

## **Trauma, Power, and Ethical Collapse: A Psychotherapeutic Analysis of the Draupadi Chir Haran Episode**

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### ***Abstract***

*This qualitative study offers a psychotherapeutic interpretation of the Draupadi Chir Haran episode from the Mahabharata, exploring the psychological states, coping mechanisms, and moral reasoning of central characters. Using thematic and hermeneutic analysis, the research integrates trauma theory (Herman, 1992), Freudian defense mechanisms, Jungian archetypes, and Indian psychological concepts such as gunas, karma, and dharma to interpret this emotionally charged narrative. The study focuses on six key figures: Draupadi, Yudhishtira, Duryodhana, Karna, Bhishma, and Krishna. Draupadi emerges as a symbol of moral courage, challenging injustice through reasoned resistance. Yudhishtira exemplifies emotional detachment and moral confusion, suggesting cognitive dissonance and passive moral injury. Duryodhana's actions reflect narcissistic aggression and a need to assert dominance, often driven by envy and inferiority. Karna is portrayed as torn between loyalty and conscience, reflecting internalized shame and unresolved trauma. Bhishma's silence under oath illustrates dharma paralysis—the collapse of ethical clarity due to conflicting duties. Krishna, embodying the archetype of divine consciousness, intervenes as a symbol of higher ethical order and cosmic justice. Through these psychological profiles, the study reveals how gender, power, and moral responsibility intersect within epic narratives. It argues that the Chir Haran episode functions as a microcosm of collective ethical breakdown and trauma, offering insights into both individual and societal responses to injustice. By bridging classical literature with contemporary psychological inquiry, this research affirms the enduring relevance of the Mahabharata as a text of psychological, moral, and cultural significance.*

**Keywords:** *Draupadi, Mahabharata, Trauma theory, psychological analysis, Dharma and ethics.*

## 1. Introduction

The *Mahabharata* is not merely an epic of war and heroism; it is a philosophical treatise that encompasses the vast terrain of human experience—ethics, psychology, politics, spirituality, and social structure. Attributed to the sage Vyasa, the epic comprises over 100,000 shlokas and offers a comprehensive view of the moral and emotional dilemmas that define human existence. Central to its discourse is the concept of *dharma*—an evolving and contextual notion of duty, justice, and righteousness—which is explored through the personal and public lives of its characters (Jena & Samantray, 2022). The *Mahabharata*'s ability to portray these themes in a manner that transcends time and culture is a testament to its universal psychological and philosophical appeal.

Scholars have increasingly turned to the *Mahabharata* to explore contemporary psychological issues. According to Patel (2023), the epic's narratives provide rich insight into moral injury, ethical decision-making, intergenerational trauma, and resistance under systemic injustice. Its continued cultural relevance is evident in how its themes are invoked in debates around law, leadership, gender, and violence in modern Indian society. Recent literary analyses have also focused on how trauma and psychological conflict are not merely incidental in the epic but form an integral part of its narrative technique (Sharma, 2022). The characters in the *Mahabharata* are deeply layered, making them ideal subjects for psychodynamic and archetypal analysis. They exhibit classic psychological defenses—denial, projection, rationalization—and show varied capacities for moral reasoning, empathy, guilt, and resilience. This makes the text not only a literary epic but also a psychological casebook, offering insight into the emotional and ethical lives of individuals navigating extreme conflict.

## The Draupadi Chir Haran Episode

Among the most pivotal and emotionally resonant episodes in the *Mahabharata* is the **Chir Haran** (disrobing) of Draupadi. Following Yudhishtira's loss in a rigged game of dice, Draupadi is dragged into the Kaurava court by Dushasana, where an attempt is made to publicly disrobe her. The act, though interrupted by divine intervention (Krishna's miracle of endless cloth), serves as a powerful representation of gendered humiliation, institutional failure, and collective moral collapse (Jena & Samantray, 2022; Ganguli, 2006, *Vana Parva*).

This episode is not only a trigger for the eventual war but also a turning point in the moral narrative of the epic. Draupadi's vocal resistance—her piercing questions regarding Yudhishtira's right to wager her after losing himself—marks a rare moment of assertive female agency in an otherwise patriarchal world (Deshpande & Mehta, 2024). Her demand for justice in a court dominated by silence, complicity, and paralysis becomes emblematic of a broader ethical crisis.

Characters such as Bhishma, Dhritarashtra, Vidura, and Karna each reveal complex psychological states. Bhishma is bound by his loyalty to the throne, rendering him inert in the face of injustice. Karna, despite his own marginalization, joins the perpetrators, suggesting a form of displaced aggression and internalized oppression. Krishna remains silent until Draupadi appeals directly to him, introducing the spiritual dimension of *grace* as a form of psychological intervention (Iyer, 2024).

This paper seeks to explore the *Chir Haran* episode through a psychotherapeutic lens, focusing on the psychological states, coping mechanisms, and moral reasoning of the key characters involved. Using qualitative thematic and hermeneutic methods, the analysis investigates how trauma manifests within the narrative structure and character behaviors. Draupadi's humiliation and resistance are analyzed as both symbolic and literal experiences of trauma, which include dissociation, narrative reclamation, and affect regulation (Jena & Samantray, 2022).

