4.1: *Andha Yug* - Dharamvir Bharati

*Andha Yug* was written originally in Hindi by Dharamvir Bharati, a legendary writer in 1953 in Hindi. The English rendering of it is done by Alok Bhatta in 2005. The play begins on the evening of the eighteenth day of the war and ends with the final pilgrimage and death of Lord Krishna.

It consists of following characters.

- Ashwatthama
- Gandhari
- Dhritarashtra
- Kritavarma
- Sanjaya
- Old Mendicant
- Guard 1
- Guard 2
- Vyasa
- Vidura
- Yudhishthira
- Kripacharya
- Yuyutsu
- Dumb Soldier
- Balarama
- Krishna

**Outline of the play**

The play opens with a Prologue, which describes the present time as *Kali Yug* or the age of darkness, as described in Vishnu Purana. All thoughts and deeds of men will be corrupt and perverse. Lord Krishna only can untie the intertwined good and evil as he is dispassionate and detached. All others are blind, self-absorbed, depressed and confused.

**Act I – The Kaurava Kingdom** - It is the evening time of last day of the royal battle. The Kaurava Kingdom is full of depressive mood after their loss in the battle. Two guards feel the futility of carrying the arms and guarding the deserted palace. Vidura feels that the origin of bad omen of vultures flying is in the violation of the code of honour, to which even Dhritarashtra agrees. Gandhari deeply mourns the loss of her sons and accuses Krishna for it. Vidura warns her not to do so. An old mendicant appears and announces the Kaurava’s final victory, as he had done earlier. Eventually he too admits that he was wrong and Krishna can only change the course of the stars.

**Act II- The Making of a Beast** - Sanjaya is aimlessly moving in the forest as he does not know how to convey the news about Kaurava’s loss to Dhritarashtra.
Ashwatthama, Kritavarma and Kripacharya are the only survivals from the Kaurava camp. Ashwatthama is full of revenge against Pandavas. Ashwatthama kills the old mendicant for telling the false prediction of Kaurav’s victory. Ashwatthama’s sleep gets haunted by the thought of killing the old man. At the end chorus informs that it is night of celebration for Pandavas and concealment of Duryodhana.

**Act III- The Half-truth of Ashwatthama**- Sanjaya, at last informs Dhritarashtra and Gandhari about Kaurav’s defeat. Yuyutsu, a son of Dhritarashtra also comes along with the crowd. Gandhari insults him for helping Pandavas in the battle. A dying soldier refuses to drink water at his hand; Sanjaya enters and informs everyone about Duryodhana’s killing in the dual. Ashwatthama informs Kritavarma and Kripacharya how Duryodhana’s killing is against dharma, law. Balaram too accuses Krishna for helping adharma, illegal behaviour of Pandavas. He calls Krishna as ‘unprincipled rouge’. Ashwatthama, now mad in rage, takes oath to kill Pandavas by any means. Ashwatthama, Kritavarma and Kripacharya take rest under the tree, on which an owl kills a sleeping crow. Immediately Ashwatthama decides to kill unarmed, sleeping Pandavas.

**Interlude- Feathers, Wheels and Bandages**- The old mendicant appears as a ghost. He explains the horrors of the age as he can realise it as a spirit. He describes this age as ‘a blind ocean’, ‘a pit of snakes’ and full of ‘white snake skins’ and ‘white bandages’. By using his visionary powers, the mendicant’s ghost understands everyone’s inner contradictions. Yuyutsu is like a wheel, which is spun on the wrong axle and lost his bearings. Sanjaya is like a useless wheel, which moves when other big wheels move. Vidura’s voice is full of doubts. The ghost sees a giant like being standing at the gates of Pandava’s camp to stop Ashwatthama’s chariot. He covers his eyes with fear.

**Act IV- Gandhari’s Curse**- Initially Chorus informs that it was Shankara, whom Ashwatthama saw at the Pandava camp. He begs for mercy and Shankara blesses him victory. Shankara also tells him that the final day of Pandavas in coming near. Ashwatthama creates havoc in the Panadava camp by killing many. Gandhari is very happy and wants to see Ashwatthama. Sanjaya with his divine power makes Gandhari see the scene at the battleground. Gandhari wants to remove her blindfold and empower Ashwatthama. Suddenly Sanjaya loses his vision. Ashwatthama hides for the fear of life. Ashwatthama now uses the deadly Bramhastra against pregnant
Uttara. Krishna protects Uttara and her child. He takes out the divine diamond from Ashwatthama’s forehead and sets him free to suffer. Gandhari accuses Krishna for this condition and curses him that his Yadav cult will end with infighting and war. Krishna accepts Gandhari’s curse immediately. Gandhari realises her mistake and apologizes to Krishna. Krishna consoles her.

