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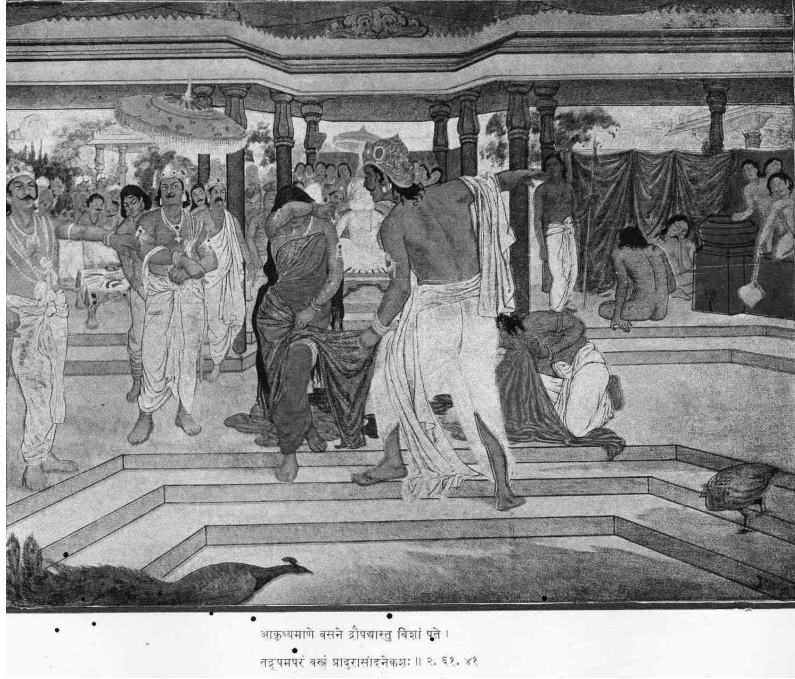
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PRADIP BHATTACHARYA

REVISING THE CRITICAL EDITION OF THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*:
AN APPROACH THROUGH THE ATTEMPT TO STRIP
DRAUPADĪ

Introduction



Disrobing Draupadi, CE vol. 2

The Critical Edition (CE) of the *Mahābhārata* published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Institute (BORI), Pune (1933-1966) is generally regarded as the last word in arriving at the textual canon of the epic. Half a century later, however, enough justification exists for taking a hard look at its claim to provide the best manuscript version extant. The fact is, as Mehendale¹ points out, that the oldest manuscript by far— a 12th century, Nepali palm-leaf manuscript— was not available for study. Nor, admitted Sukthankar,² were Kannaḍa, Oḍīya and Nandināgarī manuscripts examined. Edgerton, editor of the *Sabhā Parva* of the CE, refers to a complete manuscript, a continuous roll in Devanagari, in the Bharat Itihasa Sanshodhaka Mandal of Pune, which he could not obtain for study.³ The National Mission for Manuscripts has to find and document it for the revised edition of the *Mahābhārata*.

The CE also did not take into account the earliest version of the epic in a foreign language: Abu Saleh's *Instruction of Princes* (1026), an Arabic translation from the Sanskrit. Preceding the oldest manuscripts depended upon by the CE by centuries, this is an astonishing account of the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas as viewed from Sindh *with no mention of Kṛṣṇa*.⁴ Had Ruben known of it, it would have added grist to his mill in arguing that originally the epic was Kṛṣṇa-less.⁵

Further, the editors did not study the *Razmnama* (1584), the Persian version of the epic (including *Harivamśa*) that Akbar commissioned, although it was contemporaneous with the manuscripts depended upon for the CE. Sukthankar was mistaken in rejecting it as merely a “free rendering of the original.”⁶ Nei-

¹ Mehendale 2009: 5; 21 note 5. Adluri and Hildebeitel (2017) assert, “Sukthankar did examine the Nepali manuscript and found that it confirmed his reconstruction,” but do not cite any evidence to controvert Mehendale's statement.

² Sukthankar 1933: vi.

³ Edgerton, “Introduction,” p. xxii quoted by Mahadevan T.P. “The Southern recension,” p. 105, in Adluri, Vishva ed. 2013. *Ways and Reasons for thinking about the Mahabharata as a Whole*. Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

⁴ Bhattacharya 2009.

⁵ Brockington 1998: 55.

⁶ Sukthankar 1933: xxviii. Quoted in Adluri and Hildebeitel. 2017.

ther is it “an abridgement” as Adluri and Hildebeitel claim.⁷ A comparison with the CE would reveal the departures in the Persian version, which would throw light on the status of the text followed under Akbar’s direction. For instance, its *Aśvamedha Parva* follows Jaimini’s composition, not the Vaiśampāyana recital.⁸ The scholars Akbar gathered for this massive enterprise formed an editorial board that was the precursor of the CE’s and included Debi Misra (author of *Bhārata artha dīpikā?*) and Chaturbhuj Misra (author of *Bhārata upāya prakāsaka bhārata tātparya prakāśikā*) from Bengal, Satavadana, Madhusudana Misra (editor of *Mahānātakam*), Rudra Bhattacharaj and Sheikh Bhawan (a Dakhini Brahmin convert). The selection shows Akbar’s awareness of the existence of the Bengal, Northern and Southern recensions. His orders were to establish exactitude so that nothing of the original would be lost. The work was often read aloud to him, followed by discussions. Badauni records that once Akbar lost his temper on hearing certain passages and accused him of inserting his own bigoted views. Thus, the fidelity of the Persian version to the original was carefully verified.⁹

What the editors of the CE have done now, Kālīprasanna Simha did in Calcutta by the age of 30 for his Bengali translation of the Mahābhārata (excluding *Harivaṃśa*, which he stated was clearly a much later composition) in 17 volumes (1858-1866) omitting and adding nothing. He had a team of 7 pundits. Manuscripts from the Asiatic Society, Shobhābāzār palace, the collections of Asutosh Deb, Jatindramohan Thākur and his own great-grandfather Shāntirāma Simha’s collection in Benares were collated. For resolving contradictions in the texts and making out the meaning of knotty slokas he was helped by Tārānātha Tarkavācaspati of the Calcutta Sanskrit Vidyamandir. Every evening the translation, as it progressed, was read out to prominent leaders of Hindu society.¹⁰

⁷ Adluri and Hildebeitel 2017 *ibid*.

⁸ Sen, S.K. 2008.

⁹ *Jaiminiya Aśvamedhaparva* 2008: 69; Bhattacharya *ibid*.

