

Original Article

The Second Pandava: A Manifestation of Socio-Political Exclusion

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Caste practices dates back to Vedic period. Having placed the practices as traditional, it takes a static stature in India. Even when it is earmarked as a social construct, caste, today governs political schemas. Structured caste hierarchy determines the ideologies of communities. The inclusion or exclusion of a community is a political act. In an effort to build dalit consciousness, dalit icons from oral and folk narratives have been reinventing minor characters. Re-readings questioned and ruptured the dominance of brahmanic narrative. A methodical deciphering renders the fidget of power. A structural perspective of the epics unveils the crude entrails of power that define and delimit categories. In the politics of knowledge creation and dissemination, power determines what is to be foregrounded and backgrounded.

The period of the epic is estimated to be between 1000BC to 500 AD, which in Indian history is the 'janapada' period – the age of tribal settlements. Hence it was essential to dominate themselves to emerge as supreme. Different jurisprudential treatise were adopted to position themselves politically. The doctrine of danda (punishment, restraint, or sanction) lies behind the predominant egalitarian philosophies such as 'Doctrine of mamatva' ("mine "-ness) or svatva (suum) and 'the doctrine of dharma' (i. e. law, justice and duty). The whole hindu philosophy of sovereignty lies here. The lower ones tend to usurp the rights of others and violate morals and manners. another. "Men, we are told, normally acknowledge only one right, and that is the right of the might" (Sarkar 83). But the right of the might alone does not fetch political recognition.

The focal point of the Mahabharata is power. With the archetypal sensibilities on the victorious faction as always virtuous, their social or ruling order is sacralized. But considering the magnitude and amplitude of space and time and the ambivalence of oral tradition from which the epic has sprung, one cannot read it at its face value. Political diatribes are shielded by ruminating on dharma. 'Varnasramadharma' – stratification based on one's 'varna' -is upheld in the grand narrative. Krishna advocates and convinces Arjuna to wield weapon by accentuating varnasramadharma when he is disheartened at the commencement of war. He reminds Arjuna of the duties of a Kshatriya- to fight and ensure justice. Language becomes conducive for exercising power. Adequacy at language emanate as an agency of power. It contrives, "as political rhetoric and demagogic, as ideology and bedazzlement, as seduction through words, as persuasion" (Die-Macht Der Sprache). Readers are drawn into prejudget and develop a lopsided ideology.

The strongest among the Pandavas were Bhima and Arjuna. Both have accomplished inconceivable feats. But Bhima was never the face of the Pandava politics. His brute disposition tends the re readings to regard him as Dalit. M.T. Vasudevan Nair in his Randamoozham describes him born of a 'Kiratha'. "I wanted my son to be strong. Strong like an elephant. Then he came to me, from the deep forests. Like an unbridled, violent wind. A Kiratha with the strength of a thousand elephants. Bhima you were born of him" (The Second Turn 85). Despite the Kshatriya lineage, Bhima and his successors are trapped in the trails of Dalit identity. What demarcates him 'a dalit' is what the paper attempts to read.

The equation of Bhima and Arjuna communicate the rubrics of power. Bhima proves more an intrepid gallant than Arjuna. But unfortunately, excessive muscular strapping defiled the audacious vanquisher to a brawny hero. Arjuna could win the wars because of the footwork of Bhima. In the war with Drupada, Kauravas despite having Karna on their side retreated because of a lack of warrior like Bhima. The destruction among horses and elephant division created a wild upheaval; meanwhile Arjuna assailed and captured Drupada with his shower of arrows. Thus, because Bhima subjugated the forces that helped Drupada, Arjuna could easily capture the king.

Even after capturing Drupada, Bhima could not restrain. He continued slaughtering the soldiers. Arjuna had to remind him "This best of the monarchs, Drupada, is a relative of the kuru heroes. Therefore Bhima slay not his soldiers. Let us only give unto our preceptor his fee . . . the mighty Bhimasena, though unsatiated with the exercise of battle, refrained from the act of



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slaughter" (I: Adi P. 293). Restrain is expected of a monarch. A monarch becomes acceptable only when he maintains restrain even when he exerts. The unrestrained behavior of Bhimasena placed him out of the frame of a hero.