**Act V- Victory and a Series of Suicide** - The time moves on and Yudhishthira finally wins the throne of Hastinapur. However he can enjoy the peace of mind. The Pandavas are victorious but their self-confidence is shattered. The forest catches fire, in which Gandhari, Dhritarashtra and Kunti die of burning. A burning branch falls on lonely Sanjay’s foot and damages him badly. Yuyutsu too meets tragic death as his wounds get exposed. The scene ends with the conversation between the two guards. They inform the audience about the tremendous ruin that their city is witnessing.

**Epilogue- Death of the Lord** - The play ends with the death of Lord Krishna. Krishna leans against the tree. Ashwatthama enters and sees Krishna in that pose. He curses Krishna for being responsible for destruction. Sanjaya too enters without arms and legs. He is even not able to see. In the meantime, a hunter mistakes Krishna’s foot for deer and aims at it. The hunter releases the bow and there is a flash of lightening. Ashwatthama laughs and Sanjaya screams. A bad smell of blue blood from Krishna’s foot feels the atmosphere and Ashwatthama’s wounds stop soaring. The old mendicant is the hunter who killed Lord Krishna. Yuyutsu says that the death of Lord Krishna is full of cowardness. Such death is not going to secure the future of human race. Ashwatthama feels that Krishna’s death has created faith and hope in his mind. The old mendicant informs about the last words of the Lord. The chorus informs that it is this day, from which the world is descended into the age of darkness. However there is a small seed in the mind of man about courage, freedom and imagination to createsomething new.
4.1.1

‘The Wheel Spins without a Centre’: Discourse of Darkness and Blindness

Discourse, as in social sciences, is understood as strategies to propagate different ideological positions. Ideological positions decide the perceptions and actions of individuals, who are the vehicles as well as the victim of the same ideology. In myths, the characters represent the cultural and ideological positions. Once these positions are institutionalized they turn into discursive practices. Myths, thus not only provide a range of events and characters, they are the repository of cultural and ideological positions. The Mahabharata, the longest epic of the world is full of variety of characters and their ways of perceiving things. The great war of Mahabharata and the deep darkness that accompanies it are the central issue in Andha Yug. The play provides a select slice of this epic drama which is full of hatred, self-centeredness, treacheries, sacrifices, massacres, fraud, falsity, disbelief, diseases and unending darkness and blindness. The play captures the mood in Hastinapur after the seventeen-day long battle. The Pandavas are on the verge of victory and the Kaurava clan is about to extinguish. This war is referred as ‘the dharmayudha’ (a war upholding the principles of thought and action). Paradoxically the experience of the Great War tells a different story. It is not just a story of the on-field violence but it is a saga of abyssal darkness inside the human mind. It is this inner darkness that makes one blind in spite of the physical sight. Everyone in this cyclorama is carrying this darkness inside himself or herself. The play presents the ‘inner’ darkness with all its shades and its gradual scission towards total decadence. Discourse in such cases operates through subtleties of the mind. Everyone seems to carry the load of self-centeredness and ‘will to dominate’. Hence every character tries to create a way for him in order to establish his presence. War is an occasion for everyone to settle their accounts. Therefore it is on this occasion the darkness inside everyone’s heart is projected vividly. Andha Yug as a mythical play presents an opportunity to analyze every ancient character from the perceptive of the postmodernist discourse lenses in this manner.

It is through the social conditions the discursive and ideological practices get formed. Hence at the beginning the degrading social conditions are elaborated as
described in Vishnupurana. The great of war Mahabharata is the starting point of the ‘age of darkness’. It is the condition where everything good and pious would degrade. The virtuous rulers would be replaced by powerful and wealthy. The very thinking of man would be corrupt. The good and conscious have to retreat back from all fields and

Hide
in real caves
or in the caverns of their souls (Andha Yug26 henceforth referred as AY)
Thus the darkness outside and blindness inside the human being would prevail throughout. The condition of the present era would be horrible in every sense.