¹⁰ Bhattacharya 2010.

Thus, like the CE, both the late 16th century Persian version and the mid-19th century Bengali translation were prepared by collating Mahābhārata manuscripts from different regions. However, issues of repetition and inconsistency were not resolved in the Bengali translation. Without studying the *Razmnama* we cannot say what had been done there. One would expect that 20th century scholars would try to make good these lacunae. Instead, the CE contains contradictions that are the result of the rigid¹¹ application of the principle that whatever appeared in the largest number of manuscripts was to be included, irrespective of intra-textual consistency, which was rejected as “the realm of higher criticism.”¹² Yet, Sukthankar himself set aside his own cardinal principle when he chose to begin the CE text with the benedictory invocation, despite its absence from the entire Southern recension. His reason: all Hindu texts invariably began thus.¹³ No one has dared to criticise this departure.

Some unresolved contradictions and repetitions

Bankimchandra Chatterjee argued in his masterly *Krishnacharitra* (1886-1892):

“Those that contradict each other, of them one must necessarily be interpolated... No writer indulges in unnecessary repetition or creates a situation of contradiction through such repetition.”¹⁴

A good example of repetition is the two occasions on which Arjuna prevents Kṛṣṇa from killing Bhīṣma at VI.55 (the third day) and VI.102 (the ninth day). Lexical analysis suggests that the latter is added on, whereas the context suggests that the former is the addition. The CE editor sought to resolve this by

¹¹ Adluri and Hildebeitel, *op.cit.* plead for the word “rigorous” instead.

¹² Edgerton 1944: xxxiii.

¹³ Sukthankar 1930: 268-69 quoted by Adluri and Hildebeitel 2017 in press.

¹⁴ Chatterjee 1991: 61-62.

proposing that originally it was the third day that was the penultimate day of Bhīṣma's command and, therefore, he fought for only 4 not 10 days. His arguments are far from convincing.¹⁵

A few of the unresolved internal contradictions in the CE are enumerated below; these appear to be “passages, which were composed at a very early date and hence found time to creep into all versions,” writes Mehendale, but “the transmitters of the epic tradition...did (not) deliberately omit what they had received by tradition.” He explains that the CE retained these “since such contradictory passages occur uniformly in all the versions of both (North and South) recensions.” He adds that decisions about these “will be the task of later researchers who have to take recourse to *higher criticism* (emphasis mine).”¹⁶

- In the *Ādiparvan* (207.14), Arjuna visits Maṅalūra during his twelve-year long exile, while in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* (77.46) it is named Maṅipūra. The former indicates southern influence as Southern manuscripts locate Maṅalūra near Madurai and make Citrāṅgadā a Pāṇḍyan princess. One of these has to be emended as a scribal error by comparing with other references to Citrāṅgadā.
- According to the *Ādiparvan* (116.31), Mādrī mounted her husband's funeral pyre in the Himalayas. This is reiterated at 117.28. However, at the beginning of section 117 we find Kuntī and her sons entering Hastināpura with sages who have brought along the bodies of Pāṇḍu and Mādrī. Then, section 118 provides a description of their ornamented, anointed and perfumed bodies and states that Pāṇḍu's body looked as if he were alive. So, the corpses had been preserved for over 17 days (117.27)? Surely, either the corpses had been cremated in the Himalayas or they were brought to the capital for funeral, remaining un-decomposed for over a fortnight. One of these accounts is an interpolation.

¹⁵ Brockington 1998: 146.

¹⁶ Mehendale 2009: 15.

- In the *Sabhāparvan* (61. 35-38), Draupadī is dragged into the gaming hall and Karṇa directs Duḥśāsana, *pāṇḍavānām ca vāsāmsi draupadyāś cāpyupāhara*, “Strip the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī of their garments!” (61.38). Hearing this, the Pāṇḍavas cast off their *uttarīya* (upper garments). Duḥśāsana pulls at Draupadī’s single cloth in the midst of the assembly hall. However, almost nowhere subsequently is there any reference to the attempted stripping. We will examine this contradiction in depth.

The attempt to strip Draupadī

The CE omits Draupadī’s prayer to Kṛṣṇa for succour but not the miracle of unending garments. The *Sabhāparvan* editor, Edgerton, writes, ‘It is apparently implied (though not stated) that cosmic justice automatically, or “magically” if you like, prevented the chaste Draupadī from being stripped in public...later redactors felt it necessary to embroider the story.’¹⁷ The CE text reads thus in van Buitenen’s translation¹⁸ of II.61.40-42:-

“40. Then Duḥśāsana forcibly laid hold of Draupadī’s robe, O king, and in the midst of the assembly began to undress her.

41. But when her skirt was being stripped off, lord of the people, another similar skirt appeared every time.¹⁹

42. A terrible roar went up from all the kings, a shout of approval, as they watched that greatest wonder on earth.”

In the CE (II. 43-47) Bhīma vows to taste the blood of Duḥśāsana after he pulls at Draupadī’s sole cloth and a fresh one appears.

¹⁷ Edgerton 1944: xxix.

¹⁸ van Buitenen 1975: 146.

¹⁹ Why “skirt”? The Sanskrit is *vasana* and *vastram*. Deb Roy’s “garment” (2010, p. 235) is accurate.

As she is dragged from the inner apartments, Draupadī appeals to Duḥśāsana to refrain (II.60.25), as she is menstruating (*rajasvalāsmi*) and is clad in just a single cloth (*ekamca vāso*). Duḥśāsana responds that regardless of whether she is menstruating, wearing a single cloth (*ekāambarā*) or none (*vivastrā*), she is their prize and their slave, “And one lechers with slaves as the fancy befalls!” (van Buitenen, 60.27). As he shakes her about, there is a reference to half of her cloth slipping (*patitārdhavastrā* 60.28).²⁰ She pleads with Duḥśāsana again, “Don’t render me nude, do not debase me!” (*mā mām vivastrām kridhi mā vikārṣṭh*, 60.30). When she is dragged into the assembly hall, Bhīma notices that her upper cloth is slipping (*strastottariya*, 60.47). This refers to the portion of her garment covering her torso and not to a separate cloth for the upper-half of the body since she is *ekāambarā*. The painting commissioned specially for the CE shows, in the background, four Pāṇḍavas bare-bodied and Arjuna seated with his back to the scene, naked; in the foreground Duḥśāsana pulls at a single cloth wrapped around Draupadī.²¹

In the “Vulgate,”²² Draupadī calls out to *Govinda, Kṛṣṇa, Keśava Dvāarakāvāsin, Ramānātha, Janārdana Vrajanātha* and *Gopījanapriya*, the last two epithets indicating a post-*Harivaṁśa* addition by a poet familiar with Kṛṣṇa’s childhood dalliance with the milkmaids of Vraja as Bankimchandra Chatterjee noted back in 1886.²³ Kṛṣṇa springs up from his bed in Dvārakā and rushes on foot, deeply moved by Draupadī’s appeal, which reaches him telepathically.²⁴ This recurs when she, faced with Durvāsā’s untimely demand for food in the forest, invokes Kṛṣṇa. Referring to these two passages Sukthankar comments, “They undoubtedly represent a later phase of Kṛṣṇa worship.”²⁵ Some vernacular versions elaborate

²⁰ van Buitenen mistranslates this as “her half skirt drooping.”