Bhima, like Arjuna, was ever keen in enhancing his skill as a warrior. Straight after his lessons from Drona, he continued to receive lessons from Valarama and augmented his prospects. Even when he lived in harmony with his brothers, he exerted his prowess onto the Kauravas. When Arjuna set off to conquer East and South, Bhima was his sole assistance. "The third Pandava prince, assisted by Bhima, on only a single car subjugated all the kings" (I: Adi P 296). But when it came to the achievements of the war, the credit of sending booty to the kingdom was attributed to Arjuna. When the conquest becomes heroic transfiguration, reality lies somewhere hidden. It is the politics of self-location that aid in inventing heroisation. Identity, according to Rogowska - Stangret are on "... our planes simultaneously: epistemological, ontological, ethical, and political. Demonstrating also that such planes are interrelated and not separate" (Rogowska-Stangret). Arjuna, who always conquered the kings became a celebrated figure whereas Bhima who cleared the ingress is a pinch hitter. He somatically expressed his embitterments: 'squeezing his palms' 'thrashing trees' etc. The wild expression of passion marked him coarse. His lack of restrain intensified the déclassé image of the second Pandava.

Building personal stature is one means to acquire power. Acceptance of a hero is marked not just by his prowess but by the humility they exhibit. Of all the Pandavas, Bhima is honest and unpretentious. He is the pillar strength by which the Pandavas have survived and emerged supreme. But his haughtiness and animalistic sway sidelines him and he is never considered by the distinguished class. He was never the apple of the eye. "The principal men were pleased by the purity of Yudhishthira, the courage of Arjuna, the submissive attention of Kunti to her superiors, and the humility of the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva." (I: Adi P 7)

Power determines performance. It is requisite to comply with the axioms laid by the imperium. It constructs gender roles and executes intellectual, social discriminations in the guise of appropriateness. Discourses assimilated constrain individuals. Identity developed through negotiating the discourses often end as barbaric. Bhima's actions, despite his dauntlessness, intrepidity and congenial associations, tantamount to a coarse plebian. His percipient choice was always his mother and the fraternal order. Later with 'Draupadi swayamvarah', she became the cynosure of his life. Draupadi too, despite having five husbands, resorted to Bhima whenever she is overwhelmed by remorse. When she is disturbed by Kichaka, she turns to none but Bhima: "There is none else, save Bhima, that can today accomplish the purpose on which my heart is set" (IV: Vir. P 30). Not just with Kichaka but with Jayadharatha and at court of Indraprastha when she was insulted, Bhima was more exasperated than others. Entreaties of Draupadi were fulfilled only by Bhima. But the enterprises of Bhima were appropriated as corporeal ventures. In the war with Trigartas, King Virata was guarded only because of Bhima's prowess. When Yudhishthira asked him to save the king from being captured, Bhima did not think of bow, dart, sword or battle axe but cast "his eyes on that tree like a mad elephant" (IV: Vir. P 59). In the battle front too "Bhima seized Susarman by the hair, and lifting him up in wrath, dashed him down on the ground. And as he lay crying in agony, the mighty Bhima kicked him at the head and placing his knee on his breast dealt him severe blows" (61). This excessive physical prowess is considered sexual. This ousted Bhima from hitting big in the power chart.