Blind fear and blind love
blind power and blind justice
shall prevail in the end. (AY27)

The life in this condition for any sensible individual is meaningless and absurd. The city is ruled by the king, who is blind from the birth i.e. Dhritarashtra. His wife, Gandhari has accepted blindness voluntarily. The king is unable to guess the forthcoming dangers of the war. He is narrow-minded and visionless. The empire is ruled by the blind and therefore there is no possibility of any hope. The common feeling about the ruler goes like this,

Has he ever
been able
to see
anything
thus far (AY31)

The conditions are really horrified. They are suggested by the presence of the ‘thousands and thousands of vultures with their wings outspread.’ (AY 30) The houses are deserted. The people have left the town. The Kaurava clan is wiped out. Every face is cursed and everybody is diseased. In the defeated condition the entire city has ‘lost its sense of honour’. The common man, with no fault of his own, suffers from
the plight and extreme humiliation. It indicates that the vainglory of the rulers could be divesting for the common people. They do not initiate or participate in the war on their own. Generally they are forced to do so. They never violate honour or are tormented by disbelief. They never wish to dominate anyone but are very much happy to be slave. In spite of this they suffer in this ‘choice less’ situation. The two guards are the representative of the discourse of war. They are meaninglessly guarding the palace, which is desolate. It shows the life conditions of the majority people, who suffer due to the whims of the few. The discourse created because of the rulers and the social conditions victimizes the common people. The only solace in this situation seems to be the Lord (Krishna) who ‘takes responsibility for all of them.’ (AY 43)

Thus one comes across a sea of darkness inside and outside. These conditions are consequences of the inhuman war, which went on ferociously for seventeen days. The war shows the fighting between two classes – here the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The battle is said to be fought for upholding ‘dharma’ (righteous acts). The Pandavas are fighting to save and reinstate ‘dharma’. Paradoxically they take refugee of dishonoring code of honour (adharma) to achieve their target. Both sides have violated the code of honour in the wartime. Apparently everyone speaks about the dharma and its rule but actually everyone is power-seeker and pleasure monger. The war makes everyone naked and shows the real characters. The war for dharma turns out to be petty war for power and domination. Ultimately both sides are guilty of putting their self-interests at the centre of the battle. All principles of dharma are bent according to the convenience of the parties. Thus the Great War is a grand discourse, where everyone tries to forward his interests under the name of dharma. Thus the darkness outside is the aftereffect of the darkness inside the mind. The inner darkness waves the vicious web of the war, where everything innocence and divine is crushed. In this dark world, the knowledge is replaced by half-knowledge (of Ashwatthama), truth is replaced by half truths (of Yudhishthira), vision is replaced by cheap prophecies (of the old mendicant), honour is replaced by the contempt (of Dronacharya), reason is given way to the intoxicated mind (of Bhima), actions replaced by mere observations (of Sanjaya), faith is replaced by the fluctuating beliefs (of Vidura), wisdom is substituted by imprudence (of Gandhari), conviction is uprooted by skepticism (of Yudhishthira) and benevolence is replaced by sacrifice (of Krishna).
Every character shows the darkness inside the heart. The Pandavas have already lost their ‘dharma’ while participating in the battle. They have violated all the codes while killing Dronacharya and the other Kaurava warriors. They are wildly ecstatic about their victory without realizing the serious consequences of it. Dhrishtadyumna killed Guru Dronacharya when he was unarmed. It was a treachery because Dronacharya was made to surrender his arms by false news. The news was spread that ‘Ashwatthama is dead’. When asked for the clarification by Guru Drona, Yudhishthira replied ‘The man or the beast.’ (AY 52) It is against the code of war to kill the unarmed. Dhrishtadyumna is guilty of that sin. Moreover Yudhishthira, who is known for speaking ‘truth’, too compromises for the sake of victory. Truth gets defeated before the imperial concerns. The Pandavas get more and more morally corrupt as the war progresses. In the final battle Bhima kills Duryodhana by treachery and violates dharma again. Thus Pandavas are so intoxicated with and because of their powers that they forget that they are fighting to defend dharma. It is the Pandavas who played the foul game. Therefore they can be paid back in the same manner. Ashwatthama, indicates towards the unethical ways which the Pandavas adapted, have not left the Kauravas with any option but to battle with them on the same plain. The Pandavas have forgotten the real motive of the war i.e. to uphold dharma but they too show the unfathomable darkness lurking inside their hearts. They are victorious finally but their victory is not chest. They match with the Kauravas in the insatiable thrust for the power and insanity of behavior. The intoxication of victory lasts for a long in the Pandava camp. The Pandava soldiers are so much elated after the victory that Kripacharya and Kritavarma have to find the place to hide from them. The one time ‘protector’ Pandavas have turned out to the hunters. The intoxication of the power finally revealed the animal instincts in them. They show the great lust for power, expressing the self-centeredness and moral corruption. Their jubilant mood does not match with the total annihilation outside. The Pandavas seems to have lost the sense of reality as they have forgotten the real cause of their life. Even it appears that Krishna is unable to make them unaware. If the Pandavas have lost of the sense of ‘dharma’ then they hardly are different from the Kauravas. The difference between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is so blurred during the Great War. There are no permanent truths but only the provisional positions. The Pandavas, who were out of the power, get transformed once they taste the power. It seems that power has turned the
Pandavas into insensitive and irrational creatures. Ultimately even the great warriors like the Pandavas exhibit ungenerous tendencies and follies.