²¹ It is not a skirt-cum-stole ensemble as van Buitenen’s translation has it, but a single cloth whose upper part covers the torso, as the sari does today.

²² Imported from Biblical scholarship referring to the popular Sanskrit text.

²³ Chatterjee 1991: 113, 247.

²⁴ Wilmot 2006: 68.45, 449.

²⁵ Sukthankar 1942: xiii note 1.

this further along the lines of the *gopī-vastraharāṇa* episode in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (X.22): so long as Draupadī clutches on to her sole covering there is no response to her outcries; it is only when she lets go and lifts her hands in total surrender that the miracle occurs.

How Draupadī's modesty was saved is hinted at in verse 544* in the footnotes of the CE, which might be the earliest interpolation:

“Yājñasenī cried out for rescue to Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari and Nara. Then Dharma, hidden, the magnanimous, covered her with a multitude of garments.”

This is repeated in 553*:

“Thereupon hundreds of garments of many colours and whites appeared, O lord, due to the protection of Dharma.”

These refer back to II.60.13 where, when summoned to the dicing hall, Draupadī reflects, “In this world Dharma alone is supreme. Observed, he will bring peace.”

The enigmatic statement gives rise to many speculations, one of which possibly led to the interpolated passage bringing in Kṛṣṇa as saviour along the lines of *yato dharmas tataḥ kṛṣṇo yataḥ kṛṣṇas tato jayaḥ* (VI.41.55). Further, the god Dharma incarnated as Vidura who was the first to protest against the dice-game and the summoning of Draupadī before the assembly. Does he, Dharma-incarnate, clothe her? Significantly, later in the *Udyogaparvan* when Kṛṣṇa reminds Saṁjaya of her sufferings, he refers to her casting piteous glances all around the hall to find only *kṣattā* Vidura as her protector, *nānyam kṣatturnāthamadrṣtam kañcit*, who alone spoke in condemnation, *ekaḥ kṣattā dharmyāmartham bruvāṇo* (V.29.33, 34). Or shall we imagine ‘Dharma’ as referring to the outraged sensibilities of the assembly who throw off their upper garments to cover Draupadī, as narrated in Ayyanappilla Asan's Malayali *Bharatam Pattu* (c.1500 CE, contemporary with the CE's

manuscripts)?²⁶ Ultimately, as Duḥśāsana tires, evil omens erupt—jackals howl and asses bray—whereupon Gāndhārī and Vidura succeed in persuading Dhṛtarāṣṭra to intervene.

Hiltebeitel (2001)²⁷ argues that Kṛṣṇa’s intervention to protect Draupadī’s modesty is very much envisaged in the CE, citing two verses from the *Udyogaparvan* in which Draupadī, exhorting Keśava (V.80.26), and Kṛṣṇa speaking to Saṁjaya (V.58.21), refer to her appeal, “O Govinda,” for rescue. He admits that neither Draupadī nor Kṛṣṇa mentions the attempted stripping. If, then, Draupadī was not being stripped, why should Kṛṣṇa have intervened miraculously? Moreover, when they meet for the first time after the dice-duel in the forest-exile, Draupadī specifically mentions having been manhandled, *kṛṣyeta* (III.13.60), and “dragged around in their hall with my one piece of clothing” while menstruating (*stridharminī vepamānā śonitena samukṣitā / ekavastrā vikṛiṣṭāsmi duḥkhitā kurusamsadī // III.13.68*), being “molested,” *parikliśyantīm* (III.13.107) and “laid hold of by my hair” *kacagrahamanuprāptā* (III.13.107, 109). However, she makes no mention of any attempt to strip her. Kṛṣṇa responds that, *had he been present*, he would have prevented the fraudulent dice-game, but he was far away battling Śālva who had sacked Dvārakā (III.14.1). He mentions neither any attempt to strip her, nor any appeal from her reaching him—telepathically or otherwise. In his 1976 study on the burning of the forest, Hiltebeitel wrote that the CE is not to be followed blindly.²⁸ Here he is doing precisely that.

Other Evidence

1. At the very beginning of the Mahābhārata in the *Anukramanikā Parvan*, Dhṛtarāṣṭra laments that Draupadī

²⁶ Asan 1988: 222.

²⁷ Hiltebeitel 2001: 246-259.

²⁸ Brockington 1998: 139.

was dragged into the assembly hall but does not mention any attempt to strip her:-

*yadāśrauṣaṁ draupadīm aśrukaṅṭhīm; sabhām nītām
duḥkhitām ekavastrām /
rajasvalām nāthavatīm anāthavat; tadā nāśamse
vijayāya saṁjaya //*

“When I heard that Draupadī, tears in her throat, had been dragged into the assembly hall grieving, in a single garment, and she in her period, while her protectors stood by as though she had no one to protect her– then, Saṁjaya, I lost all hope of victory.” (I.1.106, van Buitenen).

2. Nor does he refer to Bhīma’s vow to drink Duḥśāsana’s blood. Arguing that the vow is a subsequent addition, Bhatt writes that this is “wonderfully supported by the omission of the event from the summary of the Karṇa Parvan given in the well-known Parva-saṅgraha Parvan.”²⁹
3. In the *Virāṭaparvan*, Draupadī, while lamenting her condition before Bhīma, refers only to a *prātikāmin* (servant/messenger) dragging her into the hall by her hair and being called a *dāsī* (IV.17.2).
4. Aśvatthāmā refers to the incident (IV.45.11-12) while reprimanding Karṇa for boasting: “Likewise, where was the battle in which you won Kṛṣṇā? In her single garment she was dragged into the hall, miscreant, when she was in her month, *ekavastrā sabhāyām nītā duṣṭakarmanā rajasvalā*” (van Buitenen).
5. Arjuna upbraids Karṇa: “You watched how evil men molested (*kliśyamānām*) the Princess of Pāñcāla in the assembly hall” (IV.55.4), but he does not mention the ultimate outrage of his command that she be stripped, or even to his abusing her as a prostitute.
6. In the *Udyogaparvan* (V.29.31, 33) when Kṛṣṇa mentions to Saṁjaya the atrocities suffered, he refers only to Duḥśāsana dragging menstruating Draupadī into the hall before elders.

