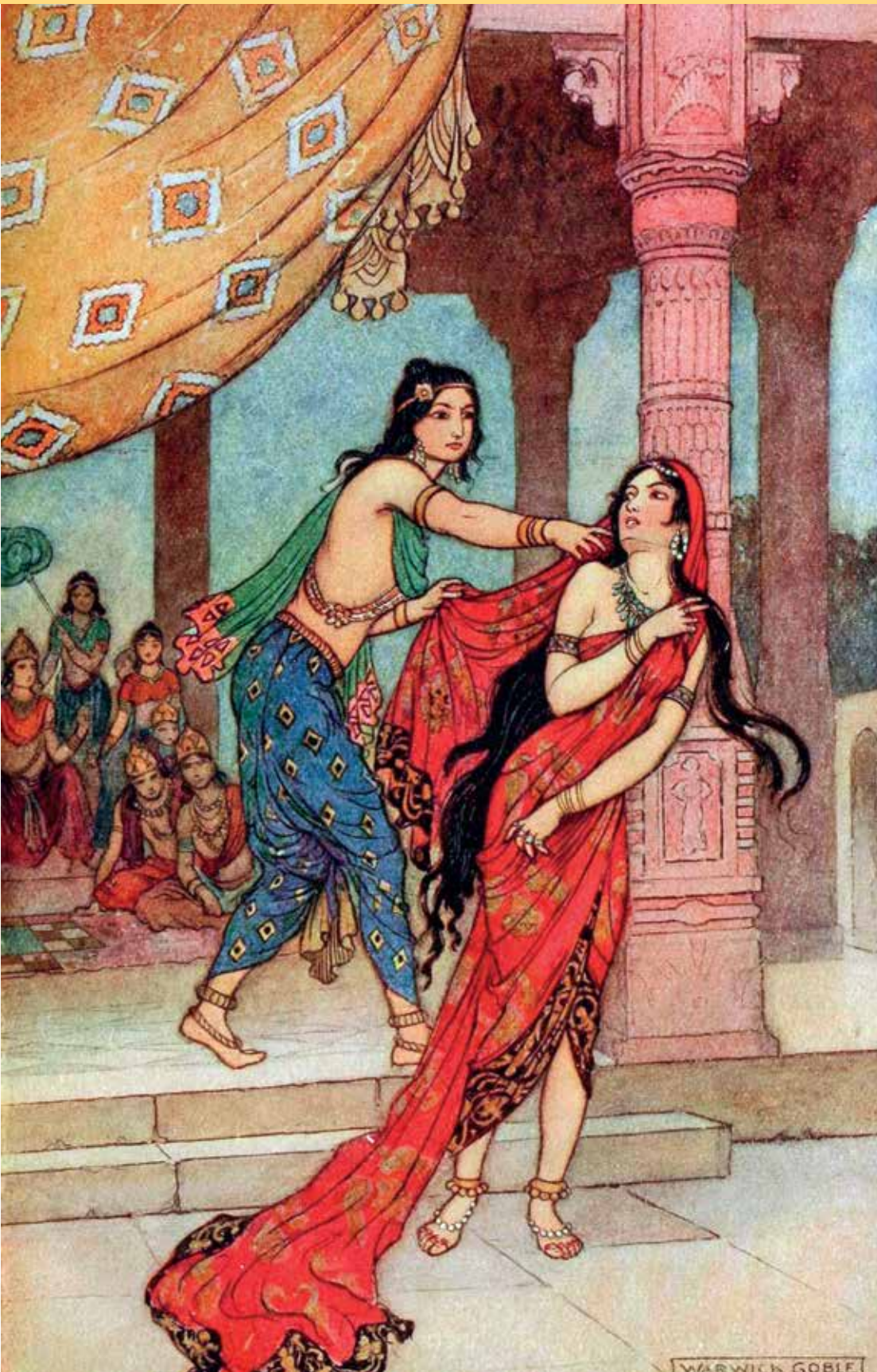


Folklore Fellows' NETWORK



No. 45 | December 2014



Authenticity,
Dracula Tourism
and the Folklore Process

Reconstructing Draupadi

Folklore Fellows' NETWORK

FF Network 45 | December 2014

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Duhshasana tries to disrobe Draupadi after Yudhisthira loses the Game of Dice where he staked Draupadi as the bait.



Folklore, Ethics and Politics

The topic of this issue is folklore, its great narratives and their scholarly use for ideological purposes. Vlad the Impaler provided materials for a Romanian heroic narrative, elsewhere forged into depictions of a cruel despot and the vampire monster of Western popular culture; and the narratives of the Indian Mahabharata may be made to support both patriarchal society and a feminist critique of it. There is nothing new in this: folklore, especially in its epic manifestations with mythic figures and events, has from the beginning interested not just researchers but also ideologues, and at times these spheres of interest have been united in one individual.

Society has also been able to offer an opportunity to researchers. Kaarle Krohn, the scholar of Finnish epic in the early twentieth century, was long of the opinion that epic consisted characteristically of nature myths, without any true connection to the past. But when his homeland felt a special need for it, he finally changed his viewpoint and presented a historical interpretation of epic, which was a fitting way to support the then threatened autonomy of Finland.

State interests and political demands are not just matters of the past. Over the last few decades it has become evident how, with the authorities of state leaders, a mythical, epical past obliges citizens to think and behave in a certain way. Without exception, this is a matter of close-minded nationalism and a story of how others have oppressed and humiliated own's own people, and how it must no longer be allowed to continue.

The best antidote to such aggressive propaganda is a clearly presented scientific critique, with sufficient publicity. Historians may relate how uncertain the sources of information presented as facts actually are, and how information about events from hundreds or even thousands of years ago may be interpreted in many different ways. Folklorists may use their own expertise to communicate how similar heroic tales and sagas of sacrifice are related the world over, and how unreliable oral tradition is when trying to delineate precise pictures of the distant past. We need to give examples of how even the near past, within a single lifespan, is coloured by politics within oral history.

Europe has regrettably seen a return of the cultiva-

tion of the sort of antipathy and propaganda that was thought to have been finally left behind with the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. More and more examples are being revealed of how an authoritarian regime will strive to mould its citizens to adopt concepts of the past and present by restricting the supply of information and threatening dire consequences for critics of the propagandised picture. Specialists in history are specially prone to suffer in this way, but folklorists may end up in danger too. Apart from the threats, the emphasis may be on persuading researchers to give their scholarly blessing to propaganda, and rewarding them for doing so. In such circumstances the researcher's ethical endurance is put to the test: should they hold firm to what they believe to be right, under the threat of losing a good job, or at the worst endanger their own safety?

The bitter experience folklorists had of twentieth-century dictatorships has taught them to refrain from supporting nationalist propaganda and made them into critics of it. This tradition of scholarly ethics needs to be held onto even under pressure. Scholarly discussion and argument needs to be continued, and researchers must maintain freedom of speech. If it is threatened in one country, colleagues elsewhere need to lend their support. Not everyone needs to agree over everything, of course. Scientific knowledge is based on the continual probing and critique of the outcomes of research, and on the presentation of new interpretations of the past especially, and the comparison of various interpretations and their premises. If such a process is forbidden, science disappears and instead we have propaganda. Sanctions may prohibit travel, and limit contacts and collaboration in economic or physical terms. They must not, however, stretch to the area of knowledge, nor must collaborative relations be broken through issues being viewed differently either side of state borders. Political crises can in the end only be alleviated through dialogue. Researchers are generally civilised people with the ability to think about matters and make rational conclusions. Only open discussion will bring sufficient materials to the table, and there are good opportunities within scientific research to achieve this. Let us cherish this scientific tradition! ■

Authenticity, Dracula Tourism and the Folklore Process

TUOMAS HOVI

Dracula tourism in Romania is tourism where tourists visit sites and places that are associated with both the historical Dracula, Vlad the Impaler, and the fictional vampire, Count Dracula (Hovi 2008a: 73). Dracula tourism is a combination of elements from Western popular culture and Romanian history, tradition and culture. It combines fiction and fictional discourses known from popular culture with Romanian history and tradition, especially that which is linked with the so-called historical Dracula, Vlad the Impaler.

The tradition used in Dracula tourism in Romania is mainly comprised of the rich story tradition about Vlad the Impaler that originates from the fifteenth century. This tradition can be divided into German, Russian (or Slavic) and Romanian stories. Although there are many similarities between them, these three story collections differ from each other in tone and especially in the way they portray Vlad the Impaler. The tradition of Vlad used in Dracula tourism is based on these stories and the way they have been used and the way they have influenced Vlad's image ever since. Although the German and the Slavic stories were written down and have survived in print form, they are all based on Romanian oral tradition favourable to Vlad which circulated in Wallachia and south-eastern Europe in the fifteenth century. In Dracula tourism this tradition is used by the tour guides and the tourism agencies that offer Dracula tourism. This tradition is mostly concentrated on the Romanian story tradition. When dealing with a story tradition which is over 500 years old in a modern tourist setting that has its roots in popular culture, concerns and questions about authenticity cannot be avoided. Therefore, although heritage was one of the main research concepts in my doctoral thesis about Dracula tourism, *Heritage through Fiction: Dracula Tourism in Romania*, my research also utilised the concept of authenticity in various ways (Hovi 2014), for example by using the folklore process, a concept developed by Lauri Honko.

Authenticity

Folkloristics has a long history in dealing with the concept of authenticity. It has been used as a defining and legitimising factor in the formation of the discipline, especially in the United States, and for many decades the dichotomy of 'authenticity versus inauthenticity' was one of the driving forces behind this definition. In the 1950s the American folklorist Richard Dorson introduced the term *fakelore* to depict the use of folkloric elements in a fictional setting. According to Regina Bendix, Dorson initially used the popular Paul Bunyan stories and later Benjamin A. Botkin's successful *A Treasury of American Folklore* series as examples of fakelore. Dorson wanted to distinguish between properly documented oral folklore and rewritten materials, among which he counted the Paul Bunyan stories and Botkin's work (Bendix 1997: 23 and 190). After Dorson the dichotomy between real and fake folklore started to crumble with the static, text-oriented approach yielding to process- and performance-oriented folkloristics (*ibid.* 194). In the 1970s and 1980s researchers such as Dell Hymes and Dennis Tedlock both took stands on authenticity, with Hymes attaching truth and authenticity to performances and Tedlock arguing that authenticity should be secured by critiquing past treatments of native literatures and using new techniques to record narratives (*ibid.* 201–4). According to Bendix the emergence of the concept of ethnicity and its research in folklore studies challenged the unreflective use of authenticity in the mid-1980s; 'Ethnicity studies forced folklorists to question their dichotomous practices, articulated most fruitfully by Abrahams and Susan Kalčik, who spelled out why Dorson's exclusion of fakelore hampered effective study and participation in the multicultural politics of the 1970s' (*ibid.* 208). In a multicultural world the idea of the authenticity or the 'purity' of folklore was no longer seen as useful or even as achievable in folkloristic research. By the late 1980s such concepts as the invention of culture or tradition and the 'imagined' had become central concerns of scholarship and the talk of authenticity faded into the background. According to

Bendix, Alan Dundes saw that fakelore might be just as integral an element of culture as folklore, and it should be studied like other folklore. Since the early 1990s the constructed nature of authenticity has been more or less fully acknowledged and problematised (*ibid.* 214–17; Briggs 1993). The questions about whether some subject of folkloristic research is authentic have more or less changed to questions about the need for authenticity: who the actors are who need authenticity or how authenticity is used (Bendix 1997: 21).

Even if authenticity is not as visible in folklore research as it used to be, it is still evident in tourism and therefore also in tourism studies. In tourism the words ‘authenticity’, ‘genuine’ and ‘real’ are used constantly to promote certain locations or events. According to Dean MacCannell, ‘The rhetoric of tourism is full of manifestations of the importance of the authenticity of the relationship between tourists and what they see’ (MacCannell 1999: 14). By marking a site as authentic, destinations have assured themselves a steady flow of tourists engaged in sightseeing (Richards 2007: 4). Because authenticity is so embedded in tourism, it is no surprise that authenticity is also frequently mentioned, discussed and defined in tourism studies. Actually authenticity is such a major theme that one can hardly find a book about tourism where the word and concept of authenticity is not mentioned. The role of authenticity in tourism experiences and expectations is, however, contested to a certain degree. In general the tourist- and tourism-related discourses have conveyed an idea that there are two opposing types of tourism and tourists: those that enjoy the contrived sites and do not care about the inauthenticity and those that are seeking authenticity in real and natural settings (Tucker 2002: 144). According to Jillian M. Rickly-Boyd, D. J. Boorstin argued in 1961 that tourism is a pseudo-event in which tourists seek inauthenticity as a justification for their inauthentic lives, whereas MacCannell responded to these claims in 1971 by arguing that as a result of the alienation of modernity tourists seek authenticity. Since then some researchers have concluded that even though tourists might still be searching for authenticity on their trips, the authenticity is not objective authenticity but symbolic authenticity, and because symbolic authenticity is not based on an exact, discoverable original, it actually allows tourists to determine what is authentic. (Rickly-Boyd 2012: 272.) Similarly some researchers have come to the conclusion that while in earlier times tourists may have gone in search of the authentic, the postmodern tourist delights also in the inauthentic (MacCannell 2001: 24; Urry 2002: 12).

Eric Cohen argues that authenticity is a socially constructed concept and its social connotation is not given, but negotiable (Cohen 1988: 374). Therefore authenticity in tourism, as in folklore research, is flexible and negotiable. Authenticity is largely based on preconceived stereotypic images that the tourists have of the visited locations and is therefore a negotiation and a combination of the expectations of the tourists and the supply and explanations given by the tourism organisers. The focus on authenticity in tourism research seems to be moving from the concept of authenticity as something one can possess or as a state of mind towards a concept of authenticity that is experienced, felt or performed (Knudsen and Waade 2010: 1). Authenticity is a major factor in Dracula tourism regarding, for example, the tradition that is used and the combination of history and popular culture. In my doctoral thesis I investigated how authenticity can be redefined and used in tourism research as well as in folkloristics.



Signs on a wall in Sighisoara.

In Europe and especially in Germany the questions and discussions of authenticity have mostly focused on the term folklorism (*Folklorismus*) which was used prominently by Hans Moser in the 1960s. Moser saw folklorism as second-hand folklore or second-hand mediation and presentation of folk culture (Bendix 1997: 176–7; Šmidchens 1999: 52). Although Moser intended the term to be an objective and non-judgemental characterisation, the terms he used to describe folklorism like ‘genuine’, ‘falsified’, ‘second-hand’ and ‘breathing originality’ made the objectivity of the term questionable right from the start. Folklorism was very quickly linked to the debate concerning the genuine versus spurious or authentic versus inauthentic (Bendix 1997: 177, 182). According to Hermann Bausinger, folklorism meant the use of material or stylistic elements of folklore in a context which is different and foreign to the original tradition (Bausinger 1984: 1405). Folklorism has traditionally been linked to either economic motives, with tourism being the most obvious example, or with political and ideological motives like nationalistic celebrations (Šmidchens 1999: 57). Although the illusions of authentic folklore and the search for the authentic might no longer be valid themes in research that focuses on folklorism (Bendix 1997: 186), and some scholars feel that folklorism should be used and perhaps redefined (Šmidchens 1999), I find that the use of the concept is not without its risks. The problem with the term folklorism is that it does make the distinction between folklore and its use (or folklore and non-folklore), and therefore

is inevitably evaluative by nature. By labelling something as folklorism the researcher may belittle and downplay the cultural value and significance of the actual performance that he or she is researching. The problem with folklorism lies also in its determination. As the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko stated,

A lament performed during an interview or on a stage is folklorism of the basest order, even though the performer puts her whole heart into it, whereas the chat between lamenters in an interview or in the dressing room is genuine folklore. Such distinctions make no sense. (Honko 2013: 49)

Honko was of the opinion that folklorism is an example of how a term or concept that has acquired pejorative overtones can even paralyse research. According to Honko the term folklorism should be disregarded and forgotten altogether because of its connotations of inauthenticity (Honko 2013: 49). In its place Honko offers the folklore process and division of folklore into many life stages and into folklore’s two main phases of life.

The Folklore Process

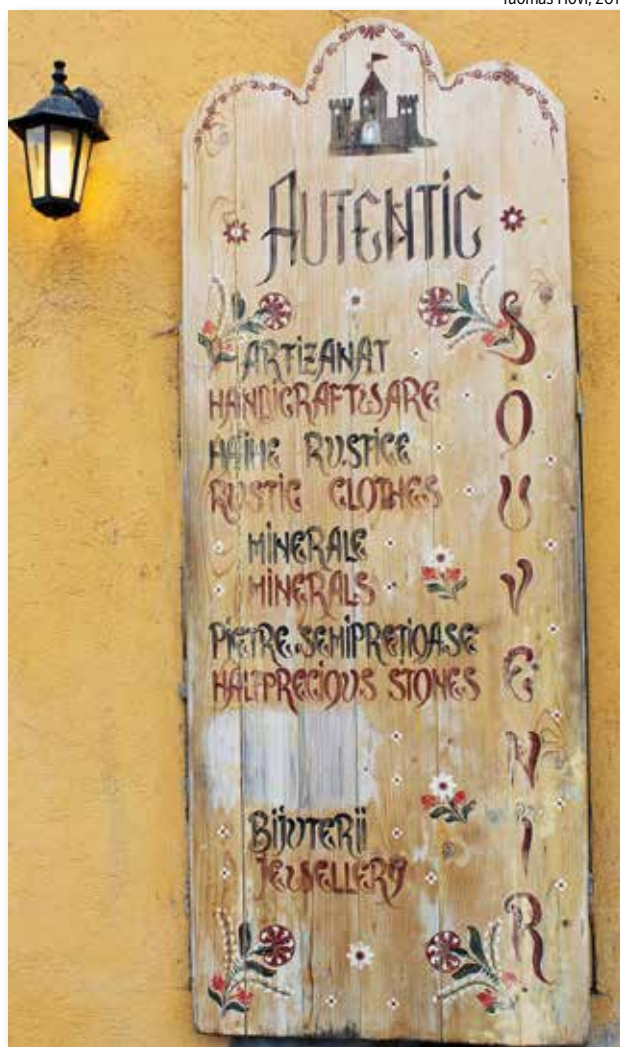
By folklore process Lauri Honko meant the stereotypical life-history of folklore in any culture, which begins in the era before the birth of the concept of folklore and ends with the present-day assessment of the meaning of folklore in its culture (Honko 2013: 38). By using the idea of the folklore process we can in my opinion easily address the questions of authenticity, fakelore

Tuomas Hovi, 2011



or folklorism. Although folklorism as a term has been used in research in a more or less neutral way (Kurkela 1989) and even though some researchers have argued for its reinstatement (Šmidchens 1999), the term has, as Honko noted, acquired pejorative overtones that cannot be overlooked. This does not, however, mean that the concept has completely disappeared from folkloristics. In her article about the country wedding in Ljubljana, Saša Poljak Istenič argues that folklorism can be defined 'with regard to those that practice and receive it, adapting tradition to their needs; as part of the folklore process, the conscious recognition, adaptation, use, and repetition of folk traditions as a symbol of the identity of a local or regional community, an ethnic group, or a nation' (Istenič 2011: 55–6; what Istenič refers to here by folklore process is not in fact the same concept that Honko argued for). Interestingly, she also refers to folklorism as being folklore that is used outside the environment in which it arose. Here the second existence of folklore is defined by the change in context. This is very much the same idea that Honko referred to as the folklore process. Istenič also argues that researchers should rely on the theoretical assumption of the parallel existence of folklore and folklorism rather than on their opposition (*ibid.* 55). Although similar to Honko's ideas, the fundamental difference is the need to separate the second existence (or life) of folklore from folklorism. The problem here, in my view, is this separation. Seppo Knuuttila has criticised the term folklorism because he feels it has often been misleadingly connected with folklore itself: tradition and folklore has been presented as turning into folklorism when they are removed from their original context and thus labelled as secondary and inauthentic folklore (Knuuttila 2002: 255–6). Thus the use of the term is problematic. By separating the second existence of folklore off as folklorism, there is a risk that it is treated as secondary or inauthentic folklore and not given its due value as a research object or as an independent manifestation of tradition. To me the term and the concept of folklorism are problematic for this very reason. By simply accepting all expressions of folklore as folklore, researchers do not need to use terms and concepts that may come across as evaluative or even as pejorative.

Honko sees the folklore process as encompassing two major folklore life phases (Honko 2013: 38). In its first life, folklore is in its original natural environment, where it is a part of the tradition and everyday life of its 'users'. Folklore's first life ends when it is found and archived by researchers. Folklore's second life begins when it is resurrected from the archives and recycled



Souvenir shop in Sighisoara.

in an environment that differs from its original cultural context (*ibid.* 48). By viewing folklore as having different life phases Honko managed to avoid a distinction between better and worse folklore. Folklore is just as relevant, authentic and real as a research subject in its first life as it is in its second life. So by using Honko's idea of folklore's different lives we can say that even if the stories told to the tourists in Dracula tourism are not real, old and authentic in their historical sense, the tradition in itself is real and authentic. It is just living its second phase of life. So whether or not the tradition is old and continued unbroken from the fifteenth century or if it is learned from books in the twentieth century does not matter. The tradition and folklore are authentic and real, but are simply used in an environment that differs from the original cultural context (*ibid.* 48). Honko divided the folklore process into twenty-two stages, twelve belonging to the first life of folklore or subordinate to it, and the remaining ten to its second life. The model of the folklore process is evolutionary and the stages have an order of their own, but it is also multilinear and the order of the stages can in reality be different. Some stage

Statue of Vlad the Impaler in Bucharest in front of the ruins of the princely palace.

might also run parallel to another or even be omitted (*ibid.* 38). The first twelve stages are:

1. The first life of folklore.
2. The partial recognition of folklore from within.
3. The external discoverers of folklore.
4. The definition of folklore.
5. The description of a culture from the inside and its use.
6. The description of a culture from the outside and its use.
7. The emergence of human relations from folklore work.
8. Collection, the documentation of folklore.
9. Archiving, the conservation of folklore.
10. Feedback from the scientific to the folklore community.
11. Establishment of a working programme by the tradition and scientific communities.
12. The scientific analysis of folklore. (Honko 2013: 39–48)

The first life of folklore is characterised by the natural and almost imperceptible existence of folklore in the folklore community. It is an organic part of everything that happens where traditional elements fulfil functions of their own in the cultural system and is therefore not noticed, recognised or emphasised. This is, of course, as Honko himself also stated, a highly idealised picture of folklore, which in reality seldom if ever exists. The next stages of the first life phase are the partial recognition of folklore both from within and from outside the culture, the definition of folklore and the description of a culture both inside and outside and its use. These stages describe the existence and discovery of folklore in a community. The next stages describe the co-operation between researchers and the folklore community and end with archiving and scientific analysis. The second life begins when folklore is 'resurrected' from the archives or somewhere else and used again in some form. The ten stages of folklore's second life are:

13. The 'second life' of folklore.
14. The emancipation of the folklore community.
15. The use of folklore in cultural policy.
16. The commercialisation of folklore.
17. The safeguarding of traditional culture and folklore.
18. Traditional culture in schools and research training.
19. Satisfying the needs of tradition communities.
20. Support for the performers of folklore.
21. International exchange in folklore work.
22. The definition of the status of folklore in the modern world. (Honko 2013: 48–53)

The second life of folklore describes the use of folkloric material in an environment that differs from its original cultural context. This is where Honko saw problems in the attitudes of researchers. Honko felt that many researchers failed to realise that there is always an element of change even in the most exact reproductions, and not only in free adaptations of folklore; all the phenomena in the second life of folklore have not been given their due value as research objects or as independent manifestations of tradition (Honko 2013: 48–9). After the rediscovery of folklore and the emancipation of the folklore community, the second life of folklore includes the political and commercial use of folklore, the safeguarding of traditional culture and folklore and its roles in schools and research. The second life of folklore concludes with the support for the performance of folklore and with the international exchange of folklore work, and with the definition of folklore's status in the modern world (*ibid.* 48–53). For Honko the mechanism of recycling material in an environment that differs from its original cultural context is different from the mechanism of the original culture. Therefore we cannot speak of the continuation of the folklore process as such, and this recycling almost never involves the integration of material into the original folklore process even when this does continue in some form. Although the folkloric material that was already put aside regains influence, it very rarely returns to its roots in the communities where it originally came from. And even if it does it usually assumes a form that is unfamiliar to the oral communication process, such as books, recordings or films (*ibid.* 48). I would, however, argue that in tourism this does actually happen and the folkloric material may return to the community where it originally came from, and therefore one could see a continuation or at least a resurrection of the material in its original community. In tourism this can also happen in a way that is familiar to the oral communication process.

Honko wrote on the folklore process firstly in Finnish in *Sananjalka* in 1990 and then in English in the Folklore Fellows' Summer School Programme in 1991, which was not properly published at the time. Since 2013 the article has been available in English in a collection of Honko's writings entitled *Theoretical Milestones: Selected Writings of Lauri Honko*, edited by Pekka Hakamies and Anneli Honko. Unfortunately Honko never wrote about the folklore process again, although he apparently had plans to do so, owing to his death in 2002. He did not define or reflect on it in any more detail and therefore it seems to be somewhat incomplete. Even though the discussion of the folklore process is problematic, being outdated and too formalistic if taken word for word as Honko wrote it, it can still be of value to folklore research. It can be used to describe and analyse tradition and folklore that has been collected and archived long since, but in a modern context it is a little

inflexible. Forms of tradition and culture change, transform and are passed on much faster nowadays than in 1990. The internet, media and constantly increasing travel all affect the easy accessibility of information about traditions and cultures. In this case a particular form of tradition or folklore might have already moved into its next life phase before it has been properly recognised, analysed and/or archived – for example, the jokes, fake virus alerts, chain emails and other material that is forwarded via email, email forwardables, form a body of folklore that might be hard to fit into the stages of the folklore process as such and yet are certainly folklore (Kibby 2005: 789). The folklore process has also been criticised for not being able to recognise contemporary forms of tradition in their first life phase (Knuuttila 2002: 256). Although I understand this criticism, I do not really see it as a problem because to me the folklore process can be used to approach these kinds of expressions of tradition and folklore that are already recognised and used in a new context.

Some Finnish researchers, such as Anna-Liisa Tenhunen, have also questioned the division of folklore into only two life phases. In her own work on laments, she has divided the tradition of laments into three separate life phases (Tenhunen 2006: 14). Folklore and tradition can in my opinion be divided into as many life phases as the researcher sees fit, with regard to the particular form of tradition or folklore. Whether or not all the stages that Honko suggested in his article can be found and recognised is not as important as finding and recognising the change of context in the use of a certain piece or form of folklore. The clear distinction in my opinion between the life phases has to be that the Dracula tradition and the folklore process context and the purpose of the particular expression of folklore and tradition is different from previously. I find the second life and the other possible following life phases useful in researching the use of folklore and tradition in tourism. As a whole the folklore process is interesting when looking at the scheme for the discovery and use of folklore in a certain culture, but as an analytic tool I feel that the first life phase in the folklore process is not that interesting or even useful other than as a way to contextualise and perceive a form of folklore or tradition that has already been ‘found’, recognised, collected and archived. In this sense the folklore process can be used as a tool to see the progression, development, evolution and/or the origins of a certain form of folklore and tradition. With the idea of the second life (or the possible subsequent lives) of folklore it is easy to validate this type of folklore, if not for other researchers then for the community or the people who might criticise this use of folklore. By defining a form of folklore as living its second phase of life, it can be researched and studied as its own entity free from unfair comparisons with its



Statue of Vlad the Impaler in Târgoviste.

‘original’ form. Or as Honko stated, with the second life of folklore we can ‘restore the research value of events in the second life of folklore to something approaching their indisputable cultural value’ (Honko 2013: 49).

The tradition and folklore that is used in Dracula tourism can for the most part be identified as belonging to the second life of folklore. The stories are circulated in an environment that differs from their original cultural context. The story tradition or the folklore about Vlad the Impaler as a whole and its later use in tourism can be viewed via the folklore process. In its first phase of life the folklore about Vlad circulated in Wallachia and in southeastern Europe from the fifteenth century (Stoicescu 1978: 175). Some of the stories were written down during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the actual oral tradition more or less continued in parts of Wallachia, especially in the area of the ruins of Poienari citadel and the village of Arefu at least until 1969, when the stories about Vlad were discovered, collected and archived by a team of researchers including Georgeta Ene (Ene 1976: 582–4). The oral tradition about Vlad, however, continued to live in its first phase of life and was not obliterated by its collection and archiving. Although some of the stories seem to have been forgotten since 1969, those about the siege of Poienari by the Turks, Vlad’s escape from Poienari with the help of the villagers of Arefu and the rewarding of the villagers are still told in the village, at least to tourists. Whether this is seen as a continuation of the tradition still in its

A new publication in the FF Communications



New Focus on Retrospective Methods

Resuming methodological discussions:
case studies from Northern Europe

edited by Eldar Heide & Karen Bek-Pedersen

The articles featured in this volume concern folkloristics, philology, comparative linguistics, cultural geography, iconography, Old Norse studies and the history of religion in Scandinavia, but in particular they concern the questions of whether, how and to what extent late-recorded material can be used to shed light on historically much earlier periods. It is a blunt fact that our sources for the study of pre-Christian times in Northern Europe are few, fragmentary and immensely limited. However, it is possible to obtain new and relevant information if we broaden our spectrum of sources to include not only contemporary or near-contemporary material, but also material from subsequent, even much later, periods. Showcasing that and how this may be done is the aim of the present volume. Seeking to reopen discussions that have been silent for some time, these articles, each in their way, target a range of methodological issues that are in need of being updated for the twenty-first century.

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first phase of life depends on whether or not the stories are really still told by the villagers to one another. If they are only told strictly to tourists, then the context has changed and therefore we can say that the folklore about Vlad the Impaler told in the area has moved to its second life phase. Without going into all of the stages listed by Honko, the folklore about Vlad has been both commercialised as a part of the tourist experience and used in the local cultural policy (stages 15 and 16). The local administration in Argeş County, where Arefu is located, has used the tradition about Vlad in a local festival called Dracula Fest Arefu, combining commercialised and cultural political aspects of the tradition. The folklore about Vlad can actually also be seen as living in at least three life phases at the same time. The German and Russian stories about him were clearly influenced by the Romanian oral stories and therefore we could say that they and the way they influenced the Western image of Vlad later used in popular culture are the second life of the original folklore. The current use of the Romanian stories and the German and Russian, though in a lesser way, can be considered as the third life phase. This is, however, only the case if we take the context of the use of the folklore as being the main criterion separating the phases of life of folklore. The use of Romanian oral stories as the basis of the German and Russian stories and their later influence on popular culture does not really fit into the folklore process described by Honko, because the recycling of folkloric material started already during the fifteenth century and it was not the result of the work of folklorists or anthropologists. The tradition about Vlad the Impaler is thus a little problematic in terms of the folklore process. Therefore I think that the folklore process should be simplified in order for it to be used in researching modern folklore.

One possibility is to give up or at least simplify the stages that Honko created. By doing so, we can define the first life of folklore as taking place in an original form and in an original context (at least supposedly). The second and other possible subsequent lives start when the context of the use of the folklore changes, usually for commercial, political or recreational reasons. This does not mean that the folklore is any less valuable, authentic or real, it just takes place in a different context. The folklore process could be used as a framework for research into a particular piece of folklore or tradition, its history and its current form. It can also be seen as a dynamic construction of a tradition with the process constantly evolving and also constantly being negotiated. It is also debatable if tradition can be divided into consecutive phases of life or whether the phases actually exist parallel with each other. Honko stated that there is no continuation of the folklore process as such between the two life phases because the mechanism of recycling of material in an environment

that differs from its original cultural context is different from the mechanism of the original culture. He also felt that this recycling of material almost never involves the integration of material into the original folklore process even when there is a continuation in some form, and even though the folkloric material that was already put aside regains influence, it very rarely returns to its roots in the communities where it originally came from. Even in the cases where it does come back, it usually assumes a form that is unfamiliar to the oral communication process (Honko 2013: 48). In the case of Dracula tourism I would tend towards arguing against this view. The Romanian stories that are told on the Dracula tours have come back to life in a form similar to the original even though the setting and the context are still very different. The stories are told aloud, they change and vary and are told better by some performers (guides) than others. Especially in the case of the storytelling in the village of Arefu, the folkloric material can be seen as having returned to its roots, if in fact it ever left.

Although authenticity is a controversial concept within folklore studies, I found it necessary to address it in my doctoral thesis because it is widely used both in tourism studies and in tourism itself. Despite several attempts to replace the term, it has survived, whereas the terms developed to replace it like fakelore or folklorism have not survived or gained acceptance. I have tested the idea and the usefulness of the concept of the folklore process by the late Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko in researching the use of folklore and tradition. By abandoning the twenty-two stages of the folklore process we can define folklore in its first life as taking place in a (supposedly) original form and context. The second and other possible subsequent lives start when the context of the use of folklore changes, usually as a result of commercial, political or recreational circumstances. The context of how tradition and folklore are used is thus the main component when dividing a specimen of folklore or tradition into its life phases. I find that simplifying the folklore process that Honko described allows it to be used as a framework to research a piece of folklore or tradition, its history and its current form and its use. The folklore process can also be seen as a dynamic construction of a tradition, a process that is constantly evolving and is constantly negotiated. With the idea of the second life (and the possible subsequent lives) of folklore, questions about authenticity are obviated and the value of this type of folklore can thus be validated. A form of folklore defined as living its second phase of life can be researched and studied as an entity, free from unfair comparisons with its 'original' or 'authentic' form. ■

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Reconstructing Draupadi

SOUMYA MOHAN GHOSH & RAJNI SINGH

The reclamation and articulation of the feminine self in Saoli Mitra's *Nathavati Anathavat* ('Five Lords, Yet None a Protector')

Introduction

Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of women; it justifies all privileges and authorises their abuse. Men need not bother themselves with alleviating the pains and the burdens that psychologically are women's lot, since these are 'intended by Nature'; men use them as a pretext for increasing the misery of the feminine lot still further. (de Beauvoir 1997: 262)

Myth, like all forms of discourse, is propagated by patriarchy to systematically construct the subject, the woman as the 'other', the negative of man, in order to perpetuate the social hierarchy and maintain the subjugation and domination of women. By harping on the image of woman as a chaste and devoted wife, a model of *pativrata*, who is caught up in perpetual service to her husband, her guardian as well as her protector – her god in the mundane world – myths legitimise patriarchal actions and aid in the dissemination of negative images of women. The image of woman is characterised by certain stereotypical notions and traits, sanctioned by the institutions of power, which coalesce into discourses in the form of advice manuals or sets of written rules. As Kate Millett points out, 'Evidence from anthropology, religion and literary myth all attests to the politically expedient character of patriarchal convictions about women' (Millett 2000: 46). Manu, the progenitor of mankind in the Hindu tradition, declares in the *Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, the laws of mankind, 'Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families)... Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence' (Manu IX 2–3). The two great epics of ancient India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the upholders of the great Indian tradition, propagate the notion of the ideal woman as a devoted and submissive wife. Although the women of the *Mahabharata* are far more assertive than the principal female character of

the *Ramayana*, Sita,¹ they are mere pawns in the hands of patriarchal rulers, remaining in the shadow of the principal male characters, their emotions and finer feelings being insufficient to find expression in the canon of ancient Indian literature. They remain inconsistent, their action dubious till the end. In the popular patriarchal notion woman is considered to be the cause behind the destruction of every age, a *kriya*, an avenging spirit responsible for the massive destruction – be it Renuka² of the Satya yuga,³ Sita of the Treta yuga, Draupadi of the Dvapara yuga, or each and every woman of the Kali yuga.

According to Hélène Cixous, 'the logocentric project [the literary history] had always been, undeniably, to found (fund) phallogocentrism, to insure for masculine order a rationale equal to history itself' (Cixous 2000: 266). Saoli Mitra's play *Nathavati Anathavat* (1983),⁴

- 1 In the *Ramayana*, Sita was abducted by Ravana, king of Lanka, and Rama, her husband, went on plundering Lanka's kingdom to rescue his wife.
- 2 Renuka's son Parashurama annihilated the Kshatriya caste for twenty-one generations after his mother beat her breast twenty-one times following the death of her husband, Jamadagni.
- 3 In Hindu cosmology *yuga* refers to an epoch or era. There are four *yugas*, which follow one another in a cyclical manner, starting from Satya yuga, then Treta yuga, Dvapara yuga and Kali yuga.
- 4 Saoli Mitra (also written as Shaoli Mitra), born in late 1940s, is a well-known actress, playwright and director of the Bengali stage. Being the daughter of celebrated theatre artists she was initiated into acting at the age of three in the play *Chera Taar*. She has written two plays: *Nathavati Anathavat* (1983, translated as *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector* in 2006) and *Katha Amritasaman* (1990, translated as *Timeless Tales*). She has acted in various plays like *Chera Taar*, *Daschakro*, *Pagla Ghora*, *Dakghar*, *Bitata Bitangsha*, *Putulkhela*, *Ekti Rajnaitik Hotya*, *Hajabaralo* and *Lankadahan*. She has also acted in a Bengali film named *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo*, directed by Ritwik Ghatak. She uses mono-acting technique in *Nathavati Anathavat*, where a narrator describes scenes from the epic assisted by a group of musicians.



Saoli Mitra: the performer.

translated into English in 2006 as *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector*, the first in Bengali theatre to provide a clearly feminist interpretation of the characters of the *Mahabharata* by narrating the life of Draupadi, the obedient, submissive wife of the Pandavas,⁵ the symbol of male sexual fantasy, deconstructs the emasculating structure of the ancient epic which legitimises the patriarchal values. Following Iravati Karve's feminist-humanist reading of Draupadi, which highlights the hidden sexual code behind the depiction of women in the epic, Mitra's subversive reading emphasises the underlying patriarchal ideology which informs the production of myth. She skilfully portrays the poignancy of pain, suffering, disgrace and sexual humiliation which Draupadi has endured, in spite of being a *pativrata* (a chaste and devoted wife) and a wife of five mighty Pandavas. Mitra demythologises the myth, decoding and deconstructing its language to understand the inherent deep structure, the socio-cultural aspects governing the formulation of mythologies. She not only confers Draupadi a voice in the hitherto muffled mouth, but also bestows softer emotions of love and care. Her play is an attempt to interpret Draupadi in a new light; as Nabaneeta Dev Sen remarks, she has seen Draupadi from 'a pair of woman's eyes' (Mittra 2006b: ix). The theatre in the skilful hands of Mitra becomes a space for simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of the neglected peripheral women characters, offering them opportunities to convey their deepest emotions – their desire, their longing

5 Pandavas, in the *Mahabharata*, were the five sons of Pandu by his wives Kunti and Madri, fathered by different gods: Yudhisthira born in Kunti's womb with the union of the god of Dharma, Bhima from the union of Kunti and the god of wind, Arjuna from the union of Kunti and Lord Indra, while Nakul and Sahadeva were born from the union of Madri and the Ashvins, the twins. All of them had a common wife, Draupadi, besides each having another wife/wives.

for unrequited love, their heart-felt sorrow, their sacrifices, their sufferings and their unheard protests in the patriarchal society – women with all their complexities and feminine qualities come alive as human beings possessing humane qualities. The present article focuses on the depiction of the principal female character of the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, in the contemporary folk theatre of Saoli Mitra, which delineates the experience of a woman, a portrait scarcely sustained by the ancient text. Reading against the grain Mitra re-evaluates the process of signification and authentication of meaning produced by the myth to sustain and perpetuate the subjugation and domination over women.

A reinterpretation of the epic by Saoli Mitra

Saoli Mitra narrates the poignant heart-rending tale of Draupadi in the tradition of *kathakatha*, a rural Bengali way of narrating a story in a dramatised manner using live music, dance and acting out multiple roles, being the *Kathakthakrun*, the *sutradhara*, the narrator of the play, as well as being multiple characters of the *Mahabharata*. The deconstructive motif is at once stressed at the very beginning of the play as the *kathakthakrun* observes that the words of the *Mahabharata* are like *amrita*, the divine nectar, 'In every age there unfold/ New meanings from the old' (Mittra 2006b: 6). The crux of the play lies in deciphering these 'new meanings', which makes the narrator dig out the sexual politics behind the grandeur of the great ancient epic of India. In a dramatic way the narrator begins with the story of Draupadi, 'A queen – yet not a queen. An empress – yet not an empress. Mistress of a kingdom. Yet a queen without a kingdom. The tale of a hapless woman who had everything yet nothing' (*ibid.*). Her tonal variance and use of language, particularly when she addresses the audience as *babu-mashai* ('Good Sirs'), confirms her rural background; and this technique of a rustic woman as the narrator of the great epic makes Draupadi descend from her high pedestal, stripping her off the epic dimension. Draupadi becomes not only the great mythological character, but also a prototype of the suffering women of day-to-day life.

In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, described as slender-waisted and whose body emits fragrance like blue lotus for two miles around (*Mahabharata* I: Adi Parva 175.10), appears in the Svayamvara Sabha, the place where a virgin chooses her own husband among her competing suitors. However, the Svayamvara of Draupadi with its archery contest was designed specially with a purpose, that Arjuna should marry Draupadi, thus making the very meaning of *svayamvara* futile in the sense that

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Seminar on Academic Publishing, Finnish Literature Society, 13–14 November 2014

The doctoral programme for History and Cultural Heritage of the University of Helsinki and the Finnish Literature Society tackled head-on the hot topic of academic publishing and its future in a jointly organized seminar for doctoral students, post-docs and supervisors held in mid-November in Helsinki. The speakers of the seminar included Head of Acquisitions **Simon Forde** from Amsterdam University Press, Professor **Pirjo Hiidenmaa** of the University of Helsinki, research fellow **Eva Johanna Holmberg** from the HCAS, University of Helsinki, writer and novelist **Anna Kortelainen**, Secretary General **Tuomas M. S. Lehtonen**, Publishing Director **Tero Norkola** and Editor **Aino Rajala** all from the Finnish Literature Society and Professor **Jennifer Richards**, editor-in-chief of the journal *Renaissance Studies*. The seminar consisted of eight keynote lectures and afternoon workshops for doctoral students and post-docs.

The number of participants (over 80 during the keynotes and 40 for the workshops) testified to the topical nature of the theme for early career researchers. It was particularly useful to hear about the prospects and conventions of academic publishing outside the Finnish field. The keynote speakers not only revealed their own – sometimes frustrating – experiences in the world of scholarly publishing but also gave invaluable insights into the processes of submitting (e.g. the criteria for choosing a journal / publishing house in regard to one’s career planning), peer reviewing and editing. We even got a glimpse of the real-life cost structure of editing, publishing and marketing scholarly monographs, which convincingly shed light on the current price level of distributing academic knowledge in monograph format. In spite of these (ever-rising) figures, the audience was delighted to hear Simon Forde’s encouraging words regarding the future of scholarly monographs. Besides strictly academic writing, some of the keynote speakers also addressed the question of “creative non-fiction” and its role and potential both in regard to creating an individual researcher profile and even as a career option.

The themes of the keynotes were elaborated upon in the afternoon workshops. Doctoral students and post-docs discussed themes such as the relationship between a PhD thesis and a scholarly monograph; the choice of language and its corollaries; interdisciplinarity; styles of academic writing; editorial roles in regard to academic joint publications and the future of scholarly writing/publishing.

The seminar was a sequel to the earlier seminar “Distributing and Evaluating Scholarly Knowledge” that was held at the Finnish Literature Society in April 2014. In 2015 these themes will be at the forefront of the Finnish Literature Society’s Open Science project. The main objective of the project is to chart the possibilities that Open Access could offer the Society’s work in academic publishing. The goal of Open Access is to provide the scholarly community, and society at large, with free and unlimited access to high quality peer-reviewed academic research on the Internet. The Finnish Literature Society will arrange a seminar on the topic in the spring of 2015 and the project report will be ready in August of the same year.



FINNLAND. COOL.

Finland's turn as Guest of Honour of this year's Frankfurt Book Fair was a brilliant success, even better than expected: no previous Guest of Honour country has achieved as much coverage in the German-language media. To our delight, with Finland this was achieved by putting literature and learning at the centre of our strategy.

Kalevala & Kanteletar 2015

Next year will mark the 175th anniversary of publication of the Kanteletar collection of folk poetry and the 180th anniversary of the publication of the Kalevala. The SKS webpages also provide a large information package on the Kalevala (neba.finlit.fi/kalevala/). In honour of the anniversary year we will publish on the webpages the manuscripts of the Kalevala and Kanteletar and educational materials for schools. We will also publish in book form and as a single volume the text of the 1849 version of the Kalevala with a guide to reading and understanding the epic.

Finland 100

The Finnish Literature Society is already preparing for the centenary of Finnish independence, which will be celebrated in 2017. You can follow the progress of our projects in this area on our webpages at www.finlit.fi/suomi100 (Free access to information, Our picture of the present is recorded today and History helps us understand)

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Fibula, Fabula, Fact

Fibula, Fabula, Fact – The Viking Age in Finland is intended to provide an essential foundation for approaching the Viking Age in Finland. This volume consists of a general introduction followed by nineteen chapters and a closing discussion. The nineteen chapters are oriented to provide introductions to the sources, methods and perspectives of various disciplines. Discussions are presented from fields including archaeology, folklore studies, genetics, geopolitics, historiography, language history, linguistics, palaeobotany, semiotics and toponymy. Each chapter is meant to help open the resources and the history of discourse of the particular discipline in a way that will be accessible to specialists from other fields, specialists from outside Finland, and also to non-specialist readers and students who may be more generally interested in the topic.

Joonas Ahola, Frog & Clive Tolley (eds.), Fibula, Fabula, Fact. The Viking Age in Finland. SF Historica 18. SKS 2014.

Her Own Worth

This book opens up a window on the life of a female labourer who lived and worked in a small ironworks village in central Finland. Her life touches upon many of the core aspects of 20th-century social change in Finland: increasing educational opportunities, social mobility, the emergence of new technologies and the transformation of gender roles. The research focuses on experiences related to gender, class and work, and the changes that occurred in these aspects of life. The research material consists of life-narrative interviews charting a process during which the author of this study engaged in an intergenerational dialogue with an elderly woman born in 1927 who is also her grandmother. The research stands at the crossroads of ethnology, folklore studies as well as social, micro and oral history.

Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Her Own Worth. Negotiations of Subjectivity in the Life Narrative of a Female Labourer. SF Ethnologica 16. SKS 2014.



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Arjuna accomplishes the task and wins Draupadi in Svayamvara Sabha.

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there was no freedom of the bride. Drupad⁶ was intent on marrying off his daughter to Arjuna, so, he might have told his daughter to reject the only other competitor to Arjuna, Karna,⁷ by virtue of his low birth. Both Drupad and the Pandavas were intent on making a political alliance through this marriage for their personal gain. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, discussing the marital relationship as the basis of society, opines: ‘The reciprocal bond basic to marriage is not set up between men and women, but between men and men by means of women, who are only the principal occasion for it’ (Lévi-Strauss, quoted in de Beauvoir 1997: 103). According to Chaturvedi Badrinath, ‘Draupadi’s

svayamvara was not a contest for gaining her but a contest for a kingdom, a mahotsava for a future great war’ (Badrinath 2008: 176). Nevertheless, when she puts the garland around the neck of Arjuna ‘she had grown even more beautiful... There was no smile on her lips, but her entire face seemed to be smiling’ (Mitra 2006b: 18). Instantly she falls in love with Arjuna, in the guise of a poor Brahmin, and accepts him as her husband, without even paying any heed to his wretched condition, despite being a daughter of a king, which Mitra praises elsewhere (Mitra 2006a: 76–7).

Unknowingly, Draupadi embraces her fate, which has in store an exile of thirteen years for her. Tragedy starts from the very first day of her marriage, when her mother-in-law unwittingly asks her sons to ‘share’ whatever they have brought with them. Hearing the mother’s words the Pandavas were ‘aglow with desire’ (Mitra 2006b: 23). Counter to the views that Draupadi was enjoying the lustful gaze of the five brothers in its primal form, as Nrisinha Prasad Bhaduri posits (Bhaduri 2013: 422), and what Karna would describe as the nature of women to have an appetite for multiple sexual partners, it has to be accepted that ‘Indian women, women everywhere in patriarchal and non-polyandrous societies, are brought up to devote their entire life to one single man. A decision of five men to marry her simultaneously is not

6 Drupad was the king of Panchala, who was humiliated by his childhood friend Drona. Drupad performed a sacrificial rite to take revenge. Later, at the time of his daughter Draupadi’s Svayamvara Sabha he planned to marry her off to Arjuna to make an important political alliance in order to secure the success of his plans.

7 Karna, one of the greatest warriors of the *Mahabharata*, was the son of Kunti, born from her union with Surya, the solar god, before her marriage to Pandu. Kunti was afraid of acknowledging the birth and thus left him to die, when he was rescued and raised by a charioteer, and thus came to be known as a *suta-putra*, i.e. the son of a charioteer. In the Svayamvara Sabha of Draupadi, Karna was rejected by virtue of his low birth. In the Kurukshetra war Karna fought against the Pandavas.

accepted without protest – violent protests’ (Chaitanya 2007: 8). Paying reverence to his elder brothers Arjuna rejects marriage to Draupadi, which provides plenty of opportunity for his brothers to conceive of Draupadi as a sexual commodity, an object of male gaze. Ironically, despite getting the right suitor, Draupadi has to wait for a decision to be possessed. The *Mahabharata* does not mention whether Arjuna had gained Yudhishthira’s permission before engaging himself in the act of *svayamvara*. Had he got Yudhishthira’s consent, as is likely, given his respect for his eldest brother, that would have meant that either Arjuna was allowed to marry her before his elder brothers or the later drama of declining the ‘offer’ of marrying Draupadi following the rule of the *svayamvara* and the subsequent pronouncing of judgement regarding Draupadi’s polyandrous marriage was predecided, which was probably what happened. It was Kunti who urged her sons to go to the empire of Panchala, probably, keeping in mind Vyasa’s words.⁸ Pradip Bhattacharya opines:

Kunti’s foresight perceives that any split among the united five will frustrate the goal of mastering Hastinapura ... Hence she plays that grim charade of pretending not to know what Bhima and Arjuna mean when they ask her to share what they have brought home. (Bhattacharya 2000: 32)

They conveniently concealed the truth of Bhima’s marriage to Hidimba,⁹ which happened before Yudhishthira’s marriage. The Pandavas had the foreknowledge of Draupadi as their future wife as conveyed to them when they were begging alms by Vyasa, who urged them to take the daughter of Drupad as their common wife and also told them the fantastical story of her previous birth:

That damsel of exquisite beauty like God has been born in Drupad’s line. The faultless Krishna would become the common wife of you all in due time. So, proceed towards the kingdom of Panchala, the mighty ones. Undoubtedly you will be very happy to gain her as a wife. (*Mahabharata* I: Adi Parva 157.14–15, our translation)

8 Vyasa, also called Veda Vyasa and Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, who is said to have categorised and divided the Vedas, is grandfather to the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The *Mahabharata* is attributed to him. In the first book of the *Mahabharata*, it is mentioned that Vyasa asked Lord Ganesha, the god of beginnings and writings, to write down the text, to which he replied that Vyasa should narrate the story without any pause. Vyasa posed a counter-condition that Lord Ganesha should comprehend the verse before writing it down. Vyasa narrated the eighteen books of the *Mahabharata* and Lord Ganesha transcribed it.

9 Hidimba, a demoness, was the wife of Bhima and thus the eldest Pandava wife. She was the sister of a giant, Hidimb, who was killed by Bhima. Bhima married Hidimba at his mother’s behest on condition that he would leave her when she bore a child to him.

Vyasa’s production of Puranic episodes regarding Draupadi’s longing for husbands in her previous birth, or the vision of the five Pandavas as the five enslaved Indras might all be instances to legitimise the unjustifiable immoral act, giving it an epic dimension, thereby exercising his authority. Satya Chaitanya argues:

I do not think she looked upon her marriage with five men as a God-sent opportunity to satisfy her insatiable lust which her past life stories speak of. Draupadi exuded sexuality, she was irresistible to men, but nothing in the *Mahabharata* tells us that she was a nymphomaniac. (Chaitanya 2007: 10)

Yudhishthira makes it clear that the nature of *dharma* is so subtle that it is difficult to decipher what is *dharma*, and whatever he says is *dharma*; thus, to provide credible justification for their action of satisfying their lust as well as to maintain their integrity he never hesitates to advocate forcefully, without gaining the consent of Draupadi, who had garlanded Arjuna in the hope of marrying him. The *Mahabharata* does not incorporate the reaction of Draupadi on hearing the absurd verdict from Yudhishthira, and it is difficult to think that the outspoken Draupadi, who can reject Karna in front of an assembly full of kings and learned men, keeps mum in the face of what is going to be the most important decision of her life, the decision for which she has to live polyandrously in a peculiar relationship with five men for the rest of her life and for which she has to be branded a ‘whore’. Satya Chaitanya opines:

If history is written by the winners, so are epics. It is possible that during its long narrative history, much of what showed the Pandavas in a bad light has been erased off the *Mahabharata*. It is also possible that the *Mahabharata* told to Janamejaya itself was an acceptable form of the story of the Pandavas. Janamejaya was, after all, Arjuna’s great grandson. I believe that Draupadi has been silenced in the chapters dealing with her post-swayamvara hours and days. (Chaitanya 2007: 10–11)

Polyandry, fraternal polyandry in particular, where a woman is married to several brothers of a same consanguineal group, is an important step towards a shift from matriarchal culture to patriarchy (Patil quoted in Nabar 2005: 181), facilitating the oppression of women. Draupadi was a victim of Kunti’s ambition of wielding power and winning back the kingdom of Hastinapura. The *kathakthakrun* of Mitra’s play questions this injustice to Draupadi: ‘Did she want this?’ (Mitra 2006: 24) and leaves the idea in suspension. Her play is an attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal discourse, reading the silences and gaps in the text as much as the words.

Critiquing the game of dice and Lord Krishna's involvement Patriarchy has always tried to subjugate woman in multiple ways, denying her bodily rights. Commenting on patriarchy, Kate Millett avers:

Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over the wife ... including the powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale. Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property. (Millett 2000: 33)

The *kathakthakrun* sounds much like a feminist when she criticises this patriarchal social order while describing the game of dice episode:¹⁰

...could it be that the gambler that lurks deep down in all of us suddenly grew powerful within Yudhishthir? So that, even though he knew of the impending doom before him, he just could not stop himself, but went on staking pawn after pawn? (Mitra 2006b: 30)

Quite shamelessly, Yudhishthira goes on playing the game of dice, and keeps on losing everything he had, his wealth, property, army, servants, and finally all his brothers starting from Nakul, Sahadev, Arjuna, Bhima to himself. Losing everything, he even pawns his wife, Draupadi, the beloved of the five Pandavas. As if empathising with Draupadi's condition, the narrator explodes in rage:

The son of Dharma says this without once pausing to use his judgment. He thinks neither of the husband's moral obligations, nor of the wife's rights. He just goes ahead and stakes Draupadi, the beloved of the five Pandavs. How absurd, how very absurd! How unfortunate Panchali is, how very unfortunate. Whether you think of her own Swayambar Sabha and the way it ended; or of this sabha. (Mitra 2006b: 32)

Further, in an infuriated state, the narrator says that if she is given a chance to go to heaven she will definitely ask why Yudhishthira was not 'sent to hell for this sin!' (Mitra 2006b: 33).

Mitra does not stop here. She further condemns Karna, the so-called tragic hero of the epic, for vindictively responding to Draupadi's plea: 'Duhshasan, go and strip the woman in front of everybody in this sabha. And let us all watch' (Mitra 2006b: 37). This act of Karna

gains little criticism in the *Mahabharata*, whereas Mitra elsewhere criticises him for it:

I do not want to consider Karna as a person of great valour. The one who can order a helpless woman to be disrobed in an assembly hall, given a chance, is nonetheless not a mighty hero. Do you think he deserves any greatness? Whatever happened in his life, that is not an act of a mighty hero; it is shameful even to call him a man. (Mitra 2006a: 77, our translation)

Draupadi was the victim of male lust and a motif of revenge, easy prey in the patriarchal set-up. To quote Kate Millett:

Patriarchal force also relies on a form of violence particularly sexual in character... [which] has been viewed as an offence one male commits upon another – a matter of abusing 'his woman'. ... [It] is carried out for masculine satisfaction, the exhilaration of race hatred, and the interests of property and vanity (honor). (Millett 2000: 44)

Following Karna's orders the Pandavas cast off their upper part, as it symbolises the stripping of glory and grandeur. But for Draupadi the stripping literally means exposing her body, unlike the metaphorical stripping of her husbands.

There are variations in the different versions of the *Mahabharata* regarding the disrobing and Krishna's involvement in it.¹¹ The commonly held view is that Draupadi was praying to Lord Krishna, eulogising him as the protector of *dharma*, to come to her aid and the moment she surrenders herself totally, signalled by raising her hands in prayer, he comes to her rescue and provides her with a multi-coloured unending robe. The Kisari Mohan Gangully translation reads:

Thus did that afflicted lady resplendent still in her beauty, O king covering her face cried aloud, thinking of Krishna, of Hari, of the lord of the three worlds. Hearing the words of Draupadi, *Krishna was deeply moved. And leaving his seat, the benevolent one from compassion, arrived there on foot.* And while Yajnaseni was crying aloud to Krishna, also called

11 Krishna, also known as Hari, Narayan, in Hindu mythology, is a deity, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, one among the Great Trinity of Hinduism. Krishna was the maternal uncle to the Pandavas. His siblings were Balarama and Subhadra. He married eight queens, the chief among them being Rukmini. He is said to have married 16,100 maidens to save their honour after killing their captor, the demon Naraka-sura. He joined the Pandava side in the great battle, but on the condition that he would not wield any weapon himself. On the battlefield, seeing Arjuna hesitating to fight with his kin, he gave him elaborate moral advice that, in turn, became a philosophical and spiritual discourse known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. He is considered by many as the master strategist who helped the Pandavas win the war.

Vishnu and Hari and Nara for protection, *the illustrious Dharma, remaining unseen, covered her with excellent clothes of many hues.* (*The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa II: Sabha Parva LXVI, emphasis added*)

However, the Poona edition of the *Mahabharata* does not mention Krishna's intervention; it only mentions the appearance of a new garment in place of the old one when Duhshasana tries to pull at her cloth (*Mahabharata II: Sabha Parva 61.40-1*). However, Mitra does not mention Lord Krishna coming to the aid of his *sakhi*, his dear friend, nor does she talk about the miraculous appearance of multiple garments to clothe her nakedness. She deconstructs the notion of a transcendental signified, the centre of the epic, the protector of Dharma, who comes to his devotee in her moment of crisis. She seems to be echoing Derrida's critique of western metaphysics and deconstruction of the notion of centre in a structure:

the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. (Derrida 2000: 90)

Elsewhere Mitra clarifies her stance:

I have tried to see human beings as humans. How can Krishna come suddenly? Where is Dvaraka, and where is Hastinapuri. Krishna had just returned to Dvaraka after the completion of Yudhisthira's Rajasuya yajna. And he was in danger as soon as he returned. Shishupal's friend, Saubhraj, enraged by the killing of Shishupal, had attacked and was plundering Dvaraka at that time; Krishna had to go to war to counter him. And it was a terrible fight. It took some time to tame him. Then, when he returned to Dvaraka, he heard the news about that game of dice; he hurried on to meet the Pandavas. However, in the meantime, within the space of one month, having lost the game of dice twice, they had been exiled to the forest. Krishna told the Pandavas about it in detail in the Vana Parva! So, he was not aware that such a shameful act as the disrobing had actually taken place. (Mitra 2006a: 72, our translation)

Articulation of the feminine self

Commenting upon the plight of women throughout history Hélène Cixous and others opine: 'Muffled throughout their history, they [women] have lived in dreams, in bodies (though muted), in silences, in aphonic revolts' (Cixous *et al.* 1976: 886). The so-called great literatures always portray them as silent, muted characters, devoid of any human emotions, their dreams not materialised, their revolt unheard. The *kathakthakrun* in the much more intense second act of the play delineates the hopes and aspirations nursed by Draupadi and her frustration



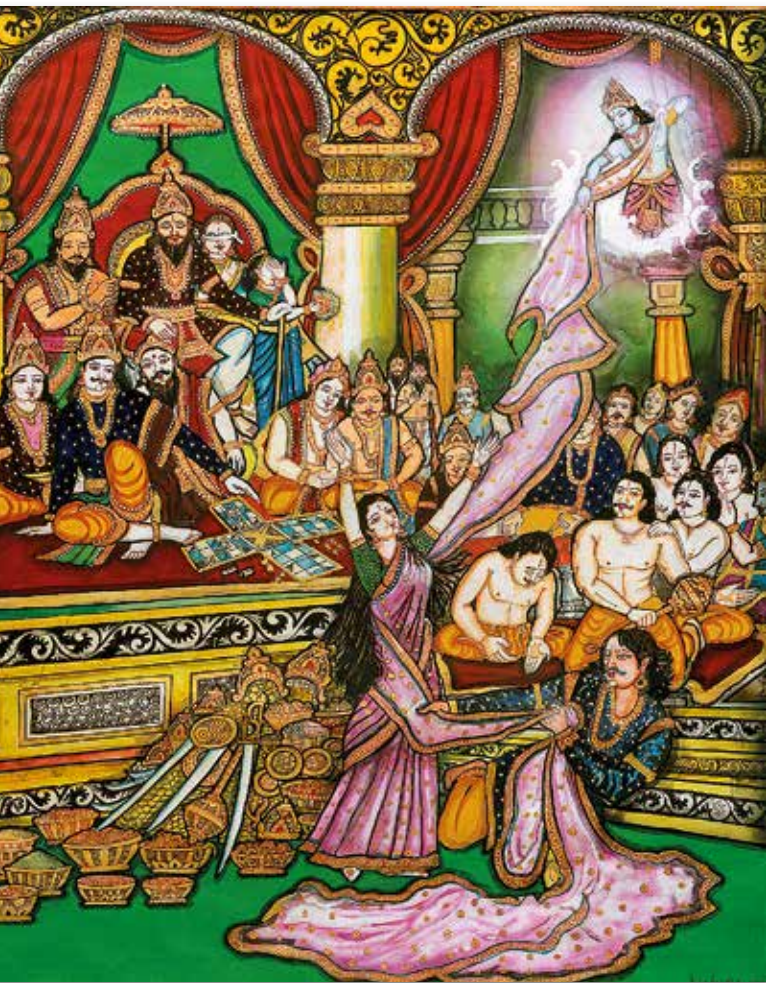
Draupadi is publicly humiliated by Duhshasana as her husbands watch in the Dice Game Hall.

at not having them fulfilled – 'The hopes she'd nursed,/ The yearning;/ The thirst...' (Mitra 2006b: 42). Mitra is successful in portraying the experiences of a woman in a livelier and natural way. Devoid of her epic status and aura Draupadi comes alive as a mere human being, a helpless pathetic woman. Mitra's Draupadi always longs for the companionship of Arjuna, with whom she fell in love on the day of her Svayamvara. The narrator brings out the agony of a languishing heart pining for love:

Partha, your brothers may find consolation in discussing your feats. But when you are away for long, I can find no joy in anything – neither in wealth, nor in pleasures, nor even in living. (Mitra 2006b: 45-6)

With theatrical techniques Mitra successfully portrays the miserable woman's love-lorn heart as the Kathak 'Lowers her head, sobs stifled, as the girls of the Chorus take up a musical phrase as though to reflect the desolate cry in her heart' (Mitra 2006b: 46). Critics opine that the life of Arjuna is characterised by sacrifice and abstinence – abstinence in the way he foregoes his claim on Draupadi the day that Kunti 'unknowingly' told the five brothers to 'share' whatever they had brought; abstinence when he voluntarily goes into exile even before sharing Draupadi's bed; even in the exile he had to leave her in search of a weapon. However, he does not observe his vow of abstinence in the form of maintaining celibacy for twelve years. He never cared for his beloved, her *viriyashulka*, never came to her rescue when she was in great distress – be it in the dice hall where the Kauravas humiliated her or during their last year of exile in the hall of Virata¹² where she was kicked

12 Virata was a ruler of a kingdom named Matsya, where the Pandavas along with Draupadi took refuge for one year.



Draupadi prays to Lord Krishna as Duhshasana pulls Draupadi's saree.

by Kichaka¹³ and later when Kichaka's friends and brothers took her to burn her alive.

Mitra's Draupadi is not a submissive woman as one finds in the epic. She is outspoken, not afraid of chastising her husbands, capable of saying whatever she has on her mind. She confronted Yudhishthira, asking the cause of her misery, 'Why am I in this state? Why have I to endure this misery?' (Mitra 2006b: 47). She even questions the righteous path he has vowed to take, 'You speak of Dharma and the scriptures. Why then did you play the game of dice? You know what the *shastras* say? The *shastras* say that gambling is a vice. Yet you played the game of dice' (*ibid.* 47–8). She had to endure the hardship and dangers, sexual harassment, threats. She is repeatedly assaulted by Jayadratha¹⁴ and Kichaka. The

13 Kichaka was the commander of an army in the kingdom of Matsya. He tried to seduce Draupadi, disguised as a maid, and pursued her into the hall of King Virata, where he kicked her in the presence of the king as well as her eldest husband Yudhishthira, who was also in disguise. Later, he was killed by Bhima.

14 Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu, was the husband of Duhshala, the Kaurava princess. He abducted Draupadi in the absence of her husband during their exile and was later defeated by Arjuna and Bhima, who subsequently rescued Draupadi.

mythical Draupadi finds an unusual treatment in Mitra as the playwright beautifully connects her with women of the present time. The torture inflicted on women today is no less than that of the atrocities wreaked on Draupadi. The Draupadi of Mitra presents the plight of every suffering woman, to which Mitra sardonically retorts: 'that's the way to show off male prowess, isn't it? What do you say, Dear Sirs?' (*ibid.* 54). The spectators are at once brought back from the mythical world to the stark reality of everyday life and are provoked to ponder the issues of the oppression of women.

The *Mahabharata* portrays Draupadi in a unilateral fashion: she was denied the bliss of motherhood, tenderness and love; there is hardly any description of her children in the epic. However, Mitra shows the motherly tenderness and affection that Draupadi possessed. She laments when she had to accompany her husbands to the forest for exile. Her heart cries, but she remains dutiful towards her lords:

And she, too, has five sons now. They were at times with Subhadra at Dvarka, at times with King Drupad at Panchal. Dear God! Draupadi burns inside, her eyes blaze. And then, with her untied, untended hair and torn, dishevelled clothes, she looks like a mad woman. (Mitra 2006b: 46)

Despite having five sons she was devoid of the bliss of motherhood and in a gush of rage she tells Krishna that if the Pandavas, including Krishna himself, forget to take revenge on the Kauravas for her humiliation, her five sons will do so: 'I shall have my five sons. They will avenge their mother' (Mitra 2006b: 59). In the dice game hall not only was the pride of the wife taken away but also the pride of the mother was lost, which could only be regained through vengeance. However, all of her sons were murdered after the war in a most unheroic manner, killed by Ashwatthama¹⁵ in their sleep. Thus, Mitra tries to make Draupadi a complete woman, more specifically an ordinary woman who is caught in the web of relationships – an obedient daughter, a dutiful wife and an affectionate mother.

Mitra's Draupadi always longs to establish *dharma-rajya*, the reign of righteousness through a war, a *dharmayuddha* – 'let there be a war for justice to reinstate morality' (Mitra 2006b: 59). She had wanted an empire where women will be respected, a kingdom where no women should experience what she had gone through. Thus, when Krishna advocates peace she challenges him, saying,

15 Ashwatthama was the son of Guru Drona, who was killed by unfair means in the Great War. Ashwatthama sought revenge after the end of the war by entering the Pandava camp during the night and slaughtered all the sons of Draupadi along with her siblings.



Draupadi accompanies her husbands on their way to thirteen year exile.

If I forget the humiliation inflicted on me, dear friend, will it usher a *Dharmarajya*, the rule of Virtue, into this world? Can you promise that in the future no woman will ever be persecuted and demeaned like I was? Will my forgiveness usher in that heavenly state? (Mitra 2006b: 60)

She had hoped that it will usher the rule of virtue, however, the consequences of the war stupefies her. All her dreams are shattered. She stands before the battlefield, turned into a cremation ground, and wonders 'what realm would she be queen of' (Mitra 2006b: 61). In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is described as 'nathavati anathavat', having husbands, but like a widow. Iravati Karve observes,

She was the wife of the five but bereft the daughter of a rich house but like an orphan, she had brave allies but she was alone. This was the pity of her situation. Every time she was dishonoured, her husbands and father-in-law stood watching in silence. (Karve 2006: 50)

According to Mitra, Draupadi's suffering is the suffering of flesh and blood and Draupadi has endured the agony and suffering of the entire era; she has encompassed the agony of the whole era in her persona.

The extension of Draupadi's story

Inspired by Iravati Karve's extension of Draupadi's experience Mitra's play describes her journey to the end, imagining the pathetic life of Draupadi even after the *Mahabharata* finishes her story. After the devastation,

the Pandavas are accompanied by Draupadi in their *Mahaprasthan*, journey towards heaven. However, after walking for months, worn out, exhausted Draupadi collapses, but her husbands do not even care to turn back. She has heard Bhima asking Yudhisthira the reason for her fall, to which Yudhisthira replies with much anguish, 'For the sin of loving Arjun the most' (Mitra 2006b: 66). Draupadi wanders retrospectively hearing Dharmaraja's answer. She never had any indifferent attitude towards her husbands and treated them alike and 'never expressed her feelings. She always tried to behave in the same way towards all of them. But her heart? How would she kill her heart? The heart cannot be touched, the heart cannot be burnt' (*ibid.* 67). All the five Pandavas had other wives, for which Draupadi never protested nor felt sad, save only in the case of Arjuna's marriage to Subhadra,¹⁶ when she could not control her emotions, revealing her preference towards Arjuna. She had loved Arjuna and garlanded him without knowing what her fate had in store for her. However, Arjuna never cared for her; he had many women in his life and never bothered about fidelity towards his beloved Panchali. Meditating about love, she thinks about Bhima; he is the only one who fought for her, protected her, never fleeing under the pretext of *dharma*. At the last moment of her life she is flooded with rays of light, as a sudden realisation strikes her:

16 Subhadra was the sister of Lord Krishna, who was abducted by Arjuna upon Krishna's advice and subsequently married.

A recent publication in the FF Communications



Songs of the Border People

Genre, reflexivity, and performance in Karelian oral poetry

by Lotte Tarkka

Rune-singing in the Kalevala meter is one of the few European oral poetries to survive the long nineteenth century. In her comprehensive study of the poems collected in the Archangel Karelian parish of Vuokkiniemi, Lotte Tarkka places this tradition within historical and ethnographic realities, contexts of local and elite ideologies, and the system of folklore genres. The songs of the border people emerge as praxis, the communicative creation of individual and collective identities grounded in a mythic-historical view of the world. The bond between the songs and their singers is articulated through an intertextual analysis of key cultural themes and the textual strategies used in their elaboration. In performance, singers and their audiences could evoke alternative realms of experience and make sense of the everyday in dialogue with each other, supranormal agents, and tradition. The poems, as powerful representations and performatives, endowed those who voiced them with godlike creative capacities, as coined in the proverb "The things I put into words, I make real."

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After all these years, her eyes suddenly brim over with tears, Dear Sirs, and a smile appears on her withered face. With great effort, she tries to hold Bhim's face between her hands, bathing it with her tears. And summoning her last breath, she says, 'Be mine in my next birth, Bhim, I want only you to be mine, I will be able to sleep in peace with my head resting in you[r] lap.' (Mitra 2006b: 70)

Mitra pays tribute to the suffering soul, saying,

Married to valiant lords, yet none a protector,
Such is the fate of
Drupad's darling daughter,
Fathomless pain and bitterness
Are all that life has brought her.
In this world so pitiless
No consolation left;
O dear one, how did you endure such pain?
Married to valiant lords, yet none a protector.
(Mitra 2006b: 65–6)

Theatrical technique

Mitra's masterful use of stagecraft, theatrical devices and fusion of various theatrical aspects like song, dance, mime, background music and light are instrumental in intensifying the effect of the narration. She mimes and acts out the emotional turmoil of Draupadi, using her brilliantly modulated voice and tonal variation, which appeal to the emotion of the audience. Often she makes her own observations and comments on past incidents as well as on the modern-day predicament of women. The satirical bite of the comments at once alienates the audience from the mythical world and ignites rational thinking from the emotionally charged audience. Critiquing the infamous game of dice and its subsequent immoral behaviour in the court Mitra's narrator observes:

Shall I say something, Dear Sirs? Nobody ever listens to good advice, to moral lessons. This was as true then as it is now. Yes, that really is so. Else, why this wanton gambling today? And along with it, all, all the attendant vices are creeping into society. (Mitra 2006b: 29)

The juxtaposition of the narratorial intrusion and the action of the mythical stories helps the audience to find a chord between mythical world and the contemporary world, universalising the experience of one woman to signify the plight of women in general, irrespective of time and space – it bridges the barrier between history and geography. Her use of the rural Bengali form helps her in the depiction of past events, at the same time questioning the acceptability of it, as she stresses, "Through these ancient traditions we can produce some manuscripts that would express dense, serious issues

Courtesy of the artist



A still of Saoli Mitra performing *Nathavati Anathavat*.

very easily... We can express the problems and complexities of our modern-day life through the medium of these forms' (Mitra 2006a: 68, our translation). Mitra's subversive reading searches back through history to expose the discursive structure of the epic, departing from the male perspective of producing meaning in phallogocentric discourses, reading and revealing in turn the silences and the omissions of phallogocentric writings. Her reading seems to have 'promoted the possibility of reading "as a woman". ... a new experience of reading and to make readers – men and women – question the literary and political assumptions on which their reading has been based' (Culler 1986: 51), disregarding the popular belief of her being the cause of destruction, as Samim Ahmed in his book *Mahabharate Draupadi* declares, 'It was not for Yudhisthira's love for the game of dice or the hatred of Duryodhana, the Kurukshetra war happened because of Yajnaseni' (Ahmed 2013: 7, our translation). Although Jain Puranas condemn Draupadi for being the real cause of the war, Iravati Karve dismisses the claim, saying that 'some misogynist has written these lines without any regard for facts' (Karve 2006: 50). Shuddhabrata Sengupta, analysing Mitra's play, observes:

Hers is an assault by the profane on the sacred, and one cannot but be delighted with the ease and the anarchic wit with which she dismembers sacrility [*sic*]. Several canons

are violated in this process, heroes become human, gods disappear or are pushed to the margin, desire not duty is celebrated as an ethical imperative. (Sengupta quoted in Rajan 1993: 135)

Mitra's interventionist theatre is akin to Brechtian epic theatre, with an intention of producing *Verfremdungseffekt*, commonly translated into English as the 'alienation effect', a method of provoking the audience into taking an active role in critically analysing and reflecting on the events shown in the auditorium. Mitra's technique of a narrator describing Draupadi's life mostly in the third person and using the past tense in prosaic form instead of using original versification shatters the illusory idea that the spectators are experiencing a real-life event as it unravels before their eyes. The presence of onstage musicians within the full view of the audience, the absence of historically relevant props, coupled with direct address to the audience contribute to breaking the imaginary 'fourth wall' between the stage and the auditorium. She emphasises the reporting of events instead of total identification with the character, dissociating into multiple roles through impersonating a host of characters, which is against the Stanislavsky's notion of an actor. However, Mitra achieves the balance of empathy and alienation through the narrator's identification with Draupadi and the intermittent interruption which at once make the audience empathise with the character and at the same time deconstruct the traditional point of view of looking at a text. She does not manipulate the audience into identifying themselves with the character; rather she helps in distancing and inviting the spectators to take an active role in analysing and evaluating the patriarchal discourse, as Brecht proclaims: 'The aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident' (Brecht 1974b: 136). The temporal dislocation caused by the reportage of the events makes the audience go back to the past and examine it with a fresh perspective. The strategic intrusion of the narrator disrupts the spatio-temporal unity of the play, which facilitates the alienation effect.

Mitra's feminist retelling of the epic echoes Brecht's idea of 'historicisation', which is a 'crucial technical device' (Brecht 1974b: 140) of achieving *Verfremdungseffekt*, revealing that history (his story) is written by men to sustain dominant patriarchal order. Mitra's subversive reading challenges the received version of the dominant narrative by questioning the action and the social structure of the past. She beautifully connects the heartfelt anguish of the mythical Draupadi and her shattered dream of establishing a *dharmarajya*, a kingdom of virtue, where no woman should suffer what she has endured, with the contemporary world where

crimes against women are recurrent phenomena. Thus, by juxtapositioning the past and the present she is able to highlight the continuity of the events and very subtly urges a change in the way women are treated in the present world, just like Brecht, whose aim is to 'invite [the spectators] into our theatres and beg not to forget their cheerful occupations while we hand the world over to their minds and hearts, for them to change as they think fit' (Brecht 1974a: 185).

Conclusion

According to Roland Barthes, myth is a form of speech, a 'metalinguage', because it is a 'second-order semiological system' (Barthes 2009: 137), where the meaning is produced through the already existing first-order sign and consequently naturalised: 'Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion' (*ibid.* 153). Mitra is able to subvert this distorted and constructed reality which silences and represses women. She is able to portray the experiences of a woman and her feminine self, thus reclaiming for her the space which a woman was denied by the patriarchal discourse. Anita Singh and Tarun Tapas Mukherjee rightly mention in *Gender, Space and Resistance: Women and Theatre in India* (2013) that Sita of the *Ramayana* is considered as the ideal Indian woman and wife. She is the epitome of *pativrata*, the comely and dutiful wife, a *sati*. However, nobody even wants to name their daughters after Draupadi. Perhaps her sufferings are so ingrained in the Indian psyche that nobody wants their daughters to be associated with her in any way, and it is probably due to her various epithets, like 'harlot', 'public woman', 'blood thirsty', that are associated with her that people do not want to allude to her in any auspicious matters. Mitra, however, refuses to compartmentalise her stance of being a feminist herself, as she mentions in an interview with Anita Singh, 'No, I am not a "feminist". I do not much understand their stance. I would rather call myself a "humanist" if you really need such an adjective!' (Mitra quoted in Singh and Mukherjee 2013: 607). She unearths the suffering soul that lurks beneath the grandeur of the great epic, the *Mahabharata*. She articulates a distinct female voice of the one whose voice was long suppressed by patriarchy, and showers her sympathy on one who had suffered a lot. In this context, it would be apt to apply Norman Brown's comment in the foreword to Iravati Karve's *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* to refer to Mitra's play:

Seen through her eyes the Mahabharata is more than a work which Hindus look upon as divinely inspired and venerate. It becomes a record of complex humanity and a mirror to all the faces which we ourselves wear. (Brown 2006: 2) ■

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Reviews

Northern peoples in others' eyes

Art Leete, *Guileless Indigenes and Hidden Passion. Descriptions of Ob-Ugrians and Samoyeds through the Centuries*, Folklore Fellows' Communications 306 (Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2014), 308 pp.

In this work, Art Leete, professor of ethnology at Tartu University, analyses the way in which the northern peoples of Eurasia have been presented in travel journals and ethnographic depictions. The particular focus of attention is the depiction of the character and world view of the Nenets Samoyeds and the Ob-Ugrian Khanty and Mansi, as influenced by researchers' cultural stereotypes and the semiotic experience of meeting the other. Leete has carried out field work in these areas, so the peoples examined and their cultures are well known to him.

The Samoyeds and Ob-Ugrians belong among the Uralic peoples: their languages are related but not intercomprehensible. Their cultures differ, though there are many similarities too. All three peoples are reindeer-herders, though for the Nenets reindeer-herding is a more central means of sustenance and their herds are bigger. All three peoples also engage in fishing and hunting as a means of living. The Samoyeds live further north on the tundra, whereas the Ob-Ugrians also partially inhabit the taiga belt. The belief system of all the peoples was originally shamanic. As the peoples live partially in the same areas, many researchers have compared them explicitly in their descriptions.

In the extensive introduction, Leete investigates the mentality, which is comprised of mental attitudes, general orientations of consciousness and habits that a society is not quite distinctly conscious of, and its formation. In analysing identity, Leete, on the basis of his own field work, views the majority as striving in their attitudes for a collectiveness, for common values and meanings produced by enculturation. Looking at the changes in the cultures of Russia's northern peoples, he cites Nikolai Vakhtin, who argues that they have been influenced by coercion and choice. The state has acted coercively towards minority peoples, and even threatened them with physical destruction, but on the other hand has presented the opportunity or motivation to

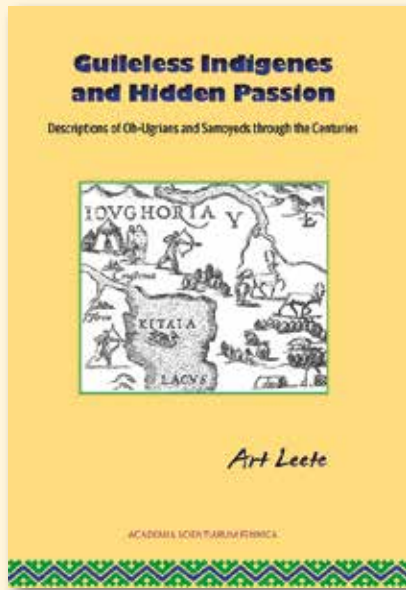
adopt the identity of the ruling populace and exploit it. In recent years, the numbers registered as belonging to northern Uralic peoples in censuses has risen, the explanation being a shift in the motivation of identity: when indigenous peoples have been offered the advantages of statehood such as free fishing and hunting rights, more have adopted the ethnicity of their forefathers than ever before. The same development has been visible in Finnish Lapland.

The work has three main chapters. The first, 'The others as monsters', begins in Antiquity, but concentrates on the early Middle Ages, when strange peoples were often demonised as monsters. They were ascribed unnatural bodily forms: they were depicted, for example, as tiny dwarfs or as giants, as one-eyed or half-people, as cannibals or half-animal. Later descriptions of strange peoples garnered parts of the earlier presentations and adopted them as their own.

The first descriptions of Ob-Ugrians and Samoyeds are found in early Russian chronicles, such as the Nestor Chronicle ('Tales of Bygone Years'). These describe the battles of the Novgorodians against the monstrous inhabitants of the Yugra in the first centuries of the second millennium. In the early Middle Ages, the Ob-Ugrians were thought to be the offspring of Noah's son Japheth. The first realistic description of the Nenets is found in the travel accounts of the Dutchman, Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, from 1594 and 1595. He met the Samoyeds as he sailed the north coast of Russia as far as the Ob, and described them as normal people without any fantasy elements.

The second main chapter describes the formation of a scientific approach to the northern peoples. It begins in the eighteenth century, with the rule of Peter the Great, and goes on to the October Revolution of 1917. Peter the Great wished to map the extensive realm of Russia and extend his power. At his initiative many

A new publication in the FF Communications



Guileless Indigenes and Hidden Passion

Descriptions of Ob-Ugrians and Samoyeds

through the Centuries

by Art Leete

This monograph is aimed for discussing the views of the character of the Khanty, Mansi and Nenets by authors of different periods. Changes of general ideas about the inhabitants of the Arctic has had a remarkable, albeit often concealed, role in the development of the research on northern peoples. The author examines the image of northern peoples beginning from ancient Greek and Roman accounts of peoples, medieval sources, modern travel journals and ends up with the analyses of contemporary scholarly writings. The book is an attempt to explore the general background of ideas and the scientific methodology that frames changes in this knowledge about the peoples of the North. The theoretical framework of this monograph is related to the dialogue between modern theories of identity and the historical modes of description. Conceptualisation of northern peoples have been affected by period-specific dominant modes of thinking about culture and appropriate ways to present one's viewpoints.

Art Leete is the Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu. He has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork among the Khanty, Mansi, Nenets and Komi people in Siberia and Russian North since the early 1990s. He has studied different aspects of historical-ethnographic descriptions of the Arctic and the twentieth century's social, political and religious change among the northern peoples.

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expeditions were made with the objective of securing reliable information about the peoples of the region and their languages: attention shifted from describing monstrosities to the observation of social and economic relations, in accordance with Enlightenment principles.

In the eyes of the Russian intellectuals, wild peoples needed civilising and converting to Christianity. By means of tax concessions the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians were converted, but Christianity scarcely took root among them, even if aspects of it came to be mixed with their ancient shamanic beliefs. Many travel journals describe the relationship between Christianity and the indigenous peoples, and the resulting syncretism. The native concepts of purity, which differ radically from European notions, are also usually described, the unrestrained use of alcohol and their laziness, but also their honesty and helpfulness. Personality is viewed as a consequence of the harshness of the environment.

Leete goes through the couple of centuries of writings on the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians quite precisely. Among them are many of the great names of Finnish Finno-Ugristics: M. A. Castrén (1813–53), the founder of Uralic studies and its chief icon, who managed to visit all the Uralic peoples in the course of his travels, including the Samoyeds. Along with his followers half a century later, August Ahlqvist, Heikki Paasonen, U. T. Sirelius, K. F. Karjalainen and Artturi Kannisto, he wrote extensive travel journals, in which Samoyeds and Ob-Ugrians are described. Many of the writers also compared the nature folk they met with Finns, and noted many similarities. Castrén especially adhered to Rousseauan ideas by which the development of the nature folk towards civilisation went hand in hand with moral degeneration. Many Finnish research travelers criticised the immorality of the Russian population of Siberia, which would serve as nothing but a bad example to the native peoples. The central Nenets researcher is missing from the group: Leete makes no use of the published memoirs of the field work carried out in 1911–12 and 1914 by Toivo Lehtisalo among the Tundra and Forest Nenets, whose life and customs the memoirs focus upon.

The last main chapter concentrates on the period from the 1920s to the present. As the research on the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians began to develop in Russia and during the Soviet period much was published, Leete has selected just some representative examples for further examination. The chapter covers many different theoretical research fields, from psychoanalysis to biology, determinism and Soviet ethnography, whose objective was to build a 'better future', and which saw the northern peoples as some sort of remnants of pre-class societies. In the late 1980s, Russian ethnographers ended up asserting that the natives had certainly adopted Soviet culture, but not at all in the optimum manner, which is

to say that the features of ethnicity were not disappearing, nor was any homogenous Soviet culture being born.

Some of the nineteenth-century researchers were already individualising the nature folk, and describing them by name, whereas in earlier centuries the peoples were spoken of as a faceless mass. In the twentieth century Russians and native Nenets, Khanty and Mansi focused attention on the same aspects and problems as their predecessors in earlier centuries, but on the other hand there appears an idealistic and exaggerated habit of praising individuals from the nature folk without any objectivity.

Two themes run side by side in Leete's work: he presents the change in the depiction of native peoples over the last millennium with concrete examples, while he also examines the anthropological attitude to the other, and its theoretical development. The text presents Rousseau, Hobbes and Hegel, along with Lévy-Bruhl, Freud and Jung, moving on to Boas, Sapir, Benedict and of course Foucault and Lévy-Strauss, to mention just a few examples. The one theme is thus very concrete, the other markedly theoretical. They overlap, but the theory and the examples could have been better discussed in tandem. As it stands, they remain separate. Fortunately Leete does not confine the theoretical description to the great names of the West, but also presents Russian and especially Soviet theories and their practical application to the native peoples of the north. As Soviet concepts did not move on quite such an abstract level as Western theories at their worst, both threads in the book are better united when describing them.

Art Leete's work is like a kaleidoscope in which the world of the Nenets and Ob-Ugrians, the descriptions of them by research travellers and anthropological theories meet and form various patterns and combinations. It contains many details, sometimes even repetitions, but at the same time it provides the reader with a millennium-long perspective on the otherness of the nature folk and our interpretation of this otherness.

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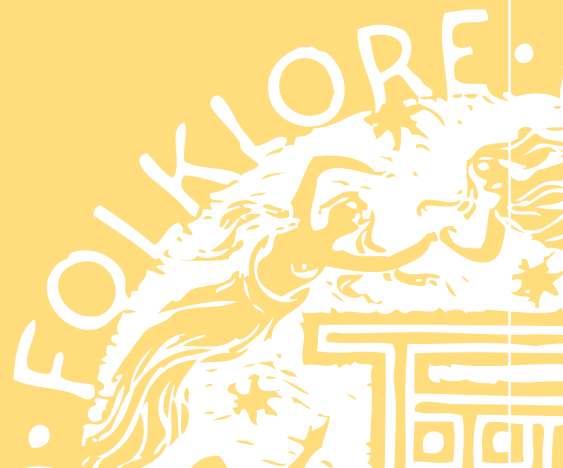
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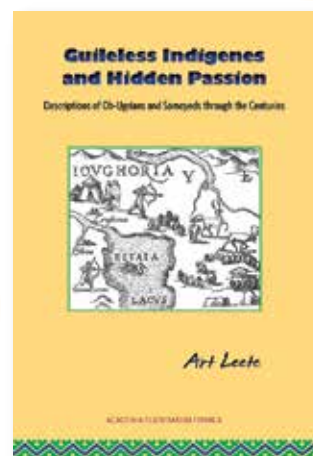
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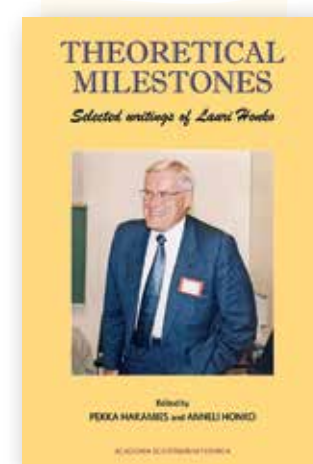
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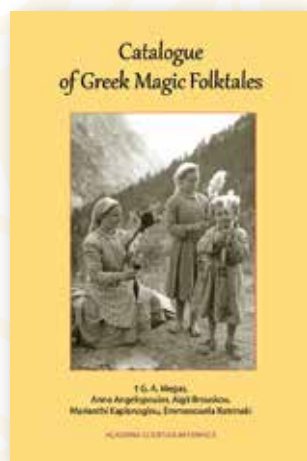


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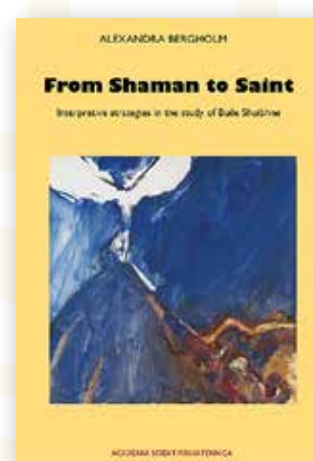


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