The Pandavas have lost the bearing of their character and action after they become the rulers. The attraction of power cripples them to the extent of becoming insensitive towards the outside reality. They are victorious but they are confused about how to rule. They have lost the elders to guide them and the fellow mates to support. Their reign becomes ‘confused and inauspicious’ and even virtue less. Interestingly the sense of dharma has been lost and they turn out be like the savage beast. All the Pandavas, except Yudhishtira have even lost the sense of reality, and do suffer from lacunae.

Bhima was proud by nature
and intellectually dull
Arjuna had grown old and weary
before his time
Nakula was ignorant
and Sahadeva retarded from birth. (AY 127)

The discourse of darkness and blind will to dominate begins with the Pandavas. They become so obtuse that they insult and laugh at Yuyutsu’s death, which earlier fought with them. The moral degradation clearly shows that anyone is not exceptional when it comes to power-politics. Even Lord Krishna is unable to control them. The Pandavas earlier claimed to reinstate the kingdom based on values and morality; however they have lost both these virtues. They are working towards their own destruction. The degrading condition of the Pandavas indicates the loss of innocence, values and basic humanity. They are the victims of the ‘inner darkness’ of power-urge, self-contradictions and loss of reason. It is impossible for any good thing or person to exist in this dark world, even the Pandavas are no exception to this.

The Pandavas are the first victims of the engulfing discourse of darkness. The Kauravas have obviously fallen prey to it. They are suffering from different iniquities right from their births. Dhritarashtra is blind since his birth. He is the king and he wishes to transfer the kingdom to his son, Duryodhana. He denies the Pandavas the rightful claim of share of power. He has a blind love towards the sons. In a way he is
the chief cause of the Great War. He is emotionally and reasonably more blind than physical blindness. He has kept himself away from the reality. He distinctly remembers the old mendicant’s prophecy regarding the Kauravas’ victory. He after the seventeen days’ war still believes that Kauravas would win the war. He creates his opinions on the ‘borrowed’ knowledge either from Vidura or Sanjaya. He has to create his own ‘world of perception’ out of the darkness filled in his vision. Unfortunately he never understood the outside reality. He desires for establishing his son Duryodhana as the absolute ruler of Hastinapur. He could not assess the Pandavas and Lord Krishna. He even seems to neglect the follies of his sons. He is impractical and bias. He seems to realize this finally.

I had spun an illusory world
of dreams and desires and passions
out of the depth of that darkness …. (AY33)

He presents the visionless king, a leader who leaves in the ‘illusory world’ created out of his extremely narrow-mindedness. The guards speak the truth about their king’s condition. They refer to his inability to see at a distance. He is physically blind and mentally narrow-minded. He could not perceive anything behind his sons. They define everything for him. His blind love towards his sons, especially Duryodhana makes him blind towards his duties as the king. He accepts his position as more emotional than the sense of law or code of honour. His physical blindness is an indication of the lack of vision, not just a lack of sight. He could never think rationally and hence finally loses all his sons. Once he realizes that his dreams and desires were fallacies, he crumbles down the fear regarding the future. Dhritarashtra has a complex relation with discourse formation. He, on the one hand is the initiator of the discourse and at another level he is victim of it. He is the one who puts blind faith in Duryodhana and denies the Pandavas their legal rights. He shows petty intentions to consolidate power in Duryodhana’s hand. His mental blindness could not imagine the horrors of the war. He continues to dream about the Kauravas victory. He is unable to digest the reality. His ego still stresses that he is the king. He feels that the victory of the Pandavas is a fatal blow against my kingdom. Dhritarashtra suffers the problem of diseased mentality. Is he unrealistic or is he unable to face the present? Does the fear in his mind show his inability to cope with the present and the future?
He has the fear but he does not appear to learn anything from the past events. After the great carnage, Dhritarashtra is still very much occupied with the thought of power. He expects Yudhishtira to quit the throne and Yuyutsu; the Kaurava son may get the kingship. This indicates his power thrust even in the final stage. It is reported that Dhritarashtra dies while burning in the forest. The symbolic death suggests some type of purification. It can be called as the life through death. His discourse of darkness suggests the unrighteous way in which the rulers behave. It is an indication that how the interests and desires of the ruler however incongruous it may be, dominates the common interest and welfare. The discourse of darkness weaved around Dhritarashtra is the core part of entire realm of discourse.

