

Karna's Tragic Reflection: The Weight of Narcissistic Influence

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Karna's Tragic Reflection: The Weight of Narcissistic Influence** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Adarsh Santhosh, Register Number: 210021000947, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2023-2024.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation **Karna's Tragic Reflection: The Weight of Narcissistic Influence** is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Meriya George, Guest Faculty, Research Centre and Postgraduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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Chapter 1

Echoes of Narcissism: The Unyielding Fate of Karna

The *Mahabharata* is considered one of the greatest epics in Indian mythology. The narrative talks about the struggle for power between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It was a war of justice, and the Pandavas won the battle at the end. The *Mahabharata* is not only an ancient story of good and evil but also reveals human nature. This epic story illustrates every emotion that an individual may experience, which gives it a great deal of relevance to our lives today. Throughout the *Mahabharata*, various human emotions are shown, including fear, love, remorse, guilt, jealousy, pride, and grief. The entire epic revolves around these emotions. There are many iconic characters portrayed in the *Mahabharata*, like Arjuna, Bheeshma, etc. Among them, one of the most important characters is Karna. He is considered a great warrior who rose above all his boundaries. Karna's story is one of the most inspirational of all.

In this study it revolves around the English translation of the novel *Mrityunjaya: The Death Conqueror* by Shivaji Sawant. It was translated into English by Nandini Nopany and P. Lal. Shivaji Sawant is an Indian novelist in the Marathi language. He won the Moortidevi Award in 1994. His notable work, *Mrityunjaya*, was translated into many languages. In this work, Karna himself narrates the story like a biography, and the views of a few characters like Kunti, Duryodhana, Shona, and Krishna can be seen. This work is a narrative of the feelings of Karna, and how Kunti, Duryodhana, and others saw Karna. Their point of view gives a clearer picture of who Karna was and what made him a legend. The book also portrays how Karna was influenced by others, which affected his later actions.

Karna was the son of the sun god Surya and Princess Kunti which made him a demigod. The tale of Karna's birth goes like this. Kunti was granted a boon from the sage Durvasa so that she could bear a child with divine qualities from any god she wished. Out of curiosity, she invoked the sun god Surya; thus, she became pregnant with Karna. He was born with divine earrings and armor, like his father, Surya. That is why he is known as Karna. This made him special, with gifts no mortal possessed. Being a mother in her teenage, Kunti was afraid to face the ridicule of society. In fear, she decided to abandon the child in the river. She put him in a casket and made the casket flow in Ganges, hoping that he would get foster parents. Later, Karna was adopted by *Suta* parents named Radha and Adhiratha. They both loved Karna very much. They took care of him as their child. Adhiratha was the charioteer of King *Dhritarashtra*. Karna was raised by them without knowing his real identity; he was born as a prince, but was abandoned by his mother. His father was a charioteer, but his destiny was different. He had a brother called Shona. Karna was known by many names, like Vasusena, Radheya, Suryaputra, etc. Thus, he became famous everywhere. Everyone saw him as a special child born with divine gifts. They did not know the truth behind his birth.

From childhood, Karna was fascinated by martial arts, especially archery. He loved to learn archery as a teenager. When he became a young man, Adhiratha, his foster father, took Karna to Hastinapur along with him. There, he saw his real birthplace for the first time. He saw the Pandavas, the Kauravas, Drona, and all the royal family members. Drona was the teacher of both Pandavas and Kauravas. Through his teachings, all the princes became masters of all the arts related to warfare. Karna joined his academy to learn martial arts. He learned very quickly and showed exceptional talent. From childhood, Karna considered Arjuna his rival. Arjuna was Drona's favorite student. After several years of training, every prince, including Karna, became a

skilled warrior. Karna was more proficient than any of the Pandavas and Kauravas, but he was not given the proper acceptance by his master. He was rejected the knowledge of *Brahmastra* by Drona. Then Karna decided to learn it somehow and finally reached Parashuram, the avatar of Lord Vishnu. Parashuram only taught Brahmins and Kshatriyas, so in the undaunted thirst for learning, Karna lied to Parashuram, saying that he was a Brahmin. Thus, Karna learned under Parashuram's teachings and became the greatest archer of all time. He got many divine *astras* and bows from Parashuram, which were very powerful. After several years of study, Karna was molded into a great warrior. But one day Parashuram found that Karna was not a Brahmin, and he was lying all this time. In sudden anger, Parashuram cursed Karna, saying that he would lose all the essential knowledge of weapons when he would need them the most. He was devastated by Parashuram's curse.

After the training, he returned to Hastinapur to show everyone his talent and prove to *Guru* Drona how skilled he had become. But when he showed his talent, he was silenced by Drona, who said that he was a *suta* and could not compete with princes. This made Karna furious. Even after becoming a skilled warrior, he was rejected by Drona. He was being insulted by everyone for his caste name. All the people who were applauding him started humiliating him. During this time, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, came to Karna and proclaimed that Karna would be the King of Anga. Karna wanted respect and recognition, so he agreed to Duryodhana's terms and became the King of Anga. Karna is grateful for the gesture and becomes Duryodhana's friend for life. Karna was loyal to Duryodhana, who saved his prestige in a difficult situation. Karna was a wise king who protected his people and territories. He was very kind and known as a great donor. Duryodhana and the other Kauravas considered the Pandavas to be their enemies. Karna also disliked them because they humiliated him by his caste name. He

always wanted to prove that he was better than Arjuna in every way. He could defeat Drona's most talented student, but he was never given a chance.

Duryodhana started planning crooked plans against the Pandavas. He became friends with many powerful warriors. He always acted like his uncle Shakuni. He was an intelligent and devious man. He knew how to trick people. Shakuni arranged a game of dice, which was his trick. He made the Pandavas gamble their kingdom and even their wife, Draupadi, in the game. Later, she was molested by the Kauravas, and the Pandavas were exiled for thirteen years. This triggered the battle of Kurukshetra. It was more like revenge for Draupadi. Kauravas had a powerful army with many great warriors like Bhishma and Drona. Karna was also ready to fight for his friend. Pandavas had Srikrishna by their side. The war was catastrophic. Many warriors died on the battlefield.

Before the battle, Srikrishna approached Karna, seeking to prevent violence and the war. Then Krishna reveals Karna's identity. He tells him that Kunti is his biological mother, and the Pandavas are his brothers. By law, Karna should be considered the eldest of the Pandavas, and he can ascend to the throne. Srikrishna tells him that the Pandavas will happily serve him, and Draupadi will be his wife too. Thus, he could end the war and rule the world. But Karna declines the offer. Karna responds that even though he was born in Kunti, his true mother was the wife of a charioteer, Radha, who gave him love and sustenance. Like this, he knows Adhiratha is his true father because of their love and affection, not because of scripture. Karna said that bonds of love are more important in life than having absolute authority. He will never betray anyone and will always be loyal to those who love him, especially his friend Duryodhana. It is not about blood ties; rather, it is about how someone treats you over time.

Then Krishna went to Kunti and asked her to inform him that he was her firstborn and the Pandavas were his half-brothers. It was left up to her by Krishna to decide between Karna and her other five sons. He meets Kunti for the first time in adulthood. Kunti then confesses that he is her firstborn. Additionally, Surya shows up, confirming Kunti's account and advising him to follow her. Karna claims that even though he was the firstborn, she never showed him the same love or attention. He restates his affection for his parents, who reared him, and his commitment to upholding his lifelong relationships with them. He promised Kunti that he would not kill any of the other brothers, but either Arjuna or Karna would die, and she could still have five sons, just as she had in her life.

At last, the fierce battle began. Both the warriors fought very well and showed their exceptional skills on the battlefield. Unfortunately, Karna's chariot wheel got stuck. Because of the curse he had earlier gotten from the goddess Earth, Karna's chariot wheel was stuck in the mud. Because of the curse of his master, Parashurama, he forgot the incantations to invoke *Brahmastra* at the critical moment. To free the wheel, Karna got off his chariot and reminded Arjuna of the protocol of battle. However, Krishna spurred Arjuna to kill Karna. The Pandavas came to know the truth about Karna only after his death. They were in such a devastated state that they did not know how to react to the sudden disclosure of the truth. Even after knowing that Karna can become the king, he stays by his words and chooses to stay by Duryodhana's side. He fought for Duryodhana and died for him. He was a gallant warrior who kept his promises and showed the world that they were wrong about him. But in the end, he died a tragic death. Karna's fate was different. Being the actual heir to the throne, he could not even get the love of his real mother and half-brothers. His death was a very fatal one. Karna deserved more but was disappointed in his whole life by everyone, including his mother.

The traumatic experiences of Karna made him a narcissist, which led him astray. Karna was abandoned by his mother right after his birth; his friend Duryodhana was using him for his personal gain; the whole society was humiliating him for his lower caste despite being a gallant warrior; all of these affected his mental health and misled him.

This project titled *Karna's Tragic Reflection: The Weight of Narcissistic Influence* tries to bring out the idea that Karna was a victim of narcissism. Chapter 2 of the project deals with the theory of narcissism, chapter 3 will be the analysis of Karna as victim of narcissism, chapter 4 will be the additional analytic study based on *Mrithyunjaya*, and chapter 5 will be the conclusion.

Chapter 2

Ego's Reflection: Diving into Narcissistic Theory

Narcissism is a self-centered personality style characterized as excessive preoccupation with oneself and one's own needs, often at the expense of others. These people require admiration and recognition from others. They do not care about other feelings; they just focus on themselves. They think that they are somehow superior to others in everything. That is why they need recognition. Narcissistic behavior can be seen in a lot of people. The name narcissism came after the Greek mythological character Narcissus, who fell in love with his reflection. According to Sigmund Freud, narcissism is a normal stage in child development, but when it persists after puberty, it is regarded as a problem. It may be because of many reasons, like childhood trauma or parental relationships. It is a psychological condition that makes the person self-centered.

Theories of narcissism, such as those of the Austrian psychoanalysts Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg, suggest that adult Narcissism has its roots in early childhood experiences. Both view narcissism, at its core, as a defect in the development of a healthy self. Parents have a great role in a child's development. They should show them a more realistic sense of self. They should reveal the limitations in themselves that lead the child to assume an idealized image that is realistic and possible to attain. Problems arise when parents fail to provide proper guidance and appropriate role models. According to Kohut, because of narcissism, there is a halt in the development of the child. The child's self remains unrealistic. But the parents would not even realize that they are one of the reasons for this condition. These people show many narcissistic behaviors, like arrogance and superiority over others. The child's self-esteem develops and slowly matures when they communicate with others, especially their mother. Through these, children get the proper way of identifying themselves and becoming realistic role models.

In Kohut's theory, Kernberg states that narcissism is a defense. It occurs from the child's reaction to the lack of empathy on the parent's side. Thus, the child becomes very emotional and may respond in great rage to the parents' neglect. In this view, narcissists try to take refuge in some aspect of themselves. They may seem adamant and ignorant all the time, but inside, they are too vulnerable. They behave rudely in a way to hide this vulnerability from others. According to the theories of Kernberg and Kohut, narcissists are people who had unsatisfying social interactions in childhood and then grew up to have grandiose self-views that led to a conflicted psychological dependence on others. It is not surprising, then, that narcissists have high self-esteem. However, these self-images appear based on unrealistic perceptions and their interpretations of what others feel about them. Narcissists find themselves more attractive than others. They feel like everyone else is inferior to them in all aspects. Findings indicate that narcissists take greater credit for good outcomes, even when those outcomes occurred by luck or chance.

Although a narcissist's self-esteem is very high, it is also very fragile and insecure, and it is constantly fluctuating according to situations. Other research indicates that narcissists may show themselves as very positive and confident outside, but their nonconscious feelings about themselves are not so positive. So, they are more attentive and reactive to others feedback. They are always eager to know what others feel about them. Being liked and accepted is not as important to narcissists as being admired and superior. To gain adoration from those around them, narcissists become aggressive when others do not react to them in the way they expected, which worsens the disorder and disturbs their personal relationships. Those who engage with narcissists think of them as radiant and competent, which makes these behaviors initially successful. But eventually, these partners start to perceive the narcissist as arrogant and resentful.

Jessica Yakeley in her article “Current understanding of narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder” talks about the psychoanalysis of narcissism and quotes their theories of narcissism. Havelock Ellis was the first theoretician to use the Narcissus myth to describe narcissism as a clinical theory in his description of states of intense autoerotism or preoccupation with one’s own sexual body (Yakeley). Psychoanalysts subsequently elaborated the construct of narcissism as a personality characteristic of vanity and self-love that is not exclusively sexual, nor confined to the realm of pathology, but a normal part of human development. Otto Rank wrote the first psychoanalytic paper focusing on narcissism, and this was followed by the publication of Freud’s now-classic text *On Narcissism*. These papers highlighted the defensive function of narcissism in protecting the individual from feelings of low self-worth and self-esteem, as well as conceptualizing narcissism as a dimensional psychological state that ranged from normal to pathological, forerunning the Ideas of more contemporary personality trait theorists. Later psychoanalysts expanded on the idea of a narcissistic personality type, for example in Wilhelm Reich’s ‘phallic-narcissistic character’(Reich), Karen Horney’s subdivisions of ‘aggressive-expansive’(Horney).

Narcissism has become a defining feature of the modern era. The interest in this concept has captured the imagination of the public, media, and literature. In the 1970s, American journalist Tom Wolfe coined the phrase ‘the “me” decade’(Wolfe) to describe the rise in celebration of the self, and American historian and social critic Christopher Lasch published *The Culture of Narcissism*, in which he explores the rise of narcissistic entitlement and decadence. These popularized texts have been paralleled by a growing body of academic interest and empirical research, particularly in the fields of psychology, social science, and cultural studies. Within psychiatry, the concept of narcissism has evolved from early psychoanalytic theorizing to

its official inclusion as a personality disorder in psychiatric nomenclature. However, the respective theories of the psychoanalysts Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg might be said to have exerted the most influence on modern conceptualizations of narcissism and on shaping the construct of narcissistic personality disorder. Kohut's self-psychology approach offers the 'deficit model' of narcissism, which asserts that pathological narcissism originates in childhood because of the failure of parents to empathize with their child. Depression and a sense of emptiness are common reactions to narcissistic damage in narcissistic people. By contrast, Kernberg's object relations approach emphasizes aggression and conflict in the psychological development of narcissism, focusing on the patient's aggression towards and envy of others. In this 'conflict model,' early childhood experiences of cold, indifferent, or aggressive parental figures push the child to develop feelings of specialness as a retreat. These feelings evolve into a pathological grandiose self-structure, which defends against the child's rage at his inability to internalize good objects.

As with any other characteristic, narcissism also has both advantages and disadvantages. A fair amount of narcissism may be advantageous since it fosters perseverance and ambition and guards against depression. Narcissists can make a very good first impression, so they can easily impress everyone. This imitation of acting very confident and strong seems to be a characteristic of a leader. But eventually they fail to prove that and form a negative impression on the team. They may hinder team performance by dominating the group and being unwilling to allow others to participate. Narcissists will always be persistent in life; they will not give up at any cost. They try to fit in by pretending to be confident and intelligent, but they fail to prove that over time. The high amount of narcissism may even cause health problems like stress, and their life will become a failure gradually.

Many real-life and fictional narcissistic characters show these characteristics of a self-centered person. Like the famous character Duryodhana in the epic *The Mahabharata*. He is also a narcissist and self-centered. He was like a dictator and cleverly used everyone for his gain. Some other such characters are the Evil Queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Voldemort from the *Harry Potter Series*, and the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Most of the villains in every story are somehow portrayed as narcissists. Thus, they act selfishly and go down the wrong path.

Karna was a victim of these narcissists. He was abandoned, discriminated against, and manipulated by narcissistic people in his life. Even after being a noble and righteous man, he became a victim of narcissism. Everything he deserved was neglected promptly by those around him. The pain and suffering gradually made him a co-narcissist. An important dimension for analysis and understanding here in the context of Karna is that, due to constant humiliation, he developed low self-esteem with a higher degree of cognitive dissonance. He became vulnerable, and the evil minds took advantage of it and used him. Karna's story is a very inspirational one. Despite being a great warrior, he died a tragic death.

Chapter 3

Karna: A Saga of Courage and Sacrifice

The Mahabharata is an epic chronicle in Indian mythology that weaves tales of fate, honor, and responsibility. Karna, a figure who personifies persistence, determination, and the human need for acceptance, is at the center of everything. Karna, who was raised as a charioteer's son despite being born to Princess Kunti and the Sun God, has always fought against the norms of society and had a strong desire to create his own way.

Karna's misfortunes began at birth itself. Kunti had to give away her newborn son due to the social implications of being an unwed mother. She wanted to give up her royal life and raise her son on her own. But she was persuaded to do otherwise. This decision haunted her all her life. After that, he was adopted by Adhiratha, and he was raised as a *suta*. He did not know his real identity—that he was the son of a god and a princess. Later in the epic, Karna comes to know about his birth and his real parents. But he could never forgive Kunti for what she did to him. Kunti did not have any other options. She was bound to societal norms and was afraid of the aftereffects. After many years, Kunti finally meets Karna and recognizes him. But she was afraid to talk to him. Kunti knew that Karna would hate her for leaving him. But she could not hide it for long. When the Kurukshetra war started, Karna was on the side of Kauravas, fighting against his brothers. So, she was forced to tell him the truth. But Karna did not see her as his mother. As for him, it was his suta mother, Radha, who raised him and loved him like a real mother. No one can blame Karna for behaving like that.

“Co-narcissistic people, as a result of their attempts to get along with their narcissistic parents, work hard to please others, defer to others opinions, worry about how others think and feel about them, are often depressed or anxious, find it hard to know their own views and

experience, and take the blame for interpersonal problems. They fear being considered selfish if they act assertively.” (Rappoport A).

Even if Kunti had many other problems and was afraid of society, she was a mother too. It was her duty to protect her son. During the war, Kunti went to Karna to tell the truth and have him by their side. But Karna did not want their position as the eldest son or the throne. He valued his words more than that. Thus, Kunti returned disappointed. She knew she had failed as a mother. Karna even gave her promise to spare her other sons except Arjuna. It was too late when the other Pandavas came to know about Karna, for by then he was already dead.

The routine exercise of paternal authority leads to the suppression of free and unfettered intellectual development in children, and later, in adults. Without saying so in so many words, Freud’s tribute to Leonardo suggested that childhood and adolescent rebellion against paternal authority is essentially an emancipatory process. (*Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* 143).

Karna was humiliated from childhood on, as he was born to a low caste. He was rejected everywhere. He did not get anything he deserved. It is prohibited for the son of a charioteer to dream impossible things. He wanted to learn martial arts, but he was seen as an outcast by Drona. He overcame all his limitations and became a great warrior. He had the potential to defeat even the Pandavas. But he was denied the chance to show his talent. Every time, there was someone to humiliate him in the name of his caste. In a moment like that, when the whole society was making fun of Karna, Duryodhana was the only one who stood up for him. He proclaimed Karna as the King of Anga. Karna was oblivious to what to do. He was thankful to Duryodhana for saving him from the humiliation. Now Karna owed Duryodhana. He thought that Duryodhana was a nobleman. So, he respected him. They became close friends. The

friendship between Karna and Duryodhana is known to be the best. Karna thought that Duryodhana loved him and was a true friend. So, he promised him to be by his side no matter what. But Duryodhana had other plans. He did not help Karna, only to be his friend. He saw the great warrior in Karna. He knew that Karna could defeat the Pandavas. So Duryodhana decided to have him by his side. That is why he gave the position of King of Anga to Karna. Karna thought it was given because he deserved it. But it was not like that. Duryodhana's crooked mind wanted Karna to win the war against the Pandavas. He became friends with Karna and gave him whatever he needed. Karna also obeyed everything Duryodhana said. He stood by his side every time as a protector. But later in the epic, Karna gave away his divine armor and earrings as charity to Lord Indra, who was acting narcissistic to protect his son Arjuna. Even a god treated Karna unfairly for his son. Not only the people around him, but even the gods were mean to Karna. Duryodhana became disappointed in Karna because he believed in Karna's divine armor. After losing it, Duryodhana had doubts about Karna's powers. He considered Karna as a weapon against the Pandavas more than a friend. Karna was being cheated by Duryodhana. He befriended Karna for his gains. Duryodhana wanted the throne, so he used Karna to make it happen. He made him believe all his lies and do as he say. As he promised, Karna stayed by his side even after knowing the truth behind his birth. He could have become the king and ruled the kingdom, but he stood by his word and fought till his last breath.

Karna respected Drona as a master. He wanted to be trained under Drona's guidance. But when he approached Drona, he was treated as an inferior person. Karna was rejected the training along with the princes. Drona focused on training the princes only. Karna was allowed to learn there but was seen as an outcast. He prevented Karna from learning the *Brahmastra*. When Karna showed his skills, he was not accepted by Drona because of his caste. Drona was a self-

centered master who wanted to make his royal students excellent. He ignored all the other sections of students, even though they were more talented than the princes. After that, Karna went to Parashuram to learn under his teaching. Even there, he was denied entry due to his caste, so he lied that he was a Brahmin. But the master found the truth and cursed Karna. In his thirst for knowledge, he had to lie to his master and was cursed for lying and being a lower caste. Both his masters disappointed him and did not give him any consideration. When Karna became an efficient warrior, he wanted to prove his worth to Drona, who rejected him. He could defeat Drona's best students. But even in that situation, he was dishonored for his lower caste. The constant prejudice and insults he had to endure turned him into an unpleasant person. Every time he heard someone call him *Suta Putra*, he became extremely hostile, which was uncharacteristic of his original nature. He was glad that he received the training and was glad about his talent, but there was no place to express it. Only a Kshatriya could enter a battle or a competition. He could shoot anything blindly, but he could not show off his skills. All he sought was glory, but it was denied to him. The adamant nature of these masters shows the narcissist traits that made many students like Karna their victims. Being one of the greatest of masters, Drona could have treated Karna more politely, but his narcissist personality did not accept it.

The Pandavas were considered the great princes in the *Mahabharata*. They are portrayed as noble, kind-hearted, and loving. They were the favorites of Master Drona. Karna's foster father, Adhiratha, was the personal charioteer of King *Dhritarashtra* and was also his good friend. Thus, Karna also went to learn with the Pandavas under Drona. But he was seen as an inferior person by them. The Pandavas always humiliated him for his lower caste. They never saw him as one of them. As the master did not consider him, the students followed suit. Despite being a talented person, he was rejected and not given the recognition he deserved. Bhima, one

of the Pandavas, always humiliated Karna. Karna hated the Pandavas because they never supported him, stood for him, or respected him. From childhood, Karna considered the Pandavas to be his rivals. He wanted to prove that he was better than any of them and that his caste was not a barrier to his skills. Due to this, he ended up on the wrong side and joined the Kauravas. Duryodhana befriended him and made him one of his men. Then Karna went to the *Swayamvara* of Princess Draupadi. Karna was rejected by Draupadi. She ashamed him for his low caste. Then Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, won the Swayamvara. He felt very embarrassed by a woman's humiliation. Thus, he hated Draupadi along with the other Pandavas. The self-centered personalities of them made Karna feel like a loser. That changed his behavior and caused him to choose the wrong path in life. The noble, kind-hearted man changed into a rude one because of the narcissistic people around him. He was deeply affected by their cruel treatment.

There was another character in the *Mahabharata* whose unfortunate fate was like that of Karna. His name is Ekalavya; he was the prince of the Nishaada community. Drona was partial to the Pandava prince Arjuna. He wanted to make Arjuna the best archer. For that, he did anything he could without considering whether the things he did were just or not. Ekalavya was an innocent boy who largely respected Drona and wished to seek archery from him. But Drona denied his request because of his *Nishaada* origin. But he trained hard to prove his worth and showed Drona his skills. However, Ekalavya's excellence would put Drona in an immense dilemma as a royal teacher, for a mere Nishaadin boy cannot surpass a royal prince under his guidance. To protect his honor, Drona asked Ekalavya to gift him his right thumb as *Guru Dakshina*. Ekalavya offered his thumb without any hesitation. Without the thumb, he will not be an archer like Arjuna. Thus, Drona can make Arjuna the best archer. A master is not supposed to show partiality among his students. But Drona was always in favor of Arjuna. He had promised

Arjuna that he would make him the best archer in the world. So, he could not withstand anyone else becoming more talented than his disciple, Arjuna. That, too, was a Nishaadin boy; it was not acceptable to Drona. So, the egoistic mind of Drona made him do the worst and take Ekalavya's thumb. Ekalavya and Karna, both sidelined and victims of constant ridicule because of their low caste in the epic, emerge as the true heroes at the end. Even though Ekalavya was the prince and heir to the Nishaada community and Karna was the king of Anga and had the divine thread attached to him, yet they were ridiculed at the hands of society, including the mighty and moralistic Pandava princes. Marginalized and excluded from society, they suffered a lot more than they deserved. Like Ekalavya lost his thumb, Karna lost his divine armor and earrings. Indra, the king of gods, approached him for his divine protective armor, *kavacha-kundala*, in the guise of a Brahmin. This divine intervention is more of an episode of debauchery than of the serene divinity that should have been attached to it. A combination of a lack of heavenly assistance and mortal weaknesses is what makes these two characters the most humane among all the other larger-than-life characters in the epic. Even if they both have no direct connection, they bear much resemblance as tragic heroes. They both were talented people who were discriminated against by the narcissist society. If they were given the proper recognition and acceptance, they would have exceeded many great warriors. But the evil society in which they lived changed their lives into pathetic ones.

All these characters played a major role in the life of Karna. They could have stopped Karna from joining the evil side and protected him from all his miseries. But they did not do it and mourned after his death, which was useless. Even Kunti confesses to everyone that Karna is her firstborn son. It was too late to regret it. There was no one to help him when he struggled. After his death, it was useless whatever anyone said or did for him. The inhumane treatment by

society is not what Karna deserved. These characters were the main reasons for Karna's miserable life. Had they treated him the way he deserved to be treated, Karna's fate would have been so different from what it was. Their self-centeredness does not allow them to show appreciation, understand, or see things from other's perspectives. The disapproval, discrimination, rejection, abandonment, and dishonesty from the society made him a tragic hero.

Chapter 4

Karna: The Eternal Enigma of the *Mahabharata*

In Shivaji Sawant's famous novel *Mrityunjaya*, Karna is portrayed as the central character. The beauty of *Mrityunjaya* is that it feels so real and portrays Karna as an ordinary human, even though he is invincible and extraordinary. The word *Mrityunjaya* refers to a person who conquered death. Such a person exists perpetually and never dies. Karna was one of the legendary warriors from the well-known Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*. Shivaji Sawant retold the age-old Indian traditions he had reconstructed in his works. Although the author's presentation of the story does not alter the reader's faith or convictions, it does offer a chance to reread the Karna myths from new angles.

The book is written from the point of view of six characters: Karna opens and takes closer to the end of his story, interspersed with chapters by Kunti (his mother), Duryodhana (his best friend), Vrishali (his wife), Shon (his younger foster brother), and a grand ending by the Lord, Krishna. The struggles from his childhood until his death are clearly portrayed in it. Karna was raised as the son of a charioteer. He did not know the secret behind his birth. He lived each day with many questions in mind. He had many doubts about himself and about his divine armor and earrings. But he did not get the answers. Throughout his life and beyond, he has never truly received the recognition he deserves. Although the Pandavas were able to witness his grandeur while he was still alive, most of the Kauravas were unable to do so since nearly every one of them perished in the battle. Shivaji Sawant recounts the indignity he suffered all his life, the disappointment in his heart, his refusal to join the Pandavas despite realizing they were his brothers and seemingly declining the chance to ascend the throne of Hastinapur, his unwavering determination, his enduring friendship with Duryodhana, and other incidents. There are many

interpretations of Karna's life. Shivaji Sawant portrays a noble image of Karna, which is different from the other works.

Mrityunjaya is the biography of Karna, and yet it is not just that. With a deceptive case, Sawant brings into play an exceptional stylistic innovation by combining six "dramatic soliloquies" to form the nine books of this novel of epic dimensions. As Karna was abandoned in the river by his biological mother Kunti, he was rescued by Adhiratha and his wife Radha, who were childless at the time. He received great love and care from them. Karna aspired to become the greatest archer in the world, but no master would teach him because he was Suta Putra. His foster parents never made him feel like an adopted child. His foster father, Adhiratha, was a charioteer. The warrior inside Karna found his path; thus, he reached Hastinapur. He wanted to learn from the master, Drona. But he was not accepted as a disciple by Drona because he was a *Suta*. The other princes also saw him as an outcast. Karna was humiliated repeatedly. He realized that the caste of a person has more priority than his talent in that place. After constant hard work and dedication, he became a great warrior. He wanted to show the ones who humiliated him that it was possible for a *Suta* to become a warrior. Birth does not determine one's future; it is their determination. The humiliation from childhood was too much for Karna. But he did not lose hope. He went to Parashuram to learn. But to learn there, he had to lie and say that he was a brahmin. Then the master found the truth and cursed Karna, saying that he would lose all his knowledge of weapons when he would need them the most. It is true that Karna lied to his master, but he had no other options. Parashuram only taught Brahmins. It was not his fault to be a Suta; nobody can choose to be born into a higher caste. The prejudices of society were always against Karna. He was constantly ridiculed by the name of his caste. Karna met his biological mother, Kunti, after reaching Hastinapur. But he did not recognize her. For him, his parents were

Suta Charioteer Adhiratha and his wife Radha. But from childhood, he had several doubts about himself, about his divine armor and earrings. He asked his foster parents about this, but he did not get a proper answer.

In other stories, Kunti is depicted as a cruel mother who abandoned her son to save her reputation in society. But Shivaji Sawant portrays Kunti as an innocent princess who was bound by societal norms. The life of Kunti was also a miserable one. She was obliged to abandon Karna. She really wanted to leave all her royal life and live with her son, but she could not do it. She had many responsibilities as a princess, so she unwillingly abandoned Karna in the river. Karna came to know about the truth behind his birth only after the *Kurukshetra* War started. Sri Krishna revealed the truth to Karna: he was the son of Kunti and the sun god. Later, Kunti herself told him that he was her son. But Karna did not see her as his mother. He wanted to be known as the son of Adhiratha and Radha. They were the ones who cared for and loved him all his life. There is no meaning in motherhood if she does not care for her children. Kunti went to Karna to beg for stopping the war. She requested that he join their side. But for Karna, his words were more important than anything. He had promised Duryodhana to be with him in any situation. So, she declined her request, and he promised her that he would not kill any of her sons except Arjuna. Kunti was left devastated. But at the end of the story, Karna forgives Kunti and calls her mother. If Kunti had not abandoned Karna, he would not have struggled in life. Because of her mistake, the life of an innocent child was spoiled. He was the eldest of the Pandavas and the actual heir to the throne, but he did not get anything he deserved. He was mistreated by his own brothers. The Pandavas were humiliating their elder brother without knowing his real identity. Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, ashamed Karna for his caste. She rejected him because he was from a lower caste. Later, Draupadi also confesses that she did not hate him and

apologizes for her mistake. They all treated Karna so badly at first, and later they changed their behavior and accepted Karna. But they were all too late. When they all came to know the real Karna, he was not able to change. He had promised Duryodhana to be with him. If they were not self centered and egotistical, Karna's life would be totally different.

The friendship between Karna and Duryodhana is known as one of the best in history. When Karna was being insulted by everyone, Duryodhana was the only one who stood by his side and gave him the position of the King of Anga. Karna was surprised by Duryodhana's proposal, but Karna also wanted respect and recognition, so he agreed with Duryodhana. Karna believed that Duryodhana was a true friend, which is why he made Karna a king. He thought that Duryodhana was a noble man who was against caste discrimination in society. So, he obeyed everything Duryodhana said. Karna was willing to do anything for Duryodhana. But Duryodhana had other plans in mind. He saw the brave warrior inside Karna and knew that he would be useful in the future. So, he treated him very nicely. Karna did not understand the crooked plans of Duryodhana. He did not agree to everything; he wanted to raise his voice against the molesting of Draupadi. But he could not do that because he thought she saw him as an inferior person. Later in the story, Karna had to give away his divine armor and earrings as charity to Lord Indra, who came disguised as a brahmin. Karna gave it without hesitation, knowing that he would be doomed. Being a great donor, he could not reject anyone's request. After hearing that Karna lost his divine armor and earrings, Duryodhana became shocked and was disappointed in Karna. His divine weapons and armor were the reasons for befriending him. Now it was lost, so Duryodhana became angry and confused. In most of the mythological stories, Duryodhana's friendship is said to be the purest one. But he was using Karna as a weapon against his enemies. For which, he gave him the position of king and gave him everything he wanted. Thus, it is

shown that Karna was mistaken for Duryodhana and blindly believed him. He manipulated Karna very cunningly in the name of friendship. Karna was bound to his words, so he could not back off from the path he had chosen. He knew it was not the right path, but as a friend, it was Karna's responsibility to protect Duryodhana. That is why Karna did not agree with Kunti or Krishna despite knowing the truth behind his birth

Potentially the best archer, Karna overcame the embarrassment of being elevated simply because of his caste by working hard and excelling. He later rose to fame as a hero of the Dalit struggle in his culture. In the perceptions of the people, Karna, who had previously been portrayed as a villain, has been transformed into a heroic figure because of Shivaji Sawant's novel *Mrityunjaya*. Karna suffers from psychological trauma because of being thrust into society and finding himself abandoned by both his mother and his companions. His complicated traumatic experiences have left him unable to consider the situation and make sensible choices. This caused him to lose sight of his choices and his responses to different circumstances. The painful events in his life were predetermined by the time of his birth. It was Kunti's egotistical reaction to her haste to test a blessing that the sage Durvasa had bestowed upon her. Her adoration for her son as a mother triumphed over her reluctance to accept social shame. This action of Kunti showed its ugly face in the life of her son, who was traumatized whenever he was ignored in the name of the caste. His mother, father, and masters—all of them rejected him and denied him his entire life. A person suffering from complex trauma often finds difficulty managing emotions and feels stressed most of the time. They also tend to exhibit stress reactions at times. He was severely traumatized by a lifetime of suffering, and he began to live an egocentric life. This is frequently linked to feeling vulnerable and uneasy in one's environment. This weakest moment of Karna was the entry point for Duryodhana, and all his

conscientiousness left, resulting in his unquestionably acknowledged downfall and annihilation. Thus, Karna became the victim of the selfishness of the people in his life. He faced narcissists from birth until his death. And it resulted in the change of his own personality into a different one. The behavior of the people around a person has a great influence on his life. It can be seen through Karna's life. If he had been treated properly by everyone, his whole life would have been different. He would not have faced any discrimination in life. Due to the narcissist people around him, his nature became like that of a narcissist and he went through an evil path, which resulted in his tragic life. Most of the stories portray Karna as an unlucky warrior, and they blame him for his misdeeds. But nobody realizes that he was the victim of constant ridicule from the narcissist society in which he lived. There were reasons behind his misfortunes. The trauma from childhood had changed him a lot, as had his perceptions of others. He was slowly changed into a con narcissist by the influence of narcissists like Kunti and Duryodhana, which resulted in his tragic death.

Chapter 5

Unmasking the Truth: Karna's Suffering a Narcissistic World

Many characters in the *Mahabharata* were considered the greatest in history, like Bheeshma, Drona, and Arjuna. One of the legendary characters among them was Karna, the *Surya putra*. He is greatly admired throughout the Mahabharata due to his exceptional warrior skills, dedication, and tragic story. Karna's story is different from others. He is known as a tragic hero in the epic who struggled all his life for respect and recognition in society.

His misfortunes started in his childhood, when his mother, Kunti, abandoned him in the river to save her from the humiliation of society. She carelessly tested the boon given by the sage Durvasa and gave birth to Karna. But being an unwed mother, she feared the social stigma. So, she abandoned Karna in the river, hoping that he would get foster parents. A child who was born to divinity and power parents like Sun-God and Kunti remained lurking for belongingness all his life. Who, even though he was loved by his foster parents, felt empty within. A critical analysis of Kunti's behavior shows the narcissistic traits that, therefore, affected Karna's behavior later in his decisions and adult life. Narcissism is a psychological condition rooted in severely low self-esteem. Narcissistic individuals are so afraid of being mistrusted by others that they try to manipulate other people's actions and opinions to safeguard their sense of self. A profound, often unconscious perception of oneself as extremely unworthy and vulnerable to criticism and rejection is the fundamental dynamic of narcissism. It is possible to see Kunti's choice to leave Karna as an attempt to defend herself from criticism, rejection, and the concern that she would not be accepted by others. An act of deeply embedded low self-esteem that involved trying to manipulate other people's perceptions of themselves.

Duryodhana, on the other hand, is considered the friend of Karna, who helped him in his difficult situation and gave him the position of king. Being given this pampering obliged Karna to remain faithful and loyal to the *Kuru* Prince till the end of his life. Although he was aware of the *Kuru* prince's vainglorious desires, Karna was mistaken by the affection of Duryodhana, so he believed him blindly. He promised him to be by his side till death. He made Karna a king, knowing he was a suta. Karna thought Duryodhana was a nobleman who also wanted to eradicate caste discrimination in society. But he was wrong; Duryodhana did not help Karna uplift the lower caste. He saw Karna as a great weapon against the Pandavas, which is why Duryodhana befriended him. If he were a righteous man, he could have stopped the humiliations faced by the lower sections with his power. But Duryodhana only helped Karna because he saw Karna as a weapon. He was being manipulated by Duryodhana in the name of friendship. Also, Karna was rejected by Drona as a student, by Draupadi as a suitable husband, and by Bheeshma on the battlefield as a leader, saying he is a *suta putra*. All these humiliations devastated him entirely. He became insecure. His identity was being questioned by great characters like Drona, Draupadi, and all. He expected to be treated more respectfully. Karna's self-perception could be interpreted as that of a restrained individual with unfavorable intellectual development and a lack of empathy. Karna further emerges as a symbol of a codependent individual in a woven world. He beholds the example of weak to almost lacking personal boundaries. Shakuni and Duryodhana took advantage of his abilities for their avaricious ambitions. He was cursed several times in his life. Unfortunately, he bears all the curses for his death, which he never deserved. He was often overly giving to reduce the burden of his misdeeds. He was also observed to be unaware of his feelings, pain, needs, and experiences. He mostly concealed himself in the background of his relationships, though he possessed more qualities and potential than anyone

else around. Karna keeps going despite all his humiliations. Despite knowing that he will die, he trains diligently to become the finest archer. His intentions were all pure. However, he was constantly worried that the outcomes would turn against him when he tried to help people. He believed his duty was to make other people's suffering less severe. In the unlikely event that he could not ease someone's sorrow, he placed the blame entirely on himself. A co-narcissist experiences it as reflecting behavior and worldview based on their interactions with the narcissistic person or their narcissistic parent. They believe the world to be the same as their parents or perpetrators. As the victim of narcissism, they subconsciously accept the punishments, including guilt, emotional withdrawal, criticism, projection of anger, blame, etc.

Only the heroic side and the tragic end of Karna are discussed everywhere, but it is stated that there is another side to Karna that is obscure to most. Karna was traumatized by the humiliation and ridicule from society, which changed him entirely into a whole new person who lost his morals and went down the wrong path. This resulted in the tragic end of Karna. Hence, it is proven that the legendary warrior Karna in the epic *Mahabharata* was a victim of narcissism. It was not only his fault to end up like that; he was being persuaded to act like that. He was subconsciously manipulated and driven by the actions of the narcissistic people in his environment, which affected his character very intensely. The narcissists around him influenced him very much, which caused him to be a co-narcissist with the characteristics of narcissists.

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