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Ústav jižní a centrální Asie FF UK

Vás zvou na přednášku, kterou přednese hostující

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Na téma:

‘Nevertheless She Persisted’: Women and the Public Sphere in the Mahābhārata

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‘Nevertheless she persisted’ is how Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell described Elizabeth Warren’s refusal to be silenced after she objected to the Senate’s vote to confirm Senator Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General. Although McConnell meant to portray Warren as speaking out of turn, many have taken this phrase as a rallying cry for women to speak truth to power in the face of gender discrimination. When I first heard this phrase, I couldn’t help but think of the women of the *Mahābhārata*, particularly Draupadī, Śakuntalā, and Sulabhā, all of whom speak eloquently and truthfully in public assemblies of mostly men, and all of whom face insults and attempts to silence them. Nevertheless, each one of them persists, offering interesting insights about women speaking in the public sphere from an ancient Indian perspective.

This paper will focus on Draupadī in particular, examining in detail the questions about women’s agency she poses in the court of King Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Because of the importance of this scene within the narrative, Draupadī’s questions – questions concerning female agency and the social status of women – are posed as some of the central moral problems of the *Mahābhārata*. In addition to analyzing this scene specifically, this paper will also look at the ways that Draupadī’s questions are explored by other women – Śakuntalā, and Sulabhā in particular – in similar circumstances, in other sections of the *Mahābhārata*. I will argue that through the words, actions, and circumstances of these three women – as well as others – the *Mahābhārata* offers a systematic critique of *dharma* from a gendered perspective.