²⁹ Bhatt 1951: 172.

7. Whenever Yudhiṣṭhira recounts the sufferings they have undergone, he always mentions Draupadī having been dragged by her hair, but never to any attempt to strip her. In his message to Duryodhana through Saṁjaya, he refers only to her hair being violated in the hall, *keṣesv adharṣayat* (V.31.16).
8. When Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas consult before the peace-embassy (V.70-79) they do not mention avenging any attempted stripping. Of them, Arjuna alone speaks of Draupadī's trials and this is limited to "how that fiend molested Draupadī in the middle of the hall" *parikliṣṭā sabhāmadhye* (V.76.18).
9. Even when Draupadī herself, furious with everyone favouring peace, lists her sufferings (V.80. 24, 26), "grabbed by the hair and molested in a men's hall" (*sāham keśagraham prāptā parikliṣṭā sabhām gatā*) and states how she invoked Govinda mentally for succour (*trāhi māmiti govinda manasā kamṣito 'si me*), she does not mention any attempt to strip her, although that would have been the sharpest goad to spur them into battle.
10. In his embassy to the Hastināpura court when Kṛṣṇa tells Dhṛtarāṣṭra all the suffering Duryodhana has imposed on the Pāṇḍavas, including dragging Draupadī into the court (V.93.58), he makes no mention of the attempt to strip her, which would have been the greatest crime.
11. When Kṛṣṇa rebukes Duryodhana during the peace embassy, enumerating all his ill deeds, he refers to his abusing and maltreating (*vinikṛtā*) the queen of the Pāṇḍavas (V.126.8-9), but makes no mention of the supreme outrage of attempting to strip her.
12. Kuntī, listing her sorrows to Kṛṣṇa several times over, laments that her greatest sorrow is Draupadī being abused verbally and molested (*parikliṣṭā*), dragged into the assembly hall draped in a single cloth while menstruating, but does not mention any attempt at stripping her daughter-in-law, which would surely have been the greatest torment by far (V.88.50, 56; 85-86; 135.15-18, 21).

13. Ghaṭotkaca, assailing Duryodhana, charges him for dragging and insulting Draupadī in her period in a single garment in the assembly-hall, with no mention of attempted stripping (VI.87.26).
14. The *Karṇaparvan* begins with the Kauravas musing over how they dragged and demeaned Draupadī. Dhṛtarāṣṭra tells Saṁjaya how his son had the wife of the Pāṇḍavas violently brought into the assembly where Karṇa abused her as “Wife of slaves” (*dāsabhāryeti* VIII.5.79). Although at different stages in the battle Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Bhīma, Duḥśāsana and Kṛṣṇa all recall the dragging and insulting of Draupadī, none refers to any attempt to strip her.
15. In the *Karṇaparvan* verses relegated in the CE to footnotes (VIII.61.934* and 935*), when Bhīma rips off the arm with which Duḥśāsana boasts he had dragged Draupadī by her hair, neither refers to the grosser outrage of attempting to strip her.
16. When Kṛṣṇa recounts Karṇa’s misdeeds to goad Arjuna into killing him, he refers to single-cloth-clad, menstruating Draupadī being summoned to the *sabhā* and mocked (VIII.67.2-3), but does not refer to Karṇa instigating any stripping, which would have surely been the sharpest goad to spur him on.
17. Bhīma enumerates Draupadī being dragged by her hair among the sufferings imposed by Shakuni, Duryodhana and Karṇa but not any attempted disrobing (Vulgate, VIII.83.46).
18. At the end of the war, when Yudhiṣṭhira provokes Duryodhana to emerge from Dvaipāyana lake, he mentions Draupadī being verbally abused and dragged, but says nothing about any attempted disrobing (IX.30.187*).
19. Bhīma, while kicking Duryodhana’s head, refers only to single-garment-draped Draupadī being mocked in the hall, not to any attempted stripping (IX.58.4).
20. Even at the very end, in the *Svargārohaṇaparvan*, Yudhiṣṭhira, outraged on seeing Duryodhana in heaven, refers to his having caused Pāñcālī to be afflicted, *parikliṣṭā* (XVIII.1.9) in the *sabhā*, but nothing more.

Adluri and Hildebeitel peremptorily dismiss the evidence of the passages involving Duryodhana as “karmically irrelevant” because of a philosophical proposition “that blame-casting must necessarily be agent-specific in a karmic universe.” This is resorting to the same “higher criticism” which they frown upon instead of tackling the contradictory evidence. They also feel that some of the others are “broadly worded enough to include an allusion to the disrobing,” though they do not explain this.³⁰

Textual disconnect

Satya Chaitanya’s study of the sequence of events brings to light a major hiatus in the text.³¹ A similar disconnect can be found in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* where the text-block VI.95.4-23 repeats the portion at 16.11-20+42.2, indicating an adding-on of verses 16.21 to 42.1.³² In Draupadī’s case, after Duḥśāsana failed in his attempt, ‘The people shouted, “The Kauravyas refuse to answer the question,” and condemned Dhṛtarāṣṭra’ (II.61.50). This refers to Draupadī’s question to the assembly (II.60.44), repeated at II.62.13, which remains unanswered in the epic. Strangely enough, the audience neither censures the king for allowing the attempted stripping, nor criticises Duḥśāsana for making the attempt. Even more puzzling is everyone’s silence about the unending stream of cloth, whether emanating from Dharma or Kṛṣṇa. Instead, Vidura’s speech, which follows, states that Draupadī is awaiting a reply to her question, weeping like an orphan (II.61.52). Surely, Vidura would have been the first to protest against any attempt to disrobe Draupadī publicly and to extol her miraculous escape in response to her appeal to Kṛṣṇa? It is significant that he refers neither to Vikarṇa’s response in support of Draupadī nor to Karṇa rebuking him and directing that she should be stripped. *It is as though these speeches have not happened at all.* We have noted above that even Kṛṣṇa, while

³⁰ Adluri and Hildebeitel *op. cit.*

³¹ Satya Chaitanya 2005.