Gandhari, who stands as the shadow of Dhritarashtra throughout his life, too is a part of the discourse of darkness. She has accepted blindness voluntarily after their marriage. She has done a great sacrifice but she too like her husband suffers from vainglory and narrow mindedness. She just like her husband is totally blind about Duryodhana. She feels that the Pandavas have always been immoral and Krishna supports them in their bad deeds. She feels that the Kauravas have the legitimate right to own the kingdom. At the beginning Gandhari is mourning about the death of her sons. She seems to be dejected by the ways of the world. She is disappointed because of the complete loss of values in the war. She feels that things like ‘dharma’, duty and honour are unreal, illusions. They do not hold any position or they are too fragile to be broken down. She looks at wisdom and honour as ‘useless’ things. She probably so much shocked with the death of her sons that she is now aware about the ‘animality’ in the human nature.

There is a dark abyss in each of us

where a ferocious beast

- a blind beast

who is the master

of all we know and do –(AY37)

Gandhari puts forward the most gruesome face of the war. She undergoes the horrible feeling of witnessing the death of all her sons over last seventeen days. She helpless removed the bangles from the bands of widow – daughter-in-laws. She is much dejected by the massacre caused in the city by this war. She is suddenly aware
of the tremendous waste the war has caused. She realizes the futility of the Great War, which was fought without any principles. Though it is referred as the battle for principles (*dharmayuddha*), there is hardly any sense of dharma present at both the side. Gandhari, being a blind, still could sense the ‘blindness’ of others created because of the self-interests. Gandhari describes the most ugly face of the war and the selfish mentality behind it. Gandhari is very much aware about the destructive and hidden aspects of the war. She even criticizes Lord Krishna as a ‘fraud’ who could not stop this carnage. Interestingly in spite of all this knowledge, Gandhari continues to dream about Duryodhana’s victory. She believes in all the prophecies related to Duryodhana’s victory. Prophecies are half or created knowledge, yet it is very much accepted. Gandhari’s belief about Duryodhana’s victory is not just out of love for him, but it is an outcome of the hatred towards the Pandavas. She feels that the Pandavas and Lord Krishna are responsible for this devastation. She is extremely agitated with her son, Yuyutsu, who fought for the Pandavas. She is not ready to pardon him for this act. Gandhari thus shows the deep darkness of revenge in her heart. She speaks against it but falls prey to the discourse of darkness. She is so much engrossed in her own consciousness that she forgets the reality around. After the seventeen days, she still hopes rather unrealistically for Duryodhana’s victory. At the end of the battle with Bhima, Duryodhana gets fatal injuries. He is on the death-bed yet Gandhari does not go to meet him. She probably could not see her loving son dying. She is unable to face realities of life.

Gandhari prefers to live in her own created world, which is full of air and noise. Her self-imposed blindness is a symbol of confinement of the vision as well as thought. She exhibits the influence of the ideological formations which do not allow her to think realistically. She is so blind, uncontrollable with the rage against Krishna after the Kaurava’s defeat that she curses Krishna. She herself suffers with a curse of darkness throughout her life. It is only at the end that she seems to understand her mistake. She confesses to Sanjaya, “I was the first victim of my own curse.” (*AY* 140) She is confined in the hut around which the forest is burning. She is sure to die of burning in that fire. She appears to be enlightened about the ‘darkness’ that she carried throughout her life. She like her husband thinks about getting hope, light, knowledge and salvation through purification. Gandhari too is a creation and victim of the discourse to dominate and self-interest. Interestingly she has accepted the
blindness on her own; hence she preferred to stay in that condition throughout her life. Her ‘voluntarily blindness’ is an indication of her willing participation in the discourse of darkness. She is full of contradictions – rationally she is aware about the horrors of war but emotionally she refuses to learn anything from it and continues to support the animality of Duryodhana.