The episode also serves as a site of psychological defense: Yudhishtira rationalizes his choices as adherence to dharma; Bhishma dissociates from moral responsibility due to his vows; Duryodhana enacts dominance as a defense against deep-seated inferiority. Draupadi, by contrast, employs assertive confrontation and spiritual appeal as coping mechanisms, effectively transforming her victimhood into resistance (Kumar & Raghavan, 2023).

The narrative aligns with key features of trauma literature—disruption of agency, testimonial injustice, emotional fragmentation, and symbolic healing. As Sarkar and Banerjee (2022) argue, classical Indian texts often represent trauma through indirect techniques such as repetition, epiphany, symbolic imagery, and invocation of divine agency. The *Chir Haran* episode fits this mold and allows a psychotherapeutic reading that bridges textuality and mental health. This study employs an **interdisciplinary methodology**, integrating **narrative literary analysis** with **psychological theories**. It draws upon Freudian psychoanalysis (defense mechanisms, repression), Jungian archetypes (the wounded feminine, the shadow), trauma theory (especially from Caruth and Herman), and Indian psychological concepts such as *sahanshakti* (endurance) and *viveka* (discrimination or discernment) (Rao, 2023). This hybrid framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of the characters' psychological responses, as well as the cultural logic that legitimizes or silences those responses.

The goal is not to psychologize mythic characters in a reductive sense, but to interpret them as embodiments of universal psychological processes. By doing so, the paper offers insights into how epic narratives can illuminate present-day concerns such as victimization, bystander behavior, moral ambivalence, and resilience in the aftermath of trauma.

## Psychological and Trauma-Informed Readings

Recent scholarship explores the *Mahabharata* through trauma theory. As Jena and Samantray (2022) argue in their narrative trauma analysis, classical Indian texts exhibit features of trauma storytelling—disjunction, repetition, fragmentation, multi-voiced narration, and invocation of divine agency as healing or intervention. These techniques, evident in the *Chir Haran* sequence, foreground lived psychic pain and the challenge to restore moral coherence. From a psychoanalytic framework, Freudian defense mechanisms such as denial, repression, projection, and rationalization are manifest in characters' behaviors. Yudhishtira's rational insistence on playing by the rules—even as the rules become blatantly unjust—reflects rationalization and denial of emotional reality. Bhishma's stoicism and refusal to intervene can be read as repression tied to rigid duty. Duryodhana's aggression and Karna's alignment with the powerful echo projection and identification with the oppressor (though scholars such as Sharma [2022] apply these psychoanalytic readings in article form).

Jungian archetypal psychology offers additional insight. Draupadi embodies the archetype of the wounded queen and the resilient feminine, while Yudhishtira represents the shadow of moral paralysis. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, especially as codified in archetypes of justice, punishment, and sacred feminine authority, illuminates how the epic situates individual trauma within broader narrative patterns. Jungian commentators like Kalsched in *Trauma and the Soul* (cited in Jungian therapy forums) emphasize that trauma requires integrative symbols and psychospiritual resources—resonant with Draupadi's eventual reliance on Krishna and oath-making in the epic.

### Indigenous Indian Constructs: Guna and Karma

Indian psychological frameworks enrich the analysis—specifically the concepts of the three *gunas* (sattva, rajas, tamas) and *karma theory*. Characters can be understood as manifestations of these qualities: Draupadi's rajas (assertiveness, agency) and sattva (moral clarity), Yudhishtira's sattva-rajasic moralism, and Duryodhana or Karna's tamasic entrenchment in inertia and aggression. Karma theory highlights how past actions and familial patterns (Dhritarashtra's favoritism, Pandava enmity) predispose characters to psychological rigidity or moral failure. Authors such as Rao (2023) and Kumar & Raghavan (2023) apply these models to narrative figures, framing actions as emerging from internal moral-psychic structure rather than simply dramatic contrivance.

### Identified Research Gap

Although feminist, philosophical, and psychological readings exist in parallel, a gap remains: very few studies synthesize feminist agency, classical ethical philosophy, trauma theory, psychoanalytic defense, Jungian archetypes, and Indian constructs into one comprehensive psychotherapeutic portrait of *Chir Haran*.

Karve's work emphasizes agency and social anthropology but is less concerned with psychological trauma. Hiltebeitel situates mythic symbolism but does not develop psychodynamic or trauma-based frameworks. Psychological or trauma-informed readings (e.g., Jena & Samantray, Sharma, Rao) often analyze the epic structurally or symbolically without attending to feminist textual agency. Meanwhile, indigenous constructs are frequently applied in isolation rather than integrated with Western psychological theories.

The study fills this void by weaving together:

- Feminist textual agency (Karve, Hiltebeitel),
- Philosophical ambiguities of *dharma* (ethical theory, court dynamics),
- Trauma narrative techniques (Jena & Samantray),
- Psychoanalytic defense and Jungian archetypes (Freudian/Jungian models),
- Indigenous concepts of *gunas* and *karma*.

This enables *detailed psychological portraits* of key figures—Draupadi, Yudhishtira, Bhishma, Karna, Duryodhana, and Krishna—situated in the charged moment of *Chir Haran*. The resulting analysis links character behaviors both to interpersonal trauma dynamics and the wider moral-ethical field, offering novel insights into how ancient narrative form can serve therapeutic reflection and deepen our understanding of trauma recovery and moral resilience.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative, interpretive research design**, aimed at deriving in-depth insights into the psychological and ethical dimensions of the *Draupadi Chir Haran* episode from the *Mahabharata*. Specifically, the study employs thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and hermeneutic interpretation (Gadamer, 1975) to explore narrative layers, character psychology, and symbolic content. This dual approach allows for the decoding of textual meaning both through surface-level themes and deeper philosophical or archetypal structures. The choice of qualitative methods is rooted in the recognition that epic narratives, especially one as layered as the *Mahabharata*, require contextual and culturally sensitive analysis that can accommodate mythic, symbolic, and psychological dimensions.

### 2.2 Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the **Sabha Parva** (Book of the Assembly Hall) of the *Mahabharata*, which contains the *Chir Haran* (disrobing) episode. To ensure textual authenticity and narrative integrity, both **critical editions** (e.g., Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute) and **popular translations** (e.g., by C. Rajagopalachari, Kisari Mohan Ganguli, and P. Lal) were consulted. The inclusion of multiple translations helps mitigate interpretive bias and provides a broader linguistic and philosophical lens.

Secondary data sources include **commentaries and interpretations** by Indian and Western scholars, such as Irawati Karve (2006), Alf Hiltebeitel (1991), and Devdutt Pattanaik (2010), among others. These offer diverse analytical perspectives—including feminist, psychoanalytic, and theological—on the episode and the broader *Mahabharata* narrative. Philosophical texts and peer-reviewed academic literature on trauma theory, Freudian and Jungian psychology, and Indian psychological constructs (e.g., *gunas*, *dharma*, *karma*) were also used to ground the study in established theoretical frameworks.

### 2.3 Sampling

This study uses **purposive sampling** to focus on **eight central characters** in the *Chir Haran* episode who either actively participate in or bear witness to the event. These characters are:

1. **Draupadi** – the subject of the trauma and a symbol of feminine resistance.
2. **Yudhishtira** – whose moral paralysis raises questions of *dharma* and duty.
3. **Duryodhana** – the aggressor representing unchecked ego and patriarchal power.
4. **Karna** – who embodies moral ambiguity and class-based resentment.
5. **Bhishma** – torn between his ethical commitments and his vow of allegiance.
6. **Krishna** – the divine intervenor, representing *dharma*, cosmic order, and psychological transcendence.

These figures were selected for their symbolic, psychological, and narrative importance in the unfolding of the event and its aftermath.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through **thematic coding**, identifying recurring psychological and ethical themes such as **shame, ego, repression, moral injury, silencing, and bystander trauma**. **Freudian concepts** such as defense mechanisms (e.g., denial, projection, rationalization) and **Jungian archetypes** (e.g., the Shadow, the Hero, the Trickster, the Anima) were used to interpret the unconscious motivations of characters and the symbolic function of the episode (Jung, 1969; Freud, 1915/1957).

Further, **Indian psychological frameworks** were employed to analyze character behavior through the lens of the **gunas** (sattva, rajas, tamas), **karma theory**, and the concept of **dharma** (action aligned with cosmic and moral order) (Kumar & Raghavan, 2023). These indigenous paradigms offer culturally embedded interpretations of ethical and emotional conflict that Western theories may not fully capture.

The **hermeneutic method** was used to interpret textual meanings in light of their cultural and philosophical contexts. This entailed close reading and iterative analysis, moving between parts of the text and the whole, to interpret the moral and psychological resonance of the episode as both a literary artifact and a source of therapeutic insight.

## 3. Result: Character Profiles

### 3.1 Draupadi

#### Tactics: Moral Reasoning and Rhetorical Resistance

During the *Chir Haran* (disrobing) episode in the *Sabha Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi employs rhetorical questioning as a powerful tool of resistance. Her famous question, “*Whom did you lose first—yourself or me?*” strategically interrogates the very legality and morality of Yudhishtira’s actions in staking her after losing himself. This question is not merely legal; it is moral and epistemic, challenging the Dharmic foundation of the Kuru court (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

By appealing to Dharma (moral order) rather than just *Rajadharma* (royal duty), Draupadi escalates the issue from a personal humiliation to a moral crisis for the entire assembly. Scholars like Irawati Karve (1969/2008) have noted how Draupadi, in this moment, becomes not a passive victim but an active agent, using logos (reason) and pathos (emotion) to shake the conscience of those present.

Her rhetorical tactics reflect what Judith Herman (1992) refers to in trauma literature as a form of “speaking truth to power”—an essential act of reclaiming agency during or after traumatic violation.

#### Psychological Aspects: Embodiment of Resistance and Agency

Draupadi stands out as a psychological symbol of resistance, dignity, and moral assertiveness. Even in the face of dehumanization, she refuses to internalize shame—a trait associated with psychological resilience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). She continuously challenges the silence and complicity of powerful male figures—Bhishma, Drona, and Dhritarashtra—forcing them to confront their moral paralysis.