³² Brockington 1998: 147.

listing Karṇa's misdeeds, does not mention his having ordered the disrobing (VIII.67.2-3). The sequence of events indicates that *originally there was no hiatus* between Draupadī's query and Vidura's exhortation to the assembly to provide an answer. Whatever we find now, in-between, is a subsequent addition.

There are three parallel accounts of Draupadī's coming to the dicing hall in chapter 60, which need to be reconciled.³³

1. Duryodhana sends the *prātikāmin* to fetch her but she sends him back with a question to Yudhiṣṭhira.
2. Duryodhana sends him again to tell her to come and state her case in person. She, thereupon, expresses her faith in Dharma.
3. Now in slokas 14-15 Yudhiṣṭhira sends his trusted attendant to her, whereupon she appears in the hall.
4. But in sloka 16 onwards Duryodhana asks the *prātikāmin* to fetch her and, on his hesitating, orders Duḥśāsana to do so. He, then, drags her by her hair into the hall.

The accounts at 3 and 4 are contradictory and the latter has possibly been added subsequently along with Bhīma's blood-drinking vow for greater dramatic effect.³⁴

What happens thereafter?

1. When Draupadī herself speaks, after Karṇa bids Duḥśāsana take her away to the Kaurava apartments, she voices her bewilderment at being dragged into the assembly but utters not a word about any attempt to strip her, which is most unnatural. Nor does she refer to Kṛṣṇa's response to her prayer and the abject failure of the attempt to disrobe her (II.62.1-14), about which Hildebeitel is insistent.

³³ Bhatt 1951: 176-177.

³⁴ Mehendale 2005 shows the vow is an interpolation.

2. Subsequently, disturbed by the ominous howling of beasts, when Vidura and Gāndhārī press Dhṛtarāṣṭra to intervene, neither refers to any attempted disrobing (II.63.24).
3. Dhṛtarāṣṭra rebukes his son for his wicked speech to *dharmapatni* Draupadī, but not for any heinous attempt to strip her.
4. Even the vow that Bhīma makes refers to her hair having been touched, *parāmr̥ṣya* (II.62.34), while Nakula's vow mentions her being verbally abused, *yairvācaḥ śrāvītā rukṣāḥ* (II.68.43). Neither refers to any attempt to disrobe her, which would surely have been the gravest provocation for swearing vengeance.
5. When Draupadī proceeds on exile, she is described as wearing a bloodstained cloth (II.70.9). If Kṛṣṇa or Dharma had continuously replaced what Duḥśāsana kept pulling away, how could she still be wearing this cloth stained with menstrual blood?
6. In the last chapter of the *Sabhāparvan* Dhṛtarāṣṭra laments that they “dragged the wretched Draupadī to the middle of the hall...clothed in her single garment, stained with blood... Duryodhana and Karṇa threw biting insults at the suffering Kṛṣṇā” (van Buitenen II.72.12-18). There is no mention of what should have been the greatest crime: the attempted disrobing and its miraculous failure.
7. Dhṛtarāṣṭra also tells Saṁjaya (II.72.19-20) that the Bharata women and Gāndhārī cried out in anguish and Brahmins did not perform the *sandhyā* rituals on the day of the dice game, furious with the dragging of Draupadī. Again, there is no reference to disrobing.³⁵
8. In the *Vanaparvan*, Saṁjaya repeats his master's word *parikarṣaṇe* to describe the outrage but makes no mention of disrobing.
9. P. L. Vaidya, editor of the CE's *Karnaparvan*, held that a verse referring to her being stripped (VIII.85.15) was an interpolation and left it out of the CE text.³⁶

³⁵ Satya Chaitanya, *ibid.*

³⁶ Bhatt 1951: 174

Hiltebeitel has overlooked two confirmations of stance in the *Śalyaparvan*. J. D. Smith³⁷ pointed out to me that as “Bhīma is gloating after fulfilling his vow to overthrow Duryodhana and tread on his head,” he says,

“Those who brought the menstruating Draupadī and who made her naked (*avastrām*) in the assembly-see those Dhārtarāṣṭras slain in battle by the Pāṇḍavas because of the torture on Yājñasenī.” (IX.58.10)

Yet, in an earlier verse (IX.58.4), while kicking Duryodhana’s head, Bhīma refers only to Draupadī clad in a single garment being mocked in the hall, not to any attempted stripping. Smith acknowledges that a contradiction exists, but is helpless because of the principle followed by the CE: “...it is strange that Bhīma says this at this point and does not say anything similar after fulfilling the more relevant vow against Duḥśāsana. But again, this is what the text actually says.”³⁸

Secondly, earlier on in the same *parvan* (IX.4.16-17) Duryodhana tells Kṛpācārya that there is no point in seeking peace because,

*duḥśāsanena yat kṛṣṇā ekavastrā rajasvalā
parikliṣṭā sabhāmadhye sarvalokasya paśyataḥ
tathā vivasanām dīnām smaranty adyāpi pāṇḍavāḥ
na nivārayituṃ śakyāḥ saṃgrāmāt te paramtapāḥ*
“Wearing a single cloth and covered in dust, dark Draupadī was wronged by Duḥśāsana in the middle of the assembly hall under the eyes of the entire world. Even today the Pāṇḍavas still remember how she was naked (*vivasanām*) and wretched (*dīnām*); those enemy-destroyers cannot be turned from war.”³⁹

³⁷ Professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge and author of the abridged Penguin translation of the Mahabharata. He maintains the online digital text of the CE.

³⁸ J.D. Smith, personal communication.

³⁹ Meiland 2005: 77.

This is the solitary reference retained in the CE to *Draupadī* *having been stripped naked* (not to an *attempt* to strip her), but it is devoid of any mention of re-clothing. *That implies that she remained naked thereafter and there was no miracle of endless garments.* On the other hand, all recensions of the text agree that she proceeds on exile wearing a bloodstained garment.

This prompts examination of the annotations, which reveals that some manuscripts have *vīmanasā* (dejected, bewildered) instead of *vivasanā*. *Vīmanasā* is textually more consistent with Duryodhana's description of her condition in the earlier line (*parikliṣṭā*), but the editors of the CE did not accept this reading that is more consistent with what has gone before and comes after. Thus, they ended up with a text that renders *Draupadī* naked without any re-clothing.

There has been no attempt to reconcile these contradictions although the overwhelming evidence is weighted against any incident of trying to disrobe *Draupadī*.