The claims of power are adjacent with the strategies positioned on an equitable and just rationality that institute universal validity. But to sustain power, there involves exclusion and repression of people. The knowledge and skill of the other Pandavas would never buck up the ruling cousins. Because ethical practices of knowledge hinge on the social practice of confinement and marginalization. Only with resistance and exclusion of people and practices does power establishes itself. "Knowledge is not a form of pure speculation belonging to an abstract and disinherited realm of enquiry; rather it is at once a product of power relations and also instrumental in sustaining these relations." (McNay 27)

Bhima is the imperium of stalwartness. He aided Krishna in overpowering Jarasandha and helps conquer Magadha. He proves more an intrepid gallant than Arjuna. Dhritarashtra's anxiety "what man is there that can stand before him?" (IV: Udy. P 125) is no misrepresentation. He was the preeminent warrior and human being of all the Pandavas. Though a dreadful warrior, his boisterous nature marked him as inhuman. His vile humour, instant blowup and fuming nature dichotomise the hero in him. The uncouth ways by which he inflicted torments to his enemies marked him as wild savage. Though people relied on his prowess, his emotional attitude let him slip from having a balanced humour. He was more like elemental forces. His emotions were always marked by extremity. It required someone to control his actions.

When self-restraint, charity, strength, intelligence, modesty and excellent energy mark the characteristics of Arjuna, the cornerstone for the survival of the Pandavas, Bhima, is inveighed as “Bhimasena is . . . ignorant of duties, and haughty, and of the sense of child, and unforbearing” (III: Vana P 330) Thus, to be perceived as hero, one needs to restrain one’s senses. Immaculate mettle is preferred to the bumptious comportment even if he is instrumental for the success of the group.

Power demands demeanor that elicits reverence. “Rules of conduct transform both action and inaction into expression, whether the individual abides by the rules, or breaks them, something significant is likely to be communicated” (Goffman 475). When Bhima exhibited his prowess savagely, he was asymmetrical and so despite his intellect and agility, he was regarded as churlish. His haughtiness attenuated his apotheosis quality. Hence when Bhima ranged the woods, disturbing the creatures, Hanuman instructs, “Thou shouldst show kindness to all creatures, as thou hast reason. Belonging to the animal species, we are ignorant of virtue. But being endued with reason, men show kindness towards creatures. Why do then . . . thou destroyest the lower animals” (III:Vana P 301). Bhima was intoxicated with strength. It was lack of restraining of senses and humility that relegated Bhima from evolving as a front runner. His animosity impeded the onlookers in seeing his guilelessness.

In the Kurukshetra battle ground, without exception, the Kaurava army suffered destruction at the hands of Bhima than of Arjuna. None could defend his physical prowess that it appeared ‘death himself is fighting in Bhima’s shape’. He blazed upon the large divisions of Kaurava forces like a mighty fire consuming dry grass. Many a times Bhima was the sole rescuer of the Pandava forces. He checked his combatants, like the bank resisting the ocean. But his physiognomy after the destruction of the Kaurava forces exposed his callousness and wildness. “. . . the heroic and mighty Bhimasena of strong arms, beholding thy sons, licking the corners of his mouth like a wolf in the midst of small creatures, fell upon them with the impetuosity of Garuda” (V: Bhi. Parva165).

The quashing of Dussasana was another heinous act that forced people to disregard Bhima. Bhima was the elemental force. He was always drawn into extremities. On battling with Dussasana, he ripped open the breast of his enemy and “quaffed his warm life- blood . . . quaffed off his enemy’s life-blood little by little, as if for enjoying its taste . . . all those stood around Bhima . . . overwhelmed with fear . . . said ‘This one is no human being!'”(VI: Karna P 220). However cruel Dussassana was to the Pandavas, this act of Bhimasena exceeded beyond human dignity. At the fall of Duryodhana too, though was made possible with deceit, Bhimasena could not contain himself. He struck his left foot on the head of the fallen monarch and danced madly. He never considered his act as unfair. He was fuming with anger at the thought of the insult rendered onto Draupadi and the helplessness of the brothers then. Hence even though he did the carnage of the entire Kuru princes, he was never the face of Pandava politics.

Primitive exercise of the power of the might definitely called for unconditional conformance. But physical exertion does not fetch deference. Absolute politics is ephemeral; it cannot hold perpetual public attention. Practice of politics of ethics, on the other hand, guarantees recognition and solidarity of the ruled with the ruler. Ethical virtues – honesty, sacrifice, justice, courage, temperance – as Plato and Aristotle identifies are “complex, rational, and emotional social skills” (qtd. in Richard The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). Disposition of virtues would kindle political supremacy. This political supremacy gets cemented as it evokes empathy.

Good behavior is acquired through “abstention from injury, by act, thought and word, in respect of all creatures, compassion, and gift, constitute behavior that is worthy of praise. That act or exertion by which others are not benefitted, or that act in consequence of which one has to feel shame, should never be done” (VIII: Santi P 273). Political behaviour is essential in strategic constructs such as formation of alliances and gaining approval of the respectable members of the society. Bhima considerably failed in adopting covert action which is outside traditional intelligence outlook. Covert political moves are the best ways to influence actions than overt proclamations and assertiveness. Krishna divulges the rationale for acquiring political ascendency. “He, . . . , who, by good offices, winneth over persons endued with good qualities, even if he beareth aversion of them in his heart, enjoyeth prosperity and fame forever and ever.” (IV: Udyo. P 189)

The Pandavas also faced threat from Rakshasa tribes. Bhima checked them and bought them under control. Bhima’s son Ghatotkacha also became part of the alliance and was nurtured to sacrifice his life so that Arjuna emerges victorious in the battle with Karna. The Rakshasa clan is only a crosspiece in the ladder of power. In the Kuru battle as well as in their stay at the woods, Ghatotkacha proved more efficacious to the Pandavas than Abhimanyu. Though the son of Bhima and the first born of the successors of the Pandavas, he was never a title-holder. Being the son of the Pandava, he should have been hailed as Kuru prince. But the epic always denominated him as ‘Rakshasa prince’.

Throughout the journey in the woods, Ghatotkacha and his associates helped the Pandavas. He was very obedient and performed everything at the demand of the Pandavas. Even when Yudhishtira addressed Ghatotkacha as legitimate son, his demeanor placed him below the kshatriya clan. At Bhima's bidding Ghatotkacha "made his appearance and saluting the Pandavas and the Brahmanas, stood with joined hands" (III: Vana P 295). Abhimanyu never had this servile attitude. His assertion evidently narrates his cardinal significance. At war Ghatotkacha mangled the Kaurava forces. "He blazed up with wrath like an all consuming conflagration" (V: Bhi. P 234). But he was adjectivised as the son of 'wicked-souled Hidmva'. Despite his warriorship, unlike Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha is never hailed as the jewel of the Pandava clan but only as a rakshasa warrior. When pages were devoted to rummage the death of Abhimanyu, Ghatotkacha's death is just a passing grievance.

The rationale behind Arjuna being held as man of honour to Bhima could also be appertained to Abhimanyu and Ghatotkacha. Abhimanyu's skill in weaponry made him supreme to the physical prowess of Ghatotkacha. Knowledge of weapons and scriptures gain higher regard than physical prowess. At Bhima's command, Ghatotkacha and his friends carried the Pandavas and Panchali to their destination. Throughout their dwelling in the forest, the Pandavas survived because of Ghatotkacha and his friends. But the paean for the deeds of the rakshasa tribe ended with the appraisal 'by virtue of native energy' and 'terrible prowess'. Thus inclusion becomes a means of excluding the tribe from the race for authoritarian power. By making them part of the alliance, they are normalized to the ways of power. The excessive muscular strapping desecrated the audacious vanquishers, Bhima and Ghatotkacha to brawny heroes. The animosity placed them away from the mark of a venerated hero. Both the father and son were steadfast and hard as nails. They were unflinching and the most dependable of the Pandava forces. But Arjuna and Abhimanyu were preferred for their seasoned behavior. Their command and finesse in archery secured them high regard among the public. The placating and ratiocination gave them a wider appeal. On the other hand, the skills of Bhima and Ghatotkacha were mere means of resistance to the political schemes of Duryodhana. Bhima, thus, with his elemental nature, brawny behavior and muscular trappings forces the generations to identify with the unseasoned, uncultured, uneducated demeanors attributed to humble origin.

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