Like Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, Ashwatthama too is the creation and victim of the discourse of darkness. He is the Kaurava camp and a staunch supporter of Duryodhana. He is enraged with the Pandavas because they killed his father; Guru Dronacharya with hatchery. He is burning with the fire of revenge. He too suffers from the darkness of irrationality, rage and vengeance. During the wartime Ashwatthama feels extremely frustrated, dejected especially after Dronacharya’s ‘heartless murder’. He smashes his bow in this vein of dejection. He is enraged with the feeling of vengeance. He has decided to turn himself into a blind, ruthless beast. He releases himself from all types of moral bondages. He accuses the Pandavas and especially Yudhishthira for this degradation. Yudhishthira’s half truth led to Dronacharya’s killing. After this act Ashwatthama loses all goodness in him. He turns into wild beast. He blames Yudhishthira’s half-truth for his condition as he has lost faith in anything innocent and gentle in the world. His present is devastated with one small event. His future is also lurking in the darkness. He as a result of this uncertainty and helplessness develops self contempt. He starts looking down upon himself. He describes his condition as

- Foul as the spittle
- Stale as the phlegm
- Left in the mouth
- Of a dying man –(AY53)

He even thinks about committing suicide and ends this impotent existence. As retaliation exercise he wishes to kill and dominate everyone. Ashwatthama is a victim of the discourse of immoral and dark war. He feels cheated and humiliated by the Pandavas. He feels that they are responsible for turning him into the beast. He has no other option but to be ‘killer’ of everything as the Pandavas have not left them any option. Ashwatthama is sure a victim of the power struggle of the royal family. Aftermaths of the war are so destructing for Ashwatthama that they have ended the
humanity and fostered animalism in him. He suffers because of the Pandavas’ will to dominate.

Ashwatthama, though a victim of the discourse of interests and conflicts, shows lot of degradation due to his own nature. Almost everybody suffers in the war; however Ashwatthama suffers much more due to his humiliation and self-condemnation. He feels for the revenge for the Pandavas even after they are victorious. They have already defeated the strong Kauravas in the battle. Hence it seems impossible for Ashwatthama to defeat them, especially when Krishna is at their side. In spite of this Ashwatthama decides to challenge the Pandavas. He even goes on to the extent of using the Brahmaastra, the weapon which as the capacity to destroy the entire earth. Unfortunately he does not know how to recall it. Thus Ashwatthama has half-knowledge about the usage of it. Dronacharya lost his life due to half-knowledge and Ashwatthama puts everyone’s life in danger because of his half-knowledge. He is a person who is eager to act but his actions are not supported by the reasons. He is more instinctual. He, in the end, accepts his moral and intellectual degradation when he refers himself a wild beast. His irrational behavior is boosted more when Gandhari praises his horrible ‘adventures’. She praises him for doing those things which even ‘hundred’ Kauravas could not achieve. He feels extremely proud when he is made the commander of the Kaurava. His voice sounds authoritative. He orders Kripacharya and Kritavarma in a strange voice. He seems to enjoy his new position. In a way Ashwatthama too suffers from the shortcomings of having ‘darkness’ inside his heart and mind. He shows incapacity to think logically. He reacts to the situations in thoughtless ways. He too has the hidden desire to dominate. Ashwatthama, just like Gandhari does not learn anything from the past happenings. Though he suffers from the discourse of self-interests of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, he too suffers from the same lacunas. He is the product of the age of darkness. He acknowledges it at the end.

The blindness of this age
flowed through my veins. (AY 157)

Ashwatthama due to his own shortcoming meets the tragic fate. He is cursed him ‘immortality’. He has to see others dying and the age of darkness crawling near and near. While this degradation takes place, he is ‘condemned to live forever and
Thus it can be said that Ashwatthama’s fate revolves around the discourse of darkness. He firstly suffers because he is the victim of the discourse, later on he suffers because of his inherent shortcomings like the power-thrust, animality and irrationality. Ashwatthama signifies that no one, whether belonging to the royal family and even marginal, suffers from the discourse of self-centeredness and power concerns.

Yuyutsu is another character, who suffers because of the discourse of conflicting interests. