

PREETI PARIKH

Corpus | Divine

Our mythology, too, has noble heroes. They save a woman's [] as Lord Krishna did during Draupadi's cheer-haran in the Hastinapur court after the eldest of her five husbands, Yudhishtira, gambled Draupadi away in a royal game of dice. Menstruating, and dressed in an uncut length of cloth, Draupadi [also known as Panchaali, meaning *of five*] is dragged by her hair into a full court and ordered to be disrobed.

She pleads to the [] and [] of the elders but they hang their heads in helpless []. As her saree begins to unravel, she folds her hands in prayer and appeals to her childhood friend and comrade, Krishna, who miraculously makes her saree infinitely long such that after some time the disrober falls exhausted next to the heap of unwound cloth on the floor. Still, Draupadi remains clothed and thus [].

What is it to

Ex pose.

Be []d.

Sa [l] ve.

Be []d.

In my personal myth, Draupadi stands in front of the court:

unclothed

secure

*No, not Draupadi's pleas at court
spilled, sponged into silence.
Not the miracle of her*

*non-disrobing saree never ending.
I want Krishna's indigo hues now.
I want Panchaali's defiant skin.*

The [] of Cloth

In my hands, a creased black-and-white 4 × 6 photograph. A bustling congregation on sand. In the foreground, a family of four: a man in wide-leg trousers, cable-knit sweater vest; a lady in a leheriya-patterned saree; in her arms, a pudgy little girl in a pinafore dress. Between the couple, turned away from the camera, a little [] wearing bell-bottom pants and a dark sweater with broad horizontal stripes.

*

For the body, clothing creates lines, angularity, volume. An architecture for a house of cloth. Detailed: pleats, folds, pannier skirts. Simple: a knotted lungi. Minimalistic. Like a tunic or pant. Sweeping like Grecian drapes or a nine-yard saree. An armor, a blanket. Barely there, ethereal. In old texts about Dhaka muslin, pictures depict gossamer garments from which the bodies of Kings and Queens peek, [] and clearly outlined.

*

The [] states: “nakedness” is not just the *state or condition of being unclothed* but also an *openness to attack or injury*, a *vulnerability*, a *defenselessness*, an *absence of disguise or concealment*.

*

To be clothed is not only to be covered with a garment but also to be endowed with attributes; to *put on a form or appearance*. Fabric is not just *woven stuff* but also an *edifice*, a *building*, a *frame*, a *structure*.

*

veined | captured | sighted | cited | dressed | a[d]dressed | a dress | a dress address
 | garbed | bodied | [o u t]fitted | garbed | formed | attired | tiered | tired

*

What's felt becomes the body, what's draped becomes form. Partly, they aren't
 original, these words ingested and worn in jest.

*

chisel | sheesham | craft | | syahi | cotton | *textere*
 language | stanza | textile | | weave | song | memory
 fashion | integument | cloth | | gaze | dwell | elide

*

In the photograph, my parents appear so distant, so young. My father—athletic, hands clasped behind his back, the sharp demeanor of an army man. How [] now resembles this image—the same broad forehead, the furrow between the brows, that same skeptical glance. My mother—wry, short-haired, with intense eyes. They are standing feet-width apart, shoulders touching, and in that triangular wedge of space between them is the left profile of my [], averted, while I, ensconced in my mother’s embrace, chewing at my thumb, scowl at the camera. No one is smiling in the picture.

*

The Khatri dips a block into resist dye, lifts and presses it on the cloth with a firm thump of his fist. Stamps a geometric pattern on the cotton fabric stretched on the workshop table. He repeats, swapping out the border block for the one with the center field design, matching the edges corner to corner. He will print this length, then

immerse it in madder and indigo. Permeated, cleansed, and ready to be sold—whose skin will this fabric make illegible, make homed?

*

Words. Just-enough-syllabled. Like a tribe of goats corralled in a stick-fenced yard. Their indexed wool a guttural tapestry, studded with locked horns. Once, I wove [] a letter. There was nothing I held even to myself. Once, I loved []. Once, I was []. Once, I was.