



Various Aspects in Dicing of Mahabharata or Temptation of Karna

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ABSTRACT

Karna or Vasusena is one of the most admired as well as controversial characters of the Mahabharata. His birth begins with mystery. In these sections- 'The Dicing', 'The Sequel to the Dicing' and 'The Temptation of Karna', several facets of Karna's character have evolved. His character invites criticism as well as praise. It is difficult to deliver a final verdict to the character of this man. Though he was following the path of adharma but he was forced to follow against his own will. He deserves praise because he always challenged the colossal forces. He accepted the friendship of Duryodhana and sacrificed every pleasure of life to keep his friendship intact. The character of Karna in section 'The Dicing' and 'The Sequel to the Dicing' invite criticism but the section 'The Temptation of Karna' present Karna as the real son of lord Surya. Karna was the friend of Duryodhana. He knew the jealousy of Duryodhana against the Pandavas. He did not want to hurt the pride of Duryodhana but tried to keep him happy. This may be called the moral lapse of Karna but one should have to keep in his mind that when Karna was struggling for his identity, Duryodhana declared him Anga Naresh (the King of Anga). He never came out from this debt of Duryodhana. He remained indebted to Duryodhana till his last breath.

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Krishna's offering to Karna the choice of joining Pandavas.

At one level it seems that choice offered to Karna is simple enough either join the Pandavas and enjoy the kingdom and riches or, be with Duryodhana and perish. But we know that Karna was no fool, and yet he chose to side with Duryodhana and perish. The real question is, not why did he make his choice, but if he had a choice in the first place any more than he had at the time when Indra disguised as a Brahmana, asked for his divine earrings and armour or when he had to pledge friendship to Duryodhana.

Krishna's attempt to convince Karna can either be his effort for the final preparation of war or his efforts at final prevention of war. If it is the former than he already knew that Karna is going to reject his offer, thus the idea of choice for Karna really does not exist. And if it was latter, then he really gave Karna a choice to prevent the war, or least minimize the casualties of human lives in the war. He tempts Karna with various objects of desire. He paints a picture like magician trying to lure his subject into his web of illusions. He tells Karna that his brothers i.e. Pandavas will touch his feet, and that Krishna himself will establish him as the king. And then he also offers Karna the pleasure of Draupadi

To think that Karna's response surprised Krishna would be to underestimate him, Karna also hints that he is aware of the dubiousness of the offer, or in other words he knows that Krishna has an ulterior motive. It is interesting to note that Karna is aware of his lineage and the identity of his biological mother and father. So Krishna's revelation is not really a revelation for him. When he talks to Krishna, he does not talk to him as man to god, but man to man, though with the respect that Krishna deserves. He listens to Krishna and politely declines, However, he adds that the contents of this conversation must remain a secret, for Yudhishtira were to know about the true identity of Karna, then he would give away his kingdom to him, he in turn would give it to Duryodhana, that is why he asks Krishna to keep the conversation a secret.

Karna knows the outcome of the battle, and to emphasise his fore knowledge of the war he tells Krishna that Duryodhana will hold a great sacrifice Of battle. And he himself will act as the witness and warriors from both Pandavas and Kauravas camp will perform their functions as instructed in Vedic sacrifice. David Sulhman remarks that "The world is, in Karna's eyes, an altar, a meeting point of life and death; the true hero like Karna himself, is sacrificer, an archetypical Vedic Yajamana, and also the potential victim of this rite... Karna chooses his death - in effect freely choosing not to be free." But Karna does not stop here, he even describes his own death to Krishna. He tells him that when Krishna will witness his slaying at the hands of Arjuna, it will be the second part of their sacrifice.

Krishna who has patiently been listening to Karna does something that appears to be the sign of something ominous in waiting, he smiles and laughs and asks Karna if he really is not tempted by the offerings that he made to him And if he so chooses then what Karna has described, and what is till now only a premonition will soon materialize and then there will be no sata yuga, dvapar yuga or treta yuga . The kali yuga will face them with full force and fierceness. Krishna wants Karna to go to Kaurava and asks them to begin the battle on the day of Indra, seven days from now, and Karna agrees even though the day of Indra does not seem very auspicious personally to him, for Indra was Arjuna's father, and it was he who asked Karna's earring and armour thus making him vulnerable in the battle.

The question is whether Krishna really wanted to touch Karna's heart. Was he really trying to tempt Karna or was he only asking him to join hands with Pandavas so that the destruction of the earth can be avoided. Surely the former cannot be true for a man of resolve like Karna. What Krishna offered to Karna was nothing much to tempt him out of his loyalty and Krishna must have known that.

Kunti's visit to Karna.

After having failed in seeking conciliation Krishna goes to Kunti and tell her that the war is certain now, and that even though Dhritarashtra knows what is right, he is intoxicated by his son's insolence. And therefore walking on the path of adharma. Kunti having heard Krishna worries about her sons and the outcome of war. The two warriors on the Kauravas side that she fears most are Bhishma and Karna. Bhishma she knows she cannot do anything about, but she thinks she has certain hold on the latter, for after all she is Karna's true mother.

Thinking thus, she decides to pay a visit to her estranged son at the bank of river Ganges, where she finds Karna busy offering his daily prayers. She waits for him, and when Karna is through he sees her and introduces himself as the son of Adhiratha and Radha, and asks the reason for her visit. Kunti informs him that, he is not the son of Adhiratha and Radha, and he is not a sutaputra, as he was famously being called, in fact she, Kunti, is his real mother and he is a Kshatriya. She informs him that he was conceived by her through the sun god when she still was maiden, and because he is her son, he must not serve the sons of Dhritarashtra.

She asks Karna to become the eldest Pandavas and enjoy the fruits of this union. She tells him that he possesses all the qualities required to be the king and that he is not only eldest but best amongst all. Karna hears the voice from the sun god telling him that everything that Kunti has said is true, and that he should do as he has been instructed by his mother Karna, after hearing what his father and mother have to say tells Kunti that he believes everything that came out of her mouth, but he cannot forget that her treatment of his has been very evil and cruel. Even the most wicked enemy could not have done any worse. By casting him out, she deprived him of fame and renown that he could have possessed. He was deprived of his kshatriya rites because of her.

And now when the war is near she wants him to change sides. He tells that if he changes side now people will think that he is frightened, and no one will speak of him as a kshatriya. Whatever he has today has been given to him by the sons of Dhritarashtra, and now he cannot betray their trust, when they need him the most, for they think that with Karna on their side they have a chance of winning the war. The time has come for him to choose the side and his conscience does not allow him to go to the Pandavas. He does not want to be ungrateful and faithless towards the king. Karna makes his intention very clear that he will use all his power and strength to kill Partha (Arjuna) in the war, and he will not accept Kunti's words now. But since she has appealed to him, her appeal will not go empty handed, he promises her that he will only kill Arjuna, and even though he can kill her other sons, he will not. And in the war if Arjuna dies, he will join the Pandavas thus the number of her sons will remain five.

Kunti is grieved but also satisfied because of the promise Karna made. She wishes him health and safety and leaves reminding him of his promise. Kunti's action here seems not out of maternal love for Karna but maternal love for her other sons. What is most intriguing about this episode is that, this formal reunion of estranged mother and son is completely devoid of any emotional display from both the sides. Both Karna and Kunti, perhaps know their purpose and act accordingly. Kunti gets the lives of her sons, and Karna once again loses a part of his strength.

Dhritarashtra's address to his son in the assembly hall

Dhritarashtra is the last one to speak in the assembly hall. He begins by asking his son to listen to him carefully if he wishes to respect his father. Dhritarashtra narrates two stories with the intention of proving two points to his son. The first story is that of Yayati and his five sons. The eldest was named Yadu. Puru was younger than Yadu, but it was Puru who extended the Kuru lineage. Yadu as extremely powerful and was born to Devayani. Yadu was recognized for his power and valour, but also because of his insolence and evil mindedness. In his insolence he subjugated all the kings, and did not heed the advice of his father. Angered, Yayati cursed him and banished him out of his kingdom, along with his other sons who were insolent because of their strength and power. Thus Puru, who always served his elders, was given the responsibility of the kingdom.

The idea of the story is to tell Duryodhana that when elder son is insolent and evil minded, he can be prohibited from becoming the king. There is hardly any doubt that Dhritarashtra is hinting that because of his insolence Duryodhana must not be the king or at least can be prohibited from being the King, but it can happen only if his father would banish him and Dhritarashtra's biggest problem was his too much affection for his son.

The second tale that Dhritarashtra narrates in the assembly hall is about Pratipa, Bhishma's grandfather and his three sons - Devapi, Bhalika, and Shantanu. Devapi was the eldest while Shantanu was the youngest. Pratipa was an able king, who knew dharma well. All of his sons were able and well versed in dharma. Devapi was truthful and respected his elders and served his father. He was loved by everyone and was respected by his subjects. He was also loved by his two brothers. But unfortunately he was afflicted by a disease of skin, and when he was about to be consecrated the Brahmanas of the state stopped the ceremony for the gods do not accept a man as the Lord of the earth if he is inferior in his limb. This gave king much grief and the king died thinking about his son. Bhalika went to maternal uncle's and upon his instructions, Shantanu became the king. The idea presented in the story is that a man deficient in the limb cannot be king, and he (Dhritarashtra) was such a man for he was blind, therefore he could not become the king.

And when he did not get the kingdom, how can Duryodhana even dream of becoming the king, for the rule of succession that commands the kingdom of Kurus clearly says that since Pandu was the king, his son must be the one to get the kingdom. He then urges his son to give half the kingdom to Pandavas, as they have demanded, along with attendants and vehicles, and what will be left will be sufficient for Duryodhana and his brothers. Dhritarashtra's urging appears to be sincere, his knowledge of dharma and laws seems to be accurate, but the problem with Dhritarashtra's speech is that it lacks the order that a king, a father can impose on his son in the world of Mahabharata.

We already have been given proof that Yayati banished his son for his insolence, similarly, Dhritarashtra could have but he did not. Just like Vidura had earlier asked Bhishma to bind Duryodhana or to retire to the forest, Dhritarashtra could have taken some stern steps. But it was his love for

Duryodhana and his secret wish or desire to see him as a king that always made him agree to Duryodhana's wish, and which ultimately lead to the great war of Kurukshetra and destruction of the Kurus.

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