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The 'Game of Dice' as the Mood, Mode and More of Indian Mythology: Reading the *Mahabharata*

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Abstract
Rewriting myth, redefining its moods, modes and mores, has been a stimulating as well as an inexplicable task for researchers. With a mixed reaction to the very idea of re-writing Indian mythology, with special reference to the *Mahabharata*, making the 'Game of Dice' as the focal point, I would quote Milan Kundera, "Someday all past culture will be completely rewritten and completely forgotten behind its re-write" (Introduction to *Jacques and His Master*). I somewhat come to an agreement, though not with such margin, with Kundera, when he says, "Death to all who dare rewrite what has been written! Impale them and roast them over a slow fire! Castrate them and cut off their ears!" (*Jacques and His Master*.) Thus, in this research, I am certainly not going to re-write mythology in any manner.

Keywords: Game of dice, Mahabharata, Indian mythology, panopticon, body politics, game of chance, power politics, existentialism, discipline and punish, Michel Foucault

Introduction
Mahabharata is a signature Indian mythical text in the most traditional sense, the 'Game of Dice'being the most pronounced subject, written with anon-show feel, having the protagonists Draupadi and Lord Krishna as prodigious and phenomenal warrior-heroes. The epic-narrative is 'polygonal'; it fits into folk tales, antiquity, mythologies, legend, fables and it has the eclectic implication in the form of logically interconnected sub-narratives. *Ramayana, Mahabharata, llliad, Odyssey, Gilgamesh, Beowulf, Aeneid, Pharsalia, Divina Commedia, Os Lusiadas* and *Paradise Lost* are the examples of epic as well as mythology where some or other physical or metaphorical games play the role of the game-changers. Novels such as Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick,* Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* James Joyce's *Ulysses,* John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath,* Patrick White's *Voss,* Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and lvo Andric's *The Bridge on the Drive*too have similar undertones.

In this study, I strive to make an alternative reading of the *Mahabharata*, as a 'myth of the game of dice', wherein the characters of tragic grandeur like Draupadi, Krishna, Arjun, Bheeshma and Karna create this approximation. Draupadi is a woman of peculiar discrepancies in her character, she dislocatesmy very sense of equilibrium and mandate. She is the victim as well as the exterminator, which becomes clear in the most bizarre manner immediately after the game of dice. Through felonies, anguishes, exultations, sorrows and contentment she carries her family forward into her life until the dice game with the Kauravas. Not just Draupadi, all the tragic characters are virtuous, yet unconvinced. They are dutiful, and yet they commands their own terms. They are the heroes, yet they are the slaves, the puppets in the pointers of time. With this as the backdrop, I study the mythical text the *Mahabharata,* with the following research points:

- Dice as a character, the apt personification.
- Dice as power politics
- Dice as a game of chance.
- Destiny as character in the 'Game of Dice'
- Dice as body politics.
- Dice as a game of existentialism
- Reworking on myth through the game, redefining its moods, modes and mores.

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Destiny, "fate" or "karma," plays a significant role in the *Mahabharata*, just as it does in many ancient Indian epics and philosophies. The concept of destiny in the *Mahabharata* is closely tied to the idea of dharma (righteousness) and the consequences of one's actions. The *Mahabharata* emphasizes the importance of one's actions, which are believed to be the driving force behind an individual's destiny. The principle of karma suggests that every action has consequences, and these consequences are determined by the nature of the action. Characters in the *Mahabharata*, like Arjuna and Yudhishthira, often grapple with the consequences of their choices and actions. The *Mahabharata* also highlights the role of divine will in shaping human destiny. Gods and celestial beings in the epic often intervene in the lives of mortal characters, influencing the outcomes of events. For example, Lord Krishna, who is considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, plays a pivotal role in the Kurukshetra War and helps shape the destiny of the Pandavas. The epic centers around the Kurukshetra War. The Kurukshetra is the 'Panopticon' in the a great conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The war is often seen as the result of the accumulation of destinies, as the characters involved are bound by their past actions and the unfolding of events. The *Mahabharata* explores the tension between destiny (karma) and free will. While individuals have the agency to make choices and take actions, their choices are guided by their understanding of dharma (duty and righteousness). The epic presents dilemmas where characters must choose between fulfilling their dharma and making personal choices. The *Mahabharata* provides numerous moral and ethical lessons related to destiny. Characters like Yudhishthira and Bhishma are held up as examples of individuals who uphold dharma even in the face of adverse destinies. Throughout the *Mahabharata*, various omens and prophecies serve as signs of destiny. These omens can influence characters' decisions and the course of events. In the *Mahabharata*, destiny is a complex and multifaceted concept, intertwined with ethics, morality, and the idea of cosmic justice. It underscores the belief that one's actions have consequences, and the choices individuals make are interconnected with their past actions and future outcomes. The tragedy is an interplay between human agency and the cosmic order, exploring the profound philosophical questions related to destiny and the path to righteousness.

Coming to the game of dice, the mood, mode and the mores of the *Mahabharata*, dice known as *aksha* or *aksha-pasha* does not appear as a character itself, but it plays a significant role in the story. The dice game, known as the 'Dyutakrida', is a pivotal moment in the epic, which eventually leads to the great Kurukshetra War. The game of dice is used by Duryodhana, one of the Kaurava princes, to deceitfully defeat the Pandavas, leading to their exile and numerous hardships. The story of the dice game involves Shakuni, Duryodhana's maternal uncle, who tricks Yudhishthira, the eldest of the Pandavas, into gambling away his kingdom, wealth, and even his own freedom. The Pandavas suffer immense humiliation and are forced into exile for thirteen years, with the last year to be spent incognito. This sets the stage for the conflicts and battles that follow in the epic.

While dice itself is not a character in the *Mahabharata*, it symbolizes the treacherous and manipulative nature of the events that take place during the dice game. The game of dice is a turning point in the *Mahabharata* and serves as a cautionary tale about the consequences of deceit and greed. Dice and the game of dice (Dyutakrida) in the *Mahabharata* are symbolic of power politics, manipulation, and the destructive consequences of ambition and greed. The game of dice serves as a prominent metaphor for the complex web of power dynamics and political manoeuvring in the epic. The game of dice is rigged by Duryodhana and his uncle Shakuni, who manipulate the outcome to ensure the defeat of the Pandavas. This deception highlights the unethical and manipulative tactics often employed by those in positions of power to achieve their objectives. The game of dice is used as a means to further the rivalry and ambition of Duryodhana, who is determined to seize the throne and power from the Pandavas. This ambition drives the political intrigue and power struggles in the story. Yudhishthira's willingness to participate in the dice game and his subsequent loss of the kingdom symbolize the vulnerability of those in power and the ease with which they can be manipulated and overthrown. The game of dice sets in motion a series of events that lead to the Pandavas' exile and suffering, ultimately culminating in the Kurukshetra War. This war is a massive display of power politics, with various alliances and strategies employed by both sides. The dice game raises moral and ethical questions about the use and abuse of power. It highlights the importance of ethics and righteousness in politics and governance. The consequences of the dice game serve as a cautionary tale for leaders and rulers, emphasizing the need for wisdom, discernment, and ethical decision-making in the exercise of power.In the *Mahabharata*, the game of dice is a pivotal moment that illustrates the dark side of political games and the destructive impact it can have on individuals and society. It serves as a powerful commentary on the complexities and dangers of power politics and the importance of ethical governance.

The game of dice in the *Mahabharata* is not just about politics and power but also a reflection of the themes of fate and chance. The dice game is essentially a game of chance and it highlights the unpredictable nature of life. Yudhishthira, known for his adherence to dharma and righteousness, is drawn into the game. This underscores how fate can lead individuals into unforeseen and often challenging situations. Yudhishthira's participation in the dice game raises questions about the role of dharma (duty) and destiny. Despite his moral values, he feels obligated to play due to his duty as a Kshatriya (warrior), emphasizing the idea that fate can sometimes override personal choices. The *Mahabharata* often features the involvement of divine forces. During the dice game, the gods and supernatural elements are said to influence the outcome, emphasizing the idea that fate is guided by forces beyond human control. While chance and fate play a role in the initial outcome of the dice game, the choices made by the characters also shape their destinies. Yudhishthira's decision to bet increasingly higher stakes and his reluctance to quit the game contribute to the dire consequences that follow. The concept of karma, the consequences of one's actions, is closely tied to the dice game. Yudhishthira's participation and choices in the game ultimately lead to his exile and the suffering of the Pandavas, illustrating the interplay between fate, karma, and individual free will. The dice game serves as a moral lesson about the unpredictability of life and the need for individuals to make ethical choices in the face of adversity. It highlights that while fate and chance may

influence events, personal integrity and adherence to dharma remain important. In the *Mahabharata*, the dice game is a critical moment that showcases the intricate interplay of fate, chance, and human agency. It underlines the complexity of life's uncertainties and the enduring relevance of dharma and righteousness even in the face of unpredictable events.

The game of dice in the *Mahabharata* can be viewed through the lens of existentialism, a philosophical and literary movement that explores the individual's struggle to find meaning in an inherently uncertain and indifferent world. Existentialism highlights the absurdity of life, where individuals are placed in seemingly meaningless and chaotic situations. The game of dice, with its rigged outcome and the Pandavas' unjust suffering, exemplifies the absurdity of fate and how life can sometimes be unjust and unpredictable. Existentialism emphasizes individual responsibility for one's actions and choices. In the dice game, Yudhishthira's decision to participate in the game and his choices within it illustrate how individuals are responsible for their own destinies, even in the face of external pressures. Existentialism promotes the idea of personal freedom and authenticity. Yudhishthira's choices within the game, such as continuing to bet and not walking away, represent his exercise of freedom and the authenticity of his character, even if it leads to negative consequences. Existentialism explores the quest for meaning and purpose in life. Yudhishthira's struggle to make sense of the dice game, the suffering that follows, and his eventual determination to seek justice and reclaim his kingdom represent the search for meaning and purpose in a world filled with adversity. Existentialism delves into the themes of isolation and loneliness. The Pandavas' exile and their struggles in the forest can be seen as a reflection of the characters' isolation and the inherent loneliness of their journey, which they must confront and grapple with. Existentialism also deals with moral and ethical dilemmas in the face of life's uncertainties. Yudhishthira's adherence to dharma and his moral dilemmas during the game highlight the conflicts between ethical choices and the harsh realities of existence.

While the *Mahabharata* is primarily a religious and epic narrative, it is a rich and multifaceted text that can be examined through various philosophical and literary lenses, including existentialism. The game of dice, with its themes of unpredictability, choice, and suffering, can be interpreted as a reflection of the existential condition of the characters and the human condition in general.

The Panopticon is a concept and architectural design for a prison or institutional building that was developed by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. The central idea behind the Panopticon is a form of social control and surveillance that involves a unique and efficient way to observe, monitor, and discipline a large number of individuals with minimal staff. To me, the Kurusabha is the panopticon where one has to decide the center and the periphery between Draupadi and the onlookers in the court who never offered to protect her. The key to the Panopticon's effectiveness is that the inmates can never be certain whether they are being observed at any given moment. This uncertainty leads to self-discipline and conformity to established rules and norms, as individuals behave as if they are constantly watched. Similarly, Draupadi, at one point, became oblivious of her centrality in

the Panopticon and surrendered to Lord Krishna when the Kauravas, Pandavas and everyone in the court was awe inspired by the view. Thus, the center and the periphery had a role reversal, immediately after the game of dice and the attempted disrobing of Draupadi. The Panopticon is designed to give those in authority significant power and control over the individuals within it. It is seen as a tool for social control, discipline, and the regulation of behavior. The Panopticon concept goes beyond just physical architecture; it has been used as a metaphor for various forms of surveillance and control in society. The French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), popularized the idea of the Panopticon as a symbol of modern disciplinary societies. He argued that the principles of surveillance, discipline, and control observed in the Panopticon could be applied to various social institutions, such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and even broader aspects of society where power and control are exercised.

The concept of the Panopticon raises questions about the balance between individual privacy and societal control, as well as the ethics of surveillance and the implications for freedom and autonomy. It continues to be a topic of discussion in contemporary debates about surveillance, privacy, and the role of technology in monitoring and controlling individuals in modern society. An alternative reading of the *Mahabharata* by keeping the game of dice as the center sometimes and some other times as the periphery raises multiple questions on the critics' hitherto simplistic readings of the seminal text, making it a forever work-in-progress, text-in-progress.

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