.33.81–66, 36.29–32, 55.38–42, 57.2, 58.7–8; 9.8.29–33; the river is compared to the underworld Vaitarāṇī (8.55.42, 58.7; 6.55.1.25, 90.38), but, insofar as it leads the dead to Yama's realm or toward the realm of the Piṭṛs (8.36.31; 6.13.17; 9.8.33), it would appear to be an earthly extension of the Vaitarāṇī. The river flows 'toward the ocean of the other world' (*paralokārnavamukhī*; 6.55.12). On the Vaitarāṇī, see E. Washburn Hopkins, *Epic Mythology* (1915; repr. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1969), pp. 5, 110–111.

divine nature of this 'battle-earth'. Kurukṣetra is a scene of a great 'sacrifice of battle' in which all the divine and demonic forces are present to reestablish the 'sinking earth' and to restore the *dharma*. Concerning the dramatic interplay between *dharma* and the Earth, the battle develops according to a sequence which I analyzed elsewhere.⁴⁷ Yudhiṣṭhira, the incarnation of Dharma, wins the war and reclaims the Earth through a series of flawed triumphs over the 'marshals' (*senāpatis*) of the Kaurava army: Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, and Śalya. These four are associated with a tetrad of colors: Bhīṣma with white, Droṇa with red, Karṇa with yellow, and Śalya with black. In Bhīṣma and Karṇa's cases, this association is made specifically in terms of their garments.⁴⁸ The goddess Earth also figures prominently in the scenes of the four marshals' deaths, and actually becomes active in the final two instances. Thus she swallows Karṇa's chariot wheel (8.66.59), and, at Śalya's death, "it was as if that bull among men was risen up to by the Earth, out of love" (9.16.53).⁴⁹

This sequence would seem to mark the culmination of the epic's use of garments as symbols of regeneration and rebirth. The deaths of the four marshals involve a behind-the-scenes intrigue between the Earth, Dharma (in the person of Yudhiṣṭhira), and Viṣṇu (in the person of Kṛṣṇa). It may also be noted that in the two deaths where the Earth is not active, it is Draupadī's brothers who become the active instruments whereby the marshals are slain: Bhīṣma by Śikhaṇḍin, Droṇa by Dhṛṣṭadyumna.⁵⁰ This configuration is not unlike that in the *sabhā*. As Draupadī was reclothed by Dharma, and, as the tradition developed, by Kṛṣṇa, so at Kurukṣetra the Earth reclothes herself with the garments of the slain, and, in particular, through the agency of Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa, takes back to herself the heroes who embody the colors of continuity⁵¹ and regeneration. The miraculous sarees that reclothe Draupadī in the *sabhā* and the 'dolls' of Uttarā are thus also the garments of the Earth.

⁴⁷ Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 283–86.

⁴⁸ On Bhīṣma, see 5.179.10–14; 6.20.9; on Karṇa, see his yellow garments cited above.

⁴⁹ See Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 270; a regrettable misprint there has '...up to be the earth'; on the role of the Earth in other episodes and in the sequence as a whole, see *ibid.*, pp. 251, 262, 279, and 284.

⁵⁰ On Śikhaṇḍin's own connection with the Goddess, see Biardeau, 'Bhakti et avatāra', p. 210 n. 1 and 220–221; Jacques Scheuer, 'Śiva dans le *Mahābhārata*: l'histoire d'Ambā / Śikhaṇḍin', *Puruṣārtha*, Vol. I, Part 2 (1975), pp. 67–86.

⁵¹ The alteration of colors also pertains to the changes in the *yugas* and to the appearances of Kṛṣṇa; see Hildebeitel [1976] 1990, 62–63, 283.