Collateral Evidence

1. The earliest post-*Mahābhārata* evidence is in the plays of the first Sanskrit dramatist Bhāsa: *Dūtavākya*, *Dūtaghaṭotkacā* and *Ūrubhaṅga* (c. 4th century BC-1st century CE?).
 - In the first, Duryodhana displays to Kṛṣṇa a vivid painting of the dice-game showing *draupadī keśāmbarākarṣaṇam*, “*Draupadī* dragged by the hair and garment” (prose passage following sloka 6) and *duḥśāsano draupadīm keśa haste grihītavān*, “*Duḥśāsana* seizing *Draupadī*'s hair in his hand” (prose passage preceding sloka 7). Kṛṣṇa exclaims, *draupadī keśadharsaṇam* “*Draupadī*'s hair being violated!” In 1916 Winternitz, comparing Bhāsa's *Dūtavākya* with the *Mahābhārata*, demonstrated that Kṛṣṇa's re-clothing of

- Draupadī was an interpolation introduced after the 4th century CE.⁴⁰
- In the second play, Ghaṭotkaca upbraids Duryodhana saying, *śirasi na tathā bhrātuḥ patniṃ sprśanti niśācarāḥ*, “nor do night-wanderers (Rākṣasas) ever touch the brother’s wife on the head” (sloka 47), referring to her having been dragged by her hair. This is an echo of what he says in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* VI.87.26.
 - In the third play, Duryodhana says, *yat kṛṣṭā karanigrahāñcitakacā dyūte tadā draupadī*, “How Draupadī was dragged by the hair in the dicing” (sloka 63).⁴¹
2. Rājaśekhara’s *Bālabhārata* (c. 10th century CE) is unaware of the re-clothing of Draupadī by Kṛṣṇa.⁴²
 3. Neither the Vaishnava Bhakti cult’s *Bhāgavata*, nor the appendix to the epic, *Harivamśa*, mentions any attempted stripping, despite their focus on the miraculous deeds of Kṛṣṇa. The former refers only to the heinous act of the Kuru lady being dragged by her hair (*keśabhimarśam*) in the assembly hall but not to Kṛṣṇa rescuing her miraculously from being stripped (I. 86; I. 15.10; III.1.7; XI.1.2.).
 4. In the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāṇa* Janamejaya refers twice only to Draupadī being dragged by her hair (IV.1.36 and 17.38), using the word *dharsitā* (IV.1.38), which also means “violated”, for what Kīcaka did to her. Yudhiṣṭhira uses the same word while giving Saṃjaya his message, *keśeṣv adharṣayat* (*Mahābhārata*, V.31.16).
 5. It is later, in the *Śiva Purāṇa* (c. 11th century CE) that we find a reference to the incident (III.19.63-66). Here the stream of garments is the result of Durvāsā’s boon to Draupadī for having torn off part of her dress to protect the sage’s modesty when his loincloth was swept away in the Ganga.⁴³ Kṛṣṇa plays no role in this. There is also the popular tale of Draupadī binding up his bleeding finger with a strip of her

⁴⁰ Brockington 1998: 258 note 53; Dhavalikar 1992: 523.

⁴¹ Menon 1996: 266-677, 274, 332, 411.

⁴² Brockington 1998: 490.

⁴³ Dange 2001: 231.

garment because of which he provides her an endless stream of cloth in the dicing hall.⁴⁴

6. Satya Chaitanya⁴⁵ has pointed out that the *Jaiminīya Aśvamedhaparvan* again a late work (c. 10th-12th century AD), carries a reference to the disrobing (2.62). Here Kṛṣṇa pays the Pāṇḍavas a surprise visit as they are wondering how to go about the horse-sacrifice. Draupadī says that they ought not to be surprised because earlier Kṛṣṇa had appeared to save them from Durvāsā and, “Before that, Hari appeared in the form of clothes in the assembly (*vastrarūpī sabhāmadhye*) to save me from shame.”⁴⁶ We have noted above Sukthankar’s rejection of both incidents as interpolations.
7. Adluri and Hildebeitel have sought to bolster their argument in favour of the disrobing episode by citing a painting of the incident possibly by Nainsukh (c. 1760/65). On the other hand, the much older sculpture in the Hoysaleswara temple in Halebidu (c. 12th century) reproduced below only depicts Draupadī being held by her hair, one person approaching her while another restrains the male tormentor.⁴⁷



Draupadī being held by her hair. (c. 12th Century)

⁴⁴ Hildebeitel 1988: 226-27.

⁴⁵ Satya Chaitanya *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Jaiminīya Aśvamedha Parva* 2008: 90.

⁴⁷ Indrajit Bandyopadhyay 2013.

We do not find any depiction of the dice game in sculpture or painting after this until we come to Akbar's *Razmnama* (1598-99). It is here that, for the first time, the stripping of Draupadi is portrayed. That is why comparing its text with the Sanskrit manuscripts is so important.



Draupadī being stripped in the dice-game by Sangha, son of Surdas, dispersed Razmnama (1598-99)

Conclusion

To sum up, intra-textual evidence supporting the attempt to strip Draupadī is available in only two passages in the *Śalyaparvan* (IX.4.16-17 and IX.58.10), of which the former has a more consistent variant reading available. Even these do not refer to her being re-clothed, whether by Kṛṣṇa or otherwise. The passages upon which Hildebeitel depends refer only to her having invoked Govinda in her distress, but not to any disrobing-and-re-robing. With overwhelming consistency (*at*

least 27 times), the text refers only to her being dragged by her hair into the royal assembly-hall while in her period, wearing a single bloodstained cloth and being insulted. *She leaves on exile wearing the same bloody garment.* Further, there is no mention of the attempted disrobing in early Sanskrit literature. It is only a couple of late texts that mention the attempt and how it was aborted miraculously.

Both the internal and the external evidence, therefore, indicate that the incident of attempted stripping that has ruled the popular imagination so powerfully, featuring on stage, in paintings, films and television as the fuse that detonated the explosion destroying the Kshatriya clans, is a later addition by one or more highly competent redactors.⁴⁸ That would imply that the three verses (II.61.40-42) retained in the CE, quoted at the beginning of this paper, are part of the interpolation that the editors rejected.

Janamejaya, who is listening to the recital, is familiar with only one version in which Draupadī was dragged, not stripped (cf. the *Devi Bhāgavata Purāna* above). That is why he never questions Vaiśampāyana about the contradictory accounts about how Draupadī was outraged.⁴⁹ How is this “the kind of ideologically motivated, idiosyncratic” approach that Adluri and Hildebeitel condemn so vehemently?⁵⁰

Revising the Critical Edition

The first scholar to have expressed serious reservations about the CE was Sylvain Levi, the doyen of French Indologists, who argued in favour of using the Nīlakaṇṭha text showing all other

⁴⁸ Bhatt 1951: p. 178: “The examination of the whole evidence available...leads us to the irresistible conclusion that the Dv. (Draupadīvastraharaṇa) episode did not form part of the original epic...”.

⁴⁹ I am indebted to Simon Brodbeck for this insight.

⁵⁰ They write, referring to me: ‘uses the self-designation “mythographer,”’ “ideology-cally motivated, idiosyncratic... unphilosophical and unthinking approaches,” “vapid arguments,” “most senseless examples” in Adluri & Hildebeitel *op. cit.*

variants alongside.⁵¹ It is interesting that the Clay Sanskrit Library's translation of the MB follows that text and not the CE.

Madeleine Biardeau, questions Sukthankar's basic premise that the Śārada version is the genuine product just because it is the shortest and apparently earliest. She writes, "I do not give much heuristic value to the reconstituted text of the critical edition of Poona."⁵² She felt the editors were blindly devoted to an outdated German philological approach. She is the first to ask bluntly why the text should be dated between 4th c. BC and the end of the 4th c. AD. Another French scholar, Georges Dumezil, preferred the Calcutta edition to the CE.⁵³

Doniger, calling the CE "no text at all,"⁵⁴ urges, "...any structural analysis of the epic would of course demand all available variants of the text."⁵⁵ Mincing no words she writes, "The critical edition...is like Frankenstein's monster, pieced together from various scraps of different bodies; its only community is that of the Pune scholars, the Frankensteins."⁵⁶

Lipner criticizes the imposition of the Western paradigm of a "critical edition" based upon a supposed "original version" since "popular oral tradition...which is the very lifeblood of Hinduism, does not work in this way...the text itself transcends the critical edition both as sacred narrative...and as a seed-bed for the literary imagination."⁵⁷

Arvind Sharma comments, "...it is clear that, at every step, the idea of a critical text seems to go against the grain of the tradition— it is an example of *pratiloma* Indology."⁵⁸

Brodbeck has pointed out the basic flaw in the assumption of the CE, viz. that scribes only add to and do not subtract from texts they copy. There is a case for re-examining the decisions

⁵¹ Levi, Sylvain. 1929. Review of the CE in *Journal Asiatique* 215: 345-48, quoted in Hildebeitel 2011: 17.

⁵² Biardeau 1997: 85-86.

⁵³ Hildebeitel op. cit. p. 17.

⁵⁴ O'Flaherty, W. D. 1978:22 quoted in Hildebeitel 2011: 16.

⁵⁵ O'Flaherty, W.D. 1978 *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Doniger, Wendy. "How to escape from the Curse." *London Review of Books* 32/19:17-18 quoted in Hildebeitel 2011 *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Lipner 2010: 148-149.

⁵⁸ Sharma 2008.

of the CE's editors about both including as well as leaving out passages.⁵⁹

Hiltebeitel has argued strenuously that Belvalkar, editor of the CE's *Śāntiparvan*, made a mistake in following the Malayalam manuscripts to alter the frame narrative as well as splitting a section into two, changing the *Nārāyaṇīya*'s ideal 18 sections (an epitome of the MB's structure, like the *Gītā*) to 19.⁶⁰ This smacks of the "higher criticism" he disapproves of so much.

Purushothaman has shown very recently that the CE of the *Harivaṃśa* contains major errors that call for major revision.⁶¹

Instead of regarding the CE as sacrosanct and arguing that we ought to accept that the epic knows of two versions of the outrage Draupadī suffered, we surely need to weigh the comparative evidence delineated above and then decide which way the scales dip. It is time to re-examine the CE adopting the "higher criticism" route. Even Brockington, who has subjected both epics to minute analysis under the lexical microscope, has come to a conclusion that echoes the "higher criticism" approach.⁶²

Use has not been made of the valuable guidance available in Sri Aurobindo's notes written in 1902. He approached the epic "from the point of view mainly of style and literary personality, partly of substance" deferring "questions of philosophy, allusion and verbal evidence" and ignoring "the question of minute metrical details on which they (Western scholars) base far-reaching conclusions."⁶³ Submitting everything to the ultimate test of style, he identified that the *Sabhāparvan* carries "the hand of the original poet...that great and severe style which is the stamp of the personality of Vyāsa" and stated that, except

⁵⁹ Brodbeck 2013.

⁶⁰ Hiltebeitel 2011: 192-4.

⁶¹ A. Purushothaman: "Why *Harivaṃśa* calls itself the *Khila* of Mahabharata – A Critique of the BORI Critical Edition of *Harivaṃśa*." Paper presented at the Mahabharata Manthan international conference of the Draupadi Dream Trust, 19-21 July, 2017.

⁶² Bhattacharya 2003 on Brockington 2000.

⁶³ Sri Aurobindo 2007:11-13, 68. Western Indologists have even dated the epic from the single occurrence of words like *suranga* (from the Greek *suringsks?*), *antakhim* (Antioch?) and *roma* (Rome?) cf. CE 02028049a *antākhīm caiva romām ca yavanānām puram tathā*.

for certain passages, the *Virātaparvan* and *Udyogaparvan* were also Vyāsa's work.⁶⁴ As an example he quotes from the former (IV.16.9) Draupadī's outcry to the sleeping Bhīma,

*uttiṣṭhottīṣṭha kim śeṣe bhīmasena yathā mṛtaḥ /
nāmṛtasya hi pāpīyān bhāryām ālabhya jīvati //*

He writes, "The whole personality of Draupadie breaks out in that cry, her chastity, her pride, her passionate and unforgiving temper, but it flashes out not in an expression of pure feeling, but in a fiery and pregnant apophthegm. It is this temperament, this dynamic force of intellectualism blended with heroic fire and a strong personality that gives its peculiar stamp to Vyasa's writing and distinguishes it from that of all other epic poets."⁶⁵ Similar is Kṛṣṇa's exhortation in the *Udyogaparvan* (V.73) for shaking Bhīma out of his pacifist mood.

It is remarkable that this selection of verses on stylistic criteria as pristine Vyāsa is matched by their inclusion in the CE many decades later on the basis of manuscript evidence. Surely, where two approaches agree, there is adequate justification for giving equal weight to each. Brockington has urged the need for "a coordinated approach to a particular text. This is where in particular the future lies...different approaches can be combined in order to provide greater illumination."⁶⁶

Sri Aurobindo pointed out that there is also the hand of an inferior poet clearly visible who delights in the miraculous and whose style is highly coloured.⁶⁷ This stylistic difference is apparent in the *Sabhāparvan* in the portion beginning with Vikarṇa's speech and ending with the miraculous re-clothing of Draupadī. In addition, we have to take into account Kṛṣṇa's assertion – consistently borne out in the epic – that he can do all that a man can, but the miraculous is beyond him:⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo 2007: 28. He brings out the features distinguishing Vyāsa's style at length with examples.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 47.

⁶⁶ Brockington 1998: 525.

⁶⁷ Sri Aurobindo 2007: 13.

⁶⁸ Chatterjee 1991: 210.

*aham hi tat kariṣyāmi param puruṣakārataḥ /
daivam tu na mayā śakyam karma kartum katham cana
//V.77.5*

Incidents like those involving Durvāsā in the forest and the re-robing of Draupadī are inconsistent with this. “If we find grave inconsistencies of character...we are justified in supposing two hands at work.”⁶⁹ Therefore, on the grounds of both style, content and textual consistency, the incident is liable to be considered as the work of a different, later, poet. In 1916 Winternitz showed that Kṛṣṇa’s re-clothing of Draupadī was an interpolation.⁷⁰ In 1949, in a different way, G.H. Bhatt argued for the same conclusion at the 15th All-India Oriental Conference, Bombay.⁷¹

L. M. Singhvi,⁷² writing in 2008, recommended “another encyclopedic project of preparing a comprehensive Mahābhārata Bibliography in all the Indian languages as well as other European and Asian languages.” Strongly endorsing the views of Bankimchandra and Sri Aurobindo regarding the stylistic layers in the Mahābhārata, he urged:-

The rigid exclusion and abandonment of the Ugrasrava recension and some of the later additions and accretions would be ruinous. What we need is a continuous discourse of scholarship and a host of scholarly guides to tell us of the architectonics of the Mahābhārata and the historical and literary background of different accretions, additions and interpolations.... (that) represent the history as well as legend and myth of India and the confluence of the so called classical and the folk. The interwoven tapestry of MB made it a veritable people’s Epic reflecting the social and cultural reality of different

⁶⁹ Sri Aurobindo 2007: 12.

⁷⁰ Note 30 above.

⁷¹ Note 23 above.

⁷² Singhvi 2008: “Mahabharata: texts and contexts in a perspective”. *Neo Indika, Bharatayan*, essays in honour of P.D. and S.S. Halvasiya, vol. 1. Ed. Dr Vasudev Poddar. Rai Bahadur Vishweshwarlal Motilal Halvasiya Trust, 15 India Exchange Place, Kolkata-700001.

periods of Indian history and different perceptions of the Indian people at different stages.”

An example of the need for this is seen in Hildebeitel’s comment in *Dharma* (2011) that Aśvaghōṣa’s reference in *Buddhacarita* to Karālanaka is “unknown and uncertain,”⁷³ whereas a discourse with this king exists in the *Mokṣadharmā Parvan* of the MB in the Haridāsa Siddhāntavāgīśa edition⁷⁴ which the CE has not covered. In his recent book on nonviolence in the MB Hildebeitel (2016) uses the story of rishi Parṇāda in deer form and the gleaner Satya which is not in the CE, taking it from “the northern Vulgate of the seventeenth-century compiler Nilakantha.” He even suggests that the tale was inserted by Nilakantha, concluding that with such “improvisations” the MB “both as text and tradition...puts both ahimsa and gleaning into the consciousness and unconscious of Hindus.”⁷⁵ That reminds us of Sukthankar’s insertion of the invocatory benediction into the CE violating his own editorial principles.

Surely, the CE is not beyond all question! Even with the Bible, after the Authorised Version (1604-11) there was the Revised Version (1881-94) followed by further revised editions. It is the German philological approach to the Bible that was adopted in preparing the CE, labelling the others as “Vulgate” as in the case of the Biblical project. The central problem lies in mapping the inter-relationships among manuscripts. Wendy Phillips-Rodriguez has put forward a fascinating schema called “uprooted trees” like the *Gītā*’s cosmic tree whose roots are upwards and branches downwards. Through this paradigm she finds that the southern manuscripts are more widely dispersed than the northern, indicating their independent evolution. This upside-down tree model opens up the study of the epic’s variations as having “an independent cultural value”. Very pertinently she asks, “Why privilege one version over the others?”⁷⁶ The variations are separate interpretations, and the

⁷³ Hildebeitel 2011: 636 n. 34.

⁷⁴ Bhattacharya 2016.

⁷⁵ Hildebeitel 2016: 31.

⁷⁶ Phillips-Rodriguez, Wendy 2012: 228.

study of how each evolved will enable greater understanding of the cultural roots of the epic.

The Revised Edition announced by the BORI, however, raises concerns.⁷⁷ Their website states:-

“Revisions to the edition will be limited to incorporating the addenda and corrigenda for each volume into the text and either correcting or pointing out minor errors in the editor’s apparatus or comments (*e.g.*, misprints, dittographies, confusion of manuscript sigla, etc.). The edition will not undertake to revise the constituted text nor will it emend the form of the edition.”⁷⁸

The editors, V. Adluri and J. Bagchee, declared in an international conference⁷⁹ that they regarded themselves as custodians of “the scribal tradition” and would not look into questions of what manuscripts were not consulted nor editorial errors (as seen particularly in the *Harivaṃśa*).

It is time, however, to take another look at the CE taking into account not only the manuscripts left out, but also the contents of the adaptations in Arabic and Persian that pre-date or are contemporary with the manuscripts, as well as ancient commentaries that have much to reveal regarding the state of the text. The findings of Mehendale, Dhavalikar, Bhatt, Brockington and Purushothaman cannot be ignored.

⁷⁷ The editors are V. Adluri of Hunter College USA and J. Bagchee of Freie Universität Berlin.

⁷⁸ <http://www.bori.ac.in/Mahabharata-Project-Revised-Second-Edition.html> accessed on 19th June 2017.

⁷⁹ Draupadi Dream Trust’s *Mahabharata Manthan*, 19-21 July 2017 on “Mahabharata: A Critical Revisit to the Tangible & Intangible Heritage” at New Delhi.

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