

This work is distributed under a Creative Commons License. You are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work under the following conditions:

- ❑ Attribution. You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- ❑ Noncommercial. You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- ❑ No Derivative Works. You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work [with the exception of "fair use" quotations for scholarly or critical purposes].
- ❑ For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work. The best way to do this is with a link to this web page.
- ❑ Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- ❑ Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights.

Playing With Tradition: Sacrifice, Ritual, and the *Mahabharata's* Dice Game by Aaron Rester

The dice game of the *Sabha Parvan* is arguably the pivotal point of the entire *Mahabharata*. This "playful" (yet deadly serious) conflict between Pandava and Kaurava foreshadows the apocalyptic battle between the two clans, and the outcome of the game provides the impetus for bringing about that event. But why, a Western reader might ask, does the fate of the world hinge upon a mere game?

My answer is that the entire *Mahabharata* is in fact intimately concerned with issues of play, of which the dice game is just one example.¹ In this paper, I will examine the place of the dice game within the epic, as well as the epic's place in the larger Hindu tradition, through the lenses of several theories of play. I will argue that the dice game embodies a seemingly unresolvable conflict that is

¹ in *Man, Play, and Games* (trans. by Meyer Barash [New York: Schocken Books, 1979] Roger Callois proposed four distinct types of play, all of which occur within the *Mahabharata*. These types, with examples of how they occur in the epic, are: 1) *Agôn*, or competition: i.e., the contest for Draupadi; various and sundry battles on individual and "team" scales; 2) *Alea*, or chance: i.e., the wager between Vinata and Kadru; the dice games involving Yudhistira and Nala (since the rules of these games are unclear, these might also be considered *agôn*); 3) *Mimicry*, or simulation: i.e., the masquerade of the Pandavas in the *Virata Parvan*; Shiva disguised as the mountain man; assorted heroes, gods, and demons pretending to be things that they are not; and 4) *Ilinx*, or the pursuit of vertigo in "an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind" (p. 23), i.e., the theophany of Krishna, Hanuman's demonstration of his magical power of growth. Such ludic moments thus provide some of the most important narrative and theological moments in the text.

central not only to the epic, but to the larger tradition of which it is a part: the conflict between chaos and order, flux and stability, destruction and stagnancy, the unpredictable and the certain.

As J.A.B. van Buitenen has noted, the *Sabha Parvan* is largely a narrative model of the *rajasuya* sacrifice performed by Yudhistira early in the *Parvan*.² This sacrifice, designed to install the sacrificer-king as universal sovereign, contained a ritual dice game at its conclusion.³ While the origins of this ritual game are unclear,⁴ its function seems relatively straightforward: just as the place of sacrifice was a recreation of the cosmos in miniature,⁵ the *rajasuya's* dice game, played by members of each of the four *varnas*,⁶ was a "cosmogonical rite intended to bring about the recreation of the universe and the birth of the king."⁷ The purpose of the *rajasuya's* dice game, like the ritual to which it was related, was the creation of social and cosmic order. The game created a small-scale model of the cosmos, allowing the players to fashion that cosmos in the manner desired.⁸

In many ways, a game is the perfect vehicle for the creation of such a microcosm:

² van Buitenen makes his argument in his introduction to his translation of the *Sabha Parvan: The Mahabharata*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) pp. 3-30.

³ J.C. Heesterman's *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1957) is an exhaustive study of this ritual.

⁴ A possible Indo-European link is suggested by the existence of similar ritual games in Celtic myth: in the Welsh collection of stories known as the *Mabinogion*, "The Dream of Rhonabwy" finds King Arthur engaged in a game of *gwyddbwyll* in the midst of a battle for the sovereignty of Britain (Gwyn and Thomas Jones, trans. [London: J.M. Dent, 1993] pp. 114-126), while the Irish god Lug wins entrance to the stronghold of, and eventually the kingship of, the Tuatha de Dannan by winning a game of *fiddchell*, isusally, translated as "chess." ("The Second Battle of Mag Tured" in *Ancient Irish Tales*, trans. by Tom P. Cross and Clark Harris Slover [New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996] p. 36.

⁵ Heesterman (1957), p. 6.

⁶ Heesterman (1957), p. 143.

⁷ Heesterman (1957), p. 153.

⁸ For more on the *rajasuya* dice game as a model of the cosmos, see Heesterman (1957) and Don Handelman and David Shulman, *God Inside Out: Siva's Game of Dice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 61-68.

It is not, in fact, difficult to advance the principle that every game, ancient or modern, creates a miniature cosmos, its arena, rules, apparatus, and players comprising a unique spatiotemporal world that reflects and symbolizes aspects of known and accepted cosmological structures.⁹

Play thus creates its own world, which is at least a partial abstraction of the world of not-play. This abstraction may be a fun-house image – or even a reversal – of the world of not-play (as in *carneval* celebrations), or it may try to reproduce relatively faithfully the world of not-play (as "Monopoly" recreates a capitalist economy). The dice game in the *Mahabharata*, as we shall see presently, is intended to be the latter, but winds up as the former, largely because its participants fail to follow the proper rules.

J. Huizinga, who was among the first modern theorists of play, argued that every type of play is in fact structured by rules, though they may be unarticulated – even the playful, seemingly spontaneous roughhousing of animals is subject to the rule "you shall not bite, or not bite hard, your brother's ear."¹⁰ It is these rules that give play its distinctive characteristics, through the construction of a boundary between play and not-play:

Inside the play-ground an absolute and peculiar order reigns... [play] creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it 'spoils the game,' robs it of its character and makes it worthless.¹¹

Huizinga did not fail to notice the connections in this regard between play and ritual.¹² Ritual is a formalized, sacralized, type of play, which seeks to impose its

⁹ Alf Hiltebeitl, "Gambling." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade (gen. ed.) (New York: MacMillan, 1987). vol. 5, p. 469.

¹⁰ J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon, 1970), p. 1.

¹¹ Huizinga, p. 10.

¹² Huizinga, pp. 14-27.

order not only within the confines of the gameboard or playground, but upon the complex and confusing world outside of these confines.

The *Mahabharata's* ritual dice game, however, results not in the establishment of social and cosmic order, but in their destruction. Why? The *rajasuya* is one of a series of sacrifices that are depicted in the epic as being performed in a fundamentally flawed fashion. These botched sacrifices begin with the snake sacrifice of Janamejaya, in which a non-sacrificial animal is sacrificed, continue through the night-raid of Ashvatthaman, with its close parallels to the destroyed sacrifice of Daksha,¹³ and culminate in Krishna's slaughter of the Andhakas, Bhojas, Saineyas, Vrsnis, which is referred to in language recalling a sacrifice.¹⁴ The *rajasuya*, too, is flawed, and it is in the dice game that these flaws manifest themselves.

One obvious flaw in the dice game as ritual is that it is wrongly emplaced. J.Z. Smith has argued that place is the fundamental characteristic of ritual:

Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention... place [is what] directs attention. [This] is best illustrated by the case of built ritual environments – most especially, crafted constructions such as temples... The temple serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains ordinary) becomes significant, becomes "sacred," simply by being there... Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement.¹⁵

The *rajasuya* is no exception to this generalization. In most versions of the sacrifice, the game took place inside a specially built hut. This hut also contained a throne on which the king was ceremonially installed after taking three "Vishnu

¹³ Alf Hildebeitl, *The Ritual of Battle* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) pp. 299-335.

¹⁴ 16.4.44. Wendy Doniger, trans. forthcoming.

¹⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp. 103-4.

steps,"¹⁶ intended to recreate Vishnu's miraculous reclamation of the three worlds. The hut provided the "focusing lens" for sacrality, marking off the ritual space and the miniature cosmos which it embodied (the "play-ground") from the outside, "profane" world (the world of not-play).

The logical analog to this hut in the world of the epic is the assembly hall (*sabha*) built for the Pandavas by Maya. Based on similarities in certain ritual formulas, Heesterman suggests the possibility that the *rajasuya*'s enthronement and dice game were originally held in an assembly hall (*sabha*).¹⁷ Moreover, just as the hut and the dice game serve as recreations of the cosmos, so does Maya's creation stand within the epic as a model of the world. Van Buitenen notes that the long descriptions of the halls of the World Guardians effectively position the Pandavas' hall as such a model.¹⁸ Krishna tells the Asura craftsman to "[b]uild an assembly hall... where we will see the designs of the Gods laid out... and the plans of Asuras and men,"¹⁹ while Duryodhana's long description of the Pandavas' hall concludes with a statement that neatly sums up the role of the *sabha* as microcosm:

Brahmins in a spirit of love, barons because they were defeated, commoners and serfs because they were obedient brought gifts, and out of affection and respect all the barbarians of all classes, high, middle, and low-born, waited on Yudhistira. At Yudhistira's palace all the world seemed to be encompassed with the variety of races that had come from a variety of countries.²⁰

The Pandavas' assembly hall would thus seem to be the epic counterpart of the sacrificial hut, and therefore the most likely location for the dice game. Yet the

¹⁶ Heesterman (1957), p. 140.

¹⁷ Heesterman (1957), p. 148.

¹⁸ van Buitenen, vol. 2. pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ 2(20)1.10 (all line numbers in this paper are approximate, based upon van Buitenen's translation)

²⁰ 2(27)48.30-5

Mahabharata's game occurs not in the Pandavas' hall, but in the hall of the Kauravas, which, though very beautiful, is built specifically for the purpose of gambling and is not sacralized by the status of a ritual microcosm. There is something inauspicious about an assembly hall where gambling occurs;²¹ according to C. Paduranga Bhatt, for example, Katyayana held that "the assembly hall meant for gambling must have a special arch-like structure near the door so that it would not be mistaken by respectable people."²² The wrongful emplacement of the ritual game serves as a "red flag" that the game is already doomed to disaster.

The epic's dice game also diverges from the prescribed ritual in the fact of the king's participation. In the *rajasuya's* dice game, players were members of the four *varnas*; the king apparently did not actually participate, aside from being presented with the dice at the end of the game.²³ This was likely due to the fact that dicing was seen as an activity unfit for kings. Manu lists gambling as the second worst of four kingly vices born of desire,²⁴ and calls gamblers "the lowest level of existence to which energy leads."²⁵ A good king "should ban gambling and betting from his kingdom, for those two vices put an end to the reign of the kings who possess the land."²⁶ The *Mahabharata's* view of gambling is generally in keeping with that of Manu: the same list of four royal vices is repeated by

²¹ C. Panduranga Bhatta, *The Dice Play in Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Amar Prakashan, 1985) pp. 107-8.

²² Bhatta, p. 108.

²³ Heesterman (1957), p. 155.

²⁴ 7.50. *The Laws of Manu*, Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans. (London: Penguin, 1991) p. 134.

²⁵ *Manu*, 12.45

²⁶ *Manu* 9.221

Vikarna,²⁷ and Yudhistira himself tells us that gambling is "trickery, an evil" in which "there is no [*kshatriya*] prowess."²⁸

Clearly, Yudhistira, as the sacrificer in the *rajasuya* ritual and as a king and *kshatriya*, should not be participating in the game. In his study of a Tulu folk game, Peter J. Claus notes that those with the most power in the social hierarchy of the village – namely, men – do not play the game because "the rigid hierarchy of statuses which governs their social relations would be threatened."²⁹ It is precisely this risk – the knowledge that one is in imminent danger of losing wealth and/or social status – which gives gambling its appeal.³⁰ It is also the reason which led Manu to admonish kings against gambling, and which prevents the king from participating in the dice game in the *rajasuya* – if the king doesn't actually play, the king can not lose, and the prescribed social and cosmic order will remain intact. Yudhistira's participation shifts the dice game from a mode of "generating the expected" to a mode of "generating the unexpected."³¹ Rather than the establishment of the proper social/cosmic order, his participation results in its complete reversal: the would-be universal sovereign is sent to the forest, and later makes his living as a gambler, one whose actions qualify him as "the lowest level of existence." This reversal culminates in the dice game with Virata, in which Yudhistira's own blood is spilled by the dice: the *rajasuya* sacrificer has become the sacrificed.

²⁷ 2(27)61.20

²⁸ 2(27)53.2

²⁹ Peter J. Claus, "Playing *Cenne*: The Meanings of a Folk Game" in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramnujan, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). p. 283.

³⁰ Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) p. 181.

³¹ These phrases come from Handelman and Shulman, pp. 61-74.

Just as Nala's failure to perform the proper ritual ablutions allows Kali to possess him,³² so breaking the ritual's rules of emplacement and participation "spoils the game,"³³ collapsing the boundaries between play and not-play, and allowing the two worlds to spill into each other. Or, alternatively, one might see the boundary that is destroyed not as the barrier between play and not-play, but between two types of play. These types are best defined by Roger Callois' *paidia/ludus* spectrum. Callois proposed that all play exists on an axis of ascending structure. At the zero of the axis is *paidia*, which he defines as

a word covering the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct: a cat entangled in a ball of wool, a dog sniffing, and an infant laughing at his rattle represent the first identifiable examples of this type of activity. It intervenes in every happy exuberance which effects an immediate and disordered agitation, an impulsive and easy recreation, but readily carried to excess, whose impromptu and unruly character remains its essential if not unique reason for being... This elementary need for disturbance and tumult... readily can become a taste for destruction and breaking things.³⁴

As we move up the axis toward *ludus*, however, play becomes more structured, and conventions, techniques, and rules appear. At the far end of the axis, where *ludus* completely overtakes *paidia*, these rules and structures become the sole object of play, and "the pleasure experienced in solving a problem arbitrarily designed for this purpose... intervenes, so that reaching a solution has no other goal than personal satisfaction for its own sake."³⁵ The *rajasuya* sacrifice, in proposing an answer to a question that it itself had proposed – namely, how one becomes universal sovereign – is pure *ludus*, but the events that stem from the *Mahabharata*'s dice game are pure *paidia*: chaotic, unpredictable, and destructive.

³² 3(32)56.1-5

³³ Huizinga, p. 10.

³⁴ Callois, pp. 27-8.

³⁵ Callois, p. 29

A distinction nearly identical to that proposed by Callois was recognized in Indian ritual by J.C. Heesterman.³⁶ While I have been using the terms "sacrifice" and "ritual" almost interchangeably, Heesterman sees them as clearly distinct modes of interacting with the universe. Sacrifice, he argues, was dangerous, unpredictable, and confrontational:

It is the arena of conflict and alliance, the field in which honor and position are to be won, the market for the distribution of wealth. It is the renewal of the past and the gamble for the future. Combining in itself all functions – social, economic, political, religious – sacrifice is the catastrophic center, the turning point of life and death, deciding each time anew, through endless rounds of winning, losing, and revanche, the state of human affairs here and in the hereafter.³⁷

Sacrifice, to Heesterman, is a battle in which the outcome is anything but certain, in which anything might happen:

Understood through the *brahmanas* it is a fighting ground where gods and *asuras* are forever slugging it out with each other, where Indra kills the Vrtra demon, where chariot fighters engage each other and the sacrificer may lose his life in hopes of going to heaven... The 'play,' the game, of the arena obviously had its sacrosanct rules, but these rules were meant to keep uncertainty intact and the outcome open.³⁸

Sacrifice, to Heesterman, is not unlike *paidia*: unpredictable and spontaneous, with a very real potential for violence and devastation.

Ritual, on the other hand, is in Heesterman's view the later response of the "Vedic ritualists" to the danger and uncertainty inherent in sacrifice. In developing a "science of ritual," he argues, the ritualists sought to create a world that removed that uncertainty:

[O]ne might try to imagine how a football game would be played by a single, unopposed team, which would have to act as its own opponent. Such a proposition would require a largely inflexible choreography,

³⁶ See *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

³⁷ Heesterman (1993), pp. 2-3.

³⁸ Heesterman (1993), p. 76.

enabling the single team to supply the moves and countermoves of their absent opponents. there would be no climax, no surprises, no excitement, and , most important, no devastating furor. The outcome would be present at the start. Rather, there would be no outcome at all. Its only point would be the flat rhythm of the perfectly executed movements and gestures of the choreographic construction.³⁹

By removing the agonistic component of the sacrifice – by, for example, disallowing the king's actual participation in the dice game – the ritualists created a new model of the cosmos that was peaceful, predictable, and unchanging. In this model, the desired outcome was assured, and the death and destruction that necessarily resulted from sacrifice would be averted. If ritual was properly performed, the world would remain eternally the same. It is this "ritual" model that was subscribed to by the authors of the texts which describe how the *rajasuya* ceremony should be performed, while the *Mahabharata's* version of the ceremony is a perfect example of Heesterman's conception of "sacrifice."

What the dice game in the *Mahabharata* presents us with, then, is the disintegration of the boundaries between sacrifice / *paidia* and ritual / *ludus*. In the *rajasuya* ritual texts, a ritualized game is designed to solve a problem created by the ritual, and its predetermined outcome is executed neatly and safely. The *Sabha Parvan's* dice game, however, catapults us into a world of spontaneity, danger, and violence, in which only destruction is assured.

Inside the epic, this explosion of order into disorder is explained by the chronological position of the epic's events on the cusp of the *dvapara-* and *kaliyugas*. In Hanuman's speech to Bhima, he states that ritual (in the broader, non-Heestermanian sense) was the central preoccupation of the *tretayuga*; in the

³⁹ Heesterman (1993), p. 4.

dvapaparayuga, however, "ritual becomes multitudinous,"⁴⁰ and these rituals are performed by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. In the coming *kaliyuga*, "Vedic life-rules, Law, sacrifice, and ritual come to an end."⁴¹ Or, according to Markandeya, the *kaliyuga* is the age of inversion:

Substitute persons perform the sacrifice, Partha, substitutes give the gifts, substitutes observe the vows in that age. Brahmins do the work of serfs, as the Eon expires, serfs become gatherers of wealth or practice the law of the baronage... When the world is upside down, it is the portent of destruction.⁴²

Because of when the game takes place, the epic argues, it can not help but dissolve into chaos.

If we step backwards out of the text, however, we see that the epic itself occurs at a pivotal time in the history of the Hindu tradition. The epic period is a time of transition from the ritualistic religion of Vedic times – in which the relationship between the human and divine was one of propitiation, necessarily mediated by the sacrificial fire and brahmin priests – to the intimate, personal, and devotional *bhakti* religion of the Classical period.

The *Mahabharata* is primarily wrestling with two conflicting religious models, neither of which is completely satisfactory. On the one hand, the sacrifice paradigm is bloody, dangerous, and ultimately destructive. On the other, the safety and predictability of the ritual paradigm provides order, but one that is remote and removed from the constantly changing and entropic world outside of itself, and that is therefore irrelevant to that world. In its inability to choose between these two impossible choices, the epic is truly "at play." Play is,

⁴⁰ 3(33)148.25-30.

⁴¹ 3(33)148.30-5.

⁴² 3(37)186.25-30.

as Huizinga observed, an attempt to resolve a tension.⁴³ Handelman and Shulman, drawing upon the work of Gregory Bateson, have suggested that the essence of play lies in paradox, in the oscillation between two equally

(im)possible alternatives:

Paradox is generated because each alternative exists on the same level of abstraction, where each is given the same value as the other and lacks the capability to dominate or to cancel the other. The paradox seems like an impassable trap.⁴⁴

The only way out of such a paradox, they tell us, is to make a choice.⁴⁵ However, I think that the Hindu tradition eventually found another way out of the paradox: the integration of the two choices into one.

Gregory Bateson argued that psychotherapy – and, indeed, all communication – involves exactly this type of playing with paradox. He asks us to imagine the process of therapy in the person of two canasta players, playing by a standard set of rules:

So long as these rules govern and are unquestioned by both players, the game is unchanging, i.e., no therapeutic change will occur... We may imagine, however, that at a certain moment the two canasta players cease to play canasta and start a discussion of the rules. Their discourse is now of a different logical type from that of their play. At the end of this discussion, we can imagine that they return to playing but with modified rules.⁴⁶

The secret to successful therapy, he argues, lies in the combination and integration of the two types of discourse (the game and the discussion of its rules). The rules of therapy, he says,

are implicit but subject to change. Such change can only be proposed by experimental action, but every such experimental action, in which a proposal to change the rules is implicit, is itself a part of the ongoing

⁴³ Huizinga, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ Handelman and Shulman, p. 41.

⁴⁵ Handelman and Shulman, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Bateson, pp. 191-2.

game. It is this combination of logical types within the single meaningful act that gives to therapy the character not of a rigid game like canasta but, instead, that of an evolving system of interaction.⁴⁷

I think that if we were to replace the word "therapy" with the phrase "religious tradition," Bateson's argument would still stand. In the *Mahabharata*, I think we see the Hindu tradition using mythic narrative to collapse two types of discourse (the tradition and the discussion of its rules) into one, as a means of discussing – and eventually changing – the rules of the game.

And change they did. An essential element of Classical *bhakti* devotion is the concept of *lila*, or the divine play of the gods, most fully embodied in the cult of Krishna as divine lover, or the myths of the dice game of Shiva and Parvati.

Lila is similar in many ways to Callois' spontaneous, unruly *paidia*. David

Kinsley's description of *lila* uses terminology that is quite similar to Callois' own:

The gods are revealed to act spontaneously, unpredictably, and sometimes tumultuously. To play is to be unfettered and unconditioned, to perform actions that are intrinsically satisfying: to sing, dance, and laugh... To play is to display oneself aimlessly and gracefully. As players, then, the gods are revealed to be delightful, joyful, graceful beings whose actions are completely spontaneous, unconditioned, and expressive of their transcendent completeness and freedom.⁴⁸

Handelman and Shulman describe *lila* as "the motive that is without motive – spontaneous action for its own sake,"⁴⁹ while Edward Dimock writes:

To those of us enslaved by rules, such behavior is random, inexplicable, whimsical. It does not fit the structure that is indeed the cement which allows society to cohere, the structure without which language is mere sound and logical thought impossible; it is, or seems, chaotic, incomprehensible, and therefore vaguely threatening.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Bateson, p. 192.

⁴⁸ David Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) p. 74.

⁴⁹ Handelman and Shulman, p. 48.

⁵⁰ Edward C. Dimock, Jr., "Lila" *History of Religions* 29: 1989. p. 160.

Lila, like *paidia*, is unpredictable, spontaneous, and chaotic. As such, it is at first glance nearly identical to Heesterman's idea of sacrifice. However, I see two crucial differences between *lila* and sacrifice. First, *lila* is a divine prerogative. While humans (such as the *gopis*) may interact with the playing god, we are the objects of play, not the players as in sacrifice. Second, while the playground of sacrifice is the sacrificial arena *cum* battlefield, the playground of *lila* is the meadows of Vrndavana, or the bed of a lover, arenas which are thrilling, even vertigo-inducing, but not physically dangerous. *Lila* theology thus managed to combine the excitement and spontaneity of sacrifice with the relative safety of ritual. With *lila*, one can have one's cake, and eat it, too.

Flashes of what would evolve into *lila* appear in the *Mahabharata* – in Shiva's dice game on the mountain, for example, or Krishna's theophany – but the world of the epic is one which has not yet resolved the conflict between the ritual and sacrifice models of religious action. In playing with these concepts – in the oscillation between the two sides of the paradox they represent – the epic, and particularly the dice game, provide us with a snapshot of a tradition rethinking and redefining itself, moving slowly toward the creation of a new model which integrated these two contradictory alternatives.

Works Cited:

- Bateson, Gregory. "A Theory of Play and Fantasy." in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. pp. 177-193.
- Bhatta, C. Panduranga. *The Dice Play in Sanskrit Literature*. Delhi: Amar Prakashan, 1985.
- Callois, Roger. *Man, Play, and Games*. trans. by Meyer Barash. New York: Schocken Books, 1979.
- Claus, Peter J. "Playing *Cenne*: The Meanings of a Folk Game." in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, Stuart H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramnujan, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. pp. 265-93.
- Cross, Tom P. and Clark Harris Slover, eds. and trans. *Ancient Irish Tales*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1996.
- Dimock, Jr., Edward C.. "Lila" *History of Religions* 29: 1989. p. 159-73.
- Handelman, Don and David Shulman. *God Inside Out: Siva's Game of Dice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Heesterman, J.C. *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1957.
- The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Hiltebeitl, Alf. "Gambling." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*,. Mircea Eliade, gen. ed. New York: MacMillan, 1987. vol. 5, pp. 468-74.
- The Ritual of Battle*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990.
- Huizinga, J. *Homo Ludens*. Boston: Beacon, 1970.
- Kinsley, David. *The Sword and the Flute*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- The Mabinogion*. Gwyn and Thomas Jones, trans. London: J.M. Dent, 1993.
- The Mahabharata*. J.A.B van Buitenen, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975 (Vol. 2), 1978 (Vol. 3).
- The Laws of Manu*. Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans. London: Penguin, 1991.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.