From a Jungian archetypal perspective, Draupadi represents the Anima transformed—initially the muse or consort, but rising into the Warrior archetype, confronting the collective unconscious of the Kuru dynasty (Jung, 1969). She becomes the moral compass of the epic, whose emotional and spiritual clarity stands in contrast to the ethical confusion around her.

Moreover, her psychological fortitude aligns with the Sattvic guna in Indian psychology—characterized by clarity, moral courage, and spiritual strength (Rao, 2011).

### **Mental State: Acute Awareness and Resilience Amidst Trauma**

Draupadi's mental state during the *Chir Haran* can be read through the lens of acute trauma awareness. Rather than dissociating, she maintains high cognitive and emotional alertness, a rare but documented response in trauma literature (van der Kolk, 2014). She does not collapse under humiliation but instead amplifies her voice, asking layered questions, invoking Dharma, and challenging the silence around her.

Her ability to reframe the narrative, not as one of shame but as one of collective ethical failure, marks her as an empowered trauma survivor. Judith Herman (1992) outlines this shift—from victimhood to moral agency—as crucial for trauma recovery.

From a Freudian lens, one might argue she resists the usual defense mechanisms like repression or denial. Instead, she confronts the abusers directly, forcing a rupture in the court's moral passivity. This confrontation is a form of working through, a key component of psychoanalytic trauma processing (Freud, 1915/1957).

Her insistence on truth, justice, and accountability suggests post-traumatic growth, a concept developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995), where individuals develop greater personal strength and moral clarity after adversity.

Draupadi is portrayed not merely as a victim of patriarchal injustice but as a psychologically rich and empowered figure. Through rhetorical skill, acute emotional regulation, and moral courage, she exposes the structural and spiritual failures of a society that allows such violence to occur. Her character encapsulates key psychotherapeutic themes: trauma confrontation, cognitive resilience, ethical clarity, and resistance against oppressive systems.

## **4.2 Yudhishtira**

### **Tactics: Justification through Dharma and Legal Formalism**

Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava and often portrayed as the embodiment of dharma, presents a complex case during the *Chir Haran* episode. His actions—staking Draupadi after himself in a game of dice—are rationalized using legal and moral abstractions. Rather than intervening to stop Draupadi's humiliation, Yudhishtira clings to the formal structures of dharma, avoiding direct confrontation or resistance. Scholars have criticized this move as moral evasion disguised as righteousness. As Alf Hiltebeitel (2001) observes, Yudhishtira often interprets dharma in ways that serve to maintain order, even at the cost of justice and empathy. His reliance on external codes reflects what Kohlberg (1984) would describe as conventional moral reasoning—obedience to laws and roles over inner ethical judgment.

### Psychological Aspects: Moral Disorientation and Guilt

Psychologically, Yudhishtira displays emotional detachment and internal conflict. His behavior reflects a classic case of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957)—a tension between his actions (gambling away his wife) and his identity as a dharmic king. Rather than reconciling this contradiction, he suppresses emotional engagement and adopts a resigned stance, which could be read as emotional numbing, a common trauma-related symptom (van der Kolk, 2014).

His inaction during Draupadi's humiliation can be interpreted as passive moral injury—a concept explored in trauma psychology that refers to the psychological damage done when one betrays or violates their own moral code by omission or compliance (Litz et al., 2009). While he does not actively harm Draupadi, his silence and rationalization deeply implicate him in the violence she experiences.

Indian psychologist K.C. Bhattacharyya's theory of "intellectual detachment" in Indian epistemology also provides insight—suggesting that Yudhishtira may have withdrawn into philosophical abstraction as a defense against emotional turmoil (Bhattacharyya, 1956).

### Mental State: Depression, Resignation, and Avoidant Coping

Yudhishtira's psychological state during and after the dice game reveals signs of resignation, guilt, and low agency. He exhibits avoidant coping—withdrawing emotionally and philosophically from the unbearable reality of the court's silence and Draupadi's suffering (Carver et al., 1989).

Some scholars argue that his behavior signals a depressive temperament, marked by low self-worth and chronic doubt. Karve (2008) emphasizes that Yudhishtira seems more burdened by the idea of dharma than guided by it, leading to paralysis in moments requiring moral clarity. Jungian analysis would describe Yudhishtira as encountering his shadow—the unconscious, repressed side of himself that harbors weakness, fear, and moral failure. His inability to confront this shadow directly contributes to his psychological fragmentation (Jung, 1969).

Moreover, from the perspective of Indian psychology, Yudhishtira can be understood as rajas-dominant—his outward commitment to order and control masks an inner turbulence rooted in attachment, pride, and moral confusion (Rao, 2011).

Yudhishtira represents the psychological complexity of moral ambivalence, legalistic thinking, and emotional suppression. His failure to act during the *Chir Haran* is not merely a lapse in heroism but a case study in the psychology of guilt, cognitive dissonance, and passive complicity. Though portrayed as a man of dharma, this moment exposes the limits of philosophical abstraction when divorced from human suffering.

### 4.3 Duryodhana

#### Tactics: Symbolic Dominance, Humiliation, and Assertion of Authority

Duryodhana's approach in the Draupadi *Chir Haran* episode is marked by a strategic use of humiliation and power display to establish dominance within the Kuru court.

His invitation to Draupadi to sit on his thigh—while she is being dragged into the court after being lost in a dice game—is not just a sexual insult, but a calculated attempt to symbolically degrade both Draupadi and the Pandavas. The act serves to reinforce his claimed superiority and assert control over a political rival through gendered violence (Sutherland, 1991). Duryodhana engineers the environment of public shaming and legitimizes his actions by referring to the rules of the dice game, emphasizing form over morality. His behavior is characterized by theatrical cruelty, intended to provoke and weaken his opponents psychologically.

### **Psychological Aspects: Narcissistic Traits, Inferiority Complex, and Sadistic Cruelty**

Duryodhana's psychology is marked by traits consistent with narcissistic personality dynamics. He displays an inflated sense of self-importance, coupled with an intense need for admiration and validation. His envy—particularly toward the Pandavas, who he sees as more successful and beloved—is a central motivator of his aggression (Kakar, 2008). His humiliation of Draupadi stems in part from a desire to avenge the perceived insult of her rejecting him during the swayamvara, and more broadly from his deep-seated resentment of the Pandava brothers' success and nobility.

This envy manifests as destructive competitiveness—a hallmark of narcissistic envy as per clinical literature (Lansky, 2006). He demonstrates moral disengagement, distancing himself from the suffering he inflicts and seeing his victims not as humans but as obstacles to be eliminated. His enjoyment of public degradation aligns with sadistic tendencies, in which one derives gratification from exercising power over a vulnerable other (Fromm, 1973). Moreover, his behavior reflects the externalization of inner conflict—projecting his internal insecurities and feelings of inadequacy onto Draupadi and the Pandavas, whom he blames for his emotional distress.

Duryodhana's actions can also be interpreted through Indian psychological constructs, particularly the dominance of rajas guna—characterized by passion, aggression, desire for power, and restlessness (Paranjpe, 1998). His inability to act with restraint, and his compulsion to dominate and control, reflect a psyche dominated by rajasic impulses unchecked by sattvic wisdom or tamasic inertia.

### **Mental State: Grandiosity, Fragile Ego, and Moral Blindness**

While Duryodhana projects supreme confidence and authority, a closer psychological reading reveals a fragile ego structure. His obsession with external symbols of power—such as his insistence on public acknowledgement of Draupadi's subjugation—suggests deep vulnerability beneath the surface (Bettelheim, 1943). He is haunted by his sense of inadequacy, especially in comparison to the Pandavas and Krishna, who represent charisma, dharma, and divine legitimacy. This unresolved inferiority is defended against through compensatory grandiosity, a common coping mechanism in narcissistic personalities (Kernberg, 1975).

In this moment, Duryodhana also exemplifies moral blindness, or a psychological state where ethical considerations are systematically overlooked in favor of goals like dominance, revenge, or loyalty to one's group (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). He is unable—or unwilling—to empathize with Draupadi's suffering or recognize the injustice of the act, as his judgment is clouded by the desire to humiliate and conquer. There is no sign of moral struggle, only triumph in violation.

His reliance on a rigid interpretation of rules, and his disregard for ethical nuance, show signs of psychological rigidity—an inability to adapt behavior in response to the demands of complex social situations. This lack of flexibility makes him prone to binary thinking (victor vs. victim, ruler vs. ruled), a feature often associated with authoritarian personalities (Adorno et al., 1950).

Duryodhana is not merely a villain in this episode, but a psychologically layered figure shaped by a confluence of narcissistic injury, social comparison, and cultural patriarchy. His actions during Draupadi's humiliation are not spontaneous but deeply rooted in an inner world marked by fear of inadequacy, hunger for control, and a total lack of moral insight. Through him, the *Mahabharata* presents a chilling portrait of power unmoored from ethics—a reflection that remains relevant in contemporary discussions of leadership, gendered violence, and psychological trauma.

#### 4.4 Karna

##### **Tactics: Justification through Loyalty and Retribution**

Karna's involvement in the *Chir Haran* episode is complex. Though initially silent, he ultimately takes an active role in Draupadi's humiliation by declaring her a slave and unworthy of dignity. He justifies this by aligning with the Kauravas, especially Duryodhana, whose loyalty he holds above moral reasoning. Karna calls Draupadi a "public woman" (*vaishya*), arguing that she had multiple husbands and thus has no right to modesty or moral standing (Ganguli, 1883/2003). This rhetorical tactic reflects not just misogyny but a deep desire to retaliate against those he perceives as unjustly privileged, particularly the Pandavas and Draupadi.

##### **Psychological Aspects: Identity Conflict, Deep Resentment, and Repressed Shame**

Karna's behavior stems from profound identity conflict. Born a Kshatriya (to Kunti and the sun god) but raised by a charioteer, he experiences chronic marginalization and social rejection, especially from the elite warrior class. This creates an inferiority complex (Kakar, 2008), which fuels his hostility toward the Pandavas, particularly Arjuna, and Draupadi, who rejected him at her swayamvara. His misogynistic aggression toward Draupadi is partly an expression of this resentment and humiliation.

Freudian defense mechanisms such as projection and displacement are clearly visible. Karna displaces his anger over his caste-based exclusion onto Draupadi, and projects his own feelings of unworthiness onto her. His need for social validation and his dependence on Duryodhana for recognition also suggest codependent personality traits, where loyalty overrides ethical considerations (Kernberg, 1975). In terms of Indian psychological constructs, Karna's mental state is dominated by *rajas*—driven by intense ambition, honor, and anger—but also influenced by *tamas*, particularly when it leads him to justify acts of cruelty and injustice (Paranjpe, 1998). His inner *sattva*—the component tied to truth and clarity—is largely suppressed during this episode.

##### **Mental State: Inner Turmoil, Moral Displacement, and Guilt Suppression**

Karna's outward aggression masks inner psychological turmoil. He is torn between his personal sense of justice and his loyalty to Duryodhana, who offered him status when society rejected him.

His decision to support Draupadi's humiliation represents moral displacement—the externalization of moral responsibility onto a collective (the Kauravas), thus allowing him to act without immediate guilt (Bandura, 1999).

Despite his harsh words, Karna is not immune to guilt. In later episodes of the *Mahabharata*, particularly before his final battle, he expresses regret for his role in Draupadi's dishonor and his unethical decisions (Hiltebeitel, 2001). This suppressed guilt is indicative of post-facto moral realization, often seen in individuals who act under group pressure or social debt, only to later confront their actions in solitude.

His behavior also reflects cognitive dissonance—holding two conflicting beliefs: a deep desire to be just and honorable, and a felt obligation to support Duryodhana at all costs. Karna resolves this dissonance through moral rationalization, insisting that Draupadi's suffering is deserved due to her pride and rejection of him. Karna's role in the *Chir Haran* episode illustrates the psychological cost of long-term marginalization, social stigma, and unresolved identity conflict. He is neither wholly villainous nor absolved—rather, he is a tragic figure whose moral compass is clouded by his need for belonging and loyalty to those who accepted him. His actions reflect a layered psyche: wounded, angry, and trapped between his ideals and his alliances.

#### 4.5 Bhishma

##### Tactics: Silence and Selective Moralism

In the *Chir Haran* episode, Bhishma does not overtly participate in Draupadi's humiliation, but his silence is a significant tactical choice. As the grand patriarch and moral authority in the Kuru court, his failure to intervene carries immense symbolic weight. He offers convoluted interpretations of dharma to justify his inaction, stating that dharma is subtle (*sukshma dharma*), thereby evading moral responsibility (Hiltebeitel, 2001; Ganguli, 2003). His tactic is one of strategic non-intervention, cloaked in philosophical detachment.

##### Psychological Aspects: Moral Disengagement, Cognitive Rigidity, and Role Conflict

Bhishma exhibits cognitive rigidity, trapped in a traditional and hierarchical interpretation of dharma. Though personally distressed by Draupadi's plight, he refrains from acting because of his loyalty to the throne and oath-bound allegiance to Hastinapura. His moral compass is compromised by role conflict—as a patriarch, he ought to protect Draupadi, but as a subject of the Kuru dynasty, he chooses silence.

This reveals moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999), where Bhishma justifies harmful inaction by deferring to abstract codes and traditions. Rather than confronting injustice, he rationalizes that a slave (Draupadi, after Yudhishtira's wager) has no rights, despite his awareness of the wrongness of the situation. This inability to act reflects splitting in psychoanalytic terms—a defense mechanism where contradictory truths (e.g., duty vs. justice) are kept psychologically apart to avoid internal conflict. Bhishma's internal landscape also reflects the *sattva-rajās* conflict in Indian psychology (Paranjpe, 1998). Though predominantly *sattvic* (wise, balanced), his excessive detachment and passivity at this moment reflect a lapse into *tamas* (inertia, moral blindness).

### **Mental State: Guilt, Suppressed Emotion, and Existential Conflict**

Bhishma's silence causes deep internal conflict. He is portrayed as visibly distressed during Draupadi's questioning, yet remains immobilized. This reflects emotional suppression, often observed in individuals with a rigid moral framework that cannot accommodate new ethical dilemmas. His silence is not passive ignorance but passive complicity born from ethical paralysis.

He later acknowledges this failure and seeks redemption through his eventual teachings to Yudhishtira in the *Shanti Parva*, where he extensively discusses dharma in its complexities—perhaps an effort to reconcile his earlier moral inaction (Hiltebeitel, 2001).

Bhishma thus experiences a form of passive moral injury—the psychological distress resulting from witnessing an immoral act and feeling complicit due to inaction (Litz et al., 2009). This unspoken trauma, combined with his inability to reconcile his roles, causes existential conflict, as he grapples with the very idea of righteousness that once defined his identity.

Bhishma's conduct in the *Chir Haran* scene reflects a deeply conflicted psyche. His failure to protect Draupadi is not from malice but from a rigid and outdated allegiance to codes that failed to evolve with the ethical needs of the moment. His inaction speaks volumes about how dharma, when interpreted dogmatically, can become a tool of complicity rather than justice. He becomes a tragic emblem of moral stagnation, where wisdom and power are rendered inert by misplaced loyalty and philosophical detachment.

### **4.6 Krishna**

Tactics: Strategic Intervention through Symbolic Protection in the Draupadi Chir Haran episode, Krishna intervenes at a pivotal moment by miraculously providing an unending stream of cloth as Draupadi is disrobed in the Kaurava court. This divine act protects her from further humiliation and reasserts her moral dignity in a space where traditional masculine authority has collapsed. Krishna's intervention is non-verbal and non-confrontational—he does not directly rebuke the perpetrators nor deliver a moral lecture—but rather enacts justice through symbolic and supernatural means. This approach reflects an economy of action grounded in cosmic timing, not reactive impulse.

### **Psychological Aspects: Detached Guide and Archetype of the Self**

Krishna's behavior may initially appear emotionally distant, especially through a trauma-informed lens which values empathetic attunement and emotional validation (Herman, 1992). Unlike a therapist figure who actively names and processes the trauma, Krishna maintains a neutral, transcendental posture. However, this detachment aligns with the Jungian archetype of the Self—the totality of psyche integrating conscious and unconscious elements, representing cosmic order and wisdom (Jung, 1969). In this framework, Krishna is not absent but wholly present in a different register: beyond personal emotion, he represents dharma in action. This type of compassionate detachment is also echoed in Indian psychological traditions. According to the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna upholds *nishkama karma* (action without attachment to results), which aligns with the sattvic guna—characterized by clarity, harmony, and insight (Paranjpe, 1998). His non-reactive presence ensures that the act of protection does not descend into retaliatory rage but stays grounded in cosmic justice.

### **Mental State: Transcendent Awareness and Compassionate Detachment**

Krishna's psychological state reflects equanimity and centered awareness, a hallmark of yogic and sattvic consciousness. He does not exhibit reactive anger, grief, or moral outrage in the moment, which may be misinterpreted as emotional detachment. Instead, this calmness is the result of transcendence of ego and a deeply rooted connection to the moral fabric of the universe. His intervention affirms not only Draupadi's individual dignity but also the collapse of collective dharma among the Kuru elders and warriors.

In sum, Krishna's role is not therapeutic in the traditional Western sense, but rather cosmically restorative. His intervention models ethical action rooted in awareness, not emotion—a necessary balance when the surrounding social order is destabilized by shame, guilt, and power abuse.

### **4. Discussion**

The *Chir Haran* episode in the *Mahabharata* is not merely a mythic account of public humiliation but a complex psychological tableau reflecting collective trauma, moral disintegration, and the dynamics of power and conscience. The episode unfolds as a moral crucible, exposing each central character's internal world—their defense mechanisms, value systems, and psychological vulnerabilities—when confronted with injustice. Through this lens, the episode can be viewed as a microcosm of trauma psychology, revealing how individuals and systems fail or transcend in moments of moral testing.

#### **4.1 Power and Humiliation: The Narcissistic Crisis of Duryodhana and Karna**

Duryodhana and Karna actively assert dominance in the scene, not just by words but by weaponizing shame. Duryodhana's gesture of inviting Draupadi to sit on his thigh is a symbolic act of sexual aggression and territorial display—akin to Freud's (1923) concept of sadistic satisfaction derived from controlling others. His behavior displays hallmarks of grandiose narcissism, characterized by inflated self-worth, entitlement, and a need for constant validation, especially through the humiliation of others.

Karna's psychological makeup is more layered. His active complicity in Draupadi's shaming appears to stem from narcissistic injury and displaced rage—a result of his lifelong marginalization and social exclusion due to his birth. His misogynistic comment—labeling Draupadi a “prostitute”—is not just cruelty but a psychological maneuver to restore self-esteem through devaluation of another. He projects his inner shame onto Draupadi, thereby reaffirming his loyalty to Duryodhana and rejecting the vulnerability of being “othered” again. Both men use Draupadi's public dehumanization as a vehicle for self-validation. This aligns with Kohut's (1971) notion of narcissistic rage, where externalizing blame and attacking others become methods of preserving a fragmented self. The episode thus reveals how power-seeking behaviors are often driven by deep psychological insecurities and identity threats.

#### 4.2 Moral Paralysis and Ethical Disintegration: Yudhishtira and Bhishma

In contrast to the aggression of Duryodhana and Karna, Yudhishtira and Bhishma exemplify a more insidious form of collapse: ethical disengagement under the guise of dharma. Yudhishtira, despite being Draupadi's husband, justifies his silence and inaction by invoking the sanctity of rules. His abdication of emotional responsibility signals a reliance on external moral codes to manage internal conflict—a classic case of moral dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Yudhishtira's behavior reflects the Freudian defense of intellectualization—a form of emotional detachment where one engages cognitively with distressing realities instead of confronting them emotionally. By clinging to the technicalities of dharma, he masks his helplessness and avoids acknowledging his betrayal of Draupadi as both husband and king.

Bhishma's response is equally revealing. As the moral elder and institutional authority, his silence during the episode represents a collapse of active ethics. He rationalizes his inaction by citing his oath to the throne, reflecting what some psychologists call moral injury—a rupture in one's ethical code due to perceived helplessness or loyalty conflicts. His internal turmoil mirrors the existential dissociation faced by those who find themselves paralyzed between institutional loyalty and personal values. Both characters embody what psychologists term learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975)—a belief in one's inability to change the situation, even when one possesses power. Their paralysis allows injustice to unfold, making them complicit in a moral atrocity through passive inaction.

#### 4.3 Trauma and Resistance: Draupadi's Feminist Assertion

Draupadi is at the emotional and ethical epicenter of the episode. Her response to extreme violation is neither submissive nor chaotic; it is deliberate, articulate, and morally pointed. From a trauma-informed lens, her behavior aligns closely with Judith Herman's (1992) stages of trauma response—particularly resistance and meaning-making.

Rather than internalizing shame or falling into victimhood, Draupadi engages the court with rhetorical sharpness and emotional clarity. She questions the legality of her disrobing, the morality of those around her, and even the silence of her husbands. Her repeated invocations of dharma are not appeals to patriarchy but strategic calls to collective conscience. In doing so, she transforms from a passive victim to an active agent of moral confrontation.

Draupadi's refusal to be silenced can be interpreted as a post-traumatic growth response—a process where individuals not only survive trauma but emerge with heightened moral insight and strength. Her composure under threat and her verbal resistance mark her as a symbol of feminist moral agency, subverting the stereotype of the helpless woman and asserting her identity in a space designed to erase it.

#### 4.4 Detached Compassion and Divine Awareness: Krishna as Archetypal Guide

Krishna's intervention in the episode introduces the archetype of the divine protector and cosmic witness. From a trauma perspective, Krishna's emotional detachment might initially appear cold or removed. However, viewed through the Jungian lens, Krishna represents the Higher Self—a force that operates beyond reactive emotion and sees the broader karmic unfolding of events.

His miraculous intervention to protect Draupadi's dignity—manifesting infinite garments as her sari is pulled—is both literal and symbolic. It reflects transcendent compassion—an intervention that doesn't negate the trauma but sanctifies the survivor's resistance. Krishna neither condemns nor consoles; he empowers through presence and action.

His calm, grounded demeanor is also consistent with the sattvic guna in Indian psychology—a quality of clarity, balance, and detachment without indifference. This spiritual form of detachment is not withdrawal but engagement without ego. Krishna's guidance affirms that moral clarity and divine justice are still possible, even amid human chaos.

#### 4.5 Archetypes and Gunas: Psychological Symbolism of Key Figures

This episode serves as a rich tableau for applying both Jungian archetypes and Indian psychological constructs such as the gunas (sattva, rajas, tamas). Each character can be understood not only in individual psychological terms but also as symbolic representations of universal psychic forces:

- Draupadi: The *Wounded Feminine* and *Warrior Queen*. Embodies resistance, moral courage, and transformative pain. Symbolizes the potential for trauma to give birth to agency.
- Yudhishtira: The *Conflicted Seeker*. Trapped between moral idealism and emotional suppression. Represents the rajas guna (passion and confusion) and the dangers of ethical detachment.
- Duryodhana: The *Shadow Archetype*. He manifests tamas—ignorance, arrogance, and cruelty masked as power. Symbolizes the darkness in human nature that thrives in unchecked power.
- Karna: The *Tragic Outcast*. Driven by a desire for belonging and plagued by rejection, Karna symbolizes the internal war between loyalty and conscience. He oscillates between tamas and rajas, revealing the psychological toll of prolonged marginalization.
- Bhishma: The *Fallen Sage*. Once a moral compass, his paralysis renders him ethically impotent. He represents the institutional elder who watches injustice unfold in the name of vows, reflecting the collapse of spiritual authority.
- Krishna: The *Divine Guide* or *Higher Self*. Operates from sattva guna, embodying detachment, clarity, and cosmic wisdom. Represents the inner voice of truth that acts without ego or emotional reactivity.

#### 5. Conclusion

The *Draupadi Chir Haran* episode stands as a compelling psychological case study that transcends mythology to interrogate the intricacies of human behavior under moral crisis. Through this single episode, the *Mahabharata* lays bare the layered psychology of trauma, complicity, shame, and moral disengagement. It reveals that silence — especially from those in positions of power — can be as violent and violating as overt aggression. The courtroom becomes not just a site of Draupadi's humiliation but a mirror reflecting the psychological fractures of the sabha itself.

Each character's reaction — whether active, passive, or divine — is shaped by the tensions between duty and empathy, loyalty and conscience, and fear and justice. Through their choices and justifications, the episode exposes how internal conflicts often manifest as external inaction or cruelty. Yudhishtira's rationalization, Bhishma's paralysis, Karna's displaced rage, and Duryodhana's power obsession are not just failures of character, but psychological defense mechanisms activated under systemic breakdowns of dharma and human dignity.

From a trauma-informed and archetypal lens, Draupadi's resistance reclaims agency in the face of annihilation, while Krishna's detached intervention reframes divine presence not as emotional indulgence but cosmic justice. The episode becomes a text that simultaneously diagnoses societal pathology and prescribes moral awakening.

Ultimately, the *Chir Haran* episode poses a timeless ethical challenge: If we were in that sabha, what would we have done? Would we speak, stay silent, act, or rationalize? The answer, perhaps, reveals not just the fabric of ancient characters, but the threads of our own psychological and moral selves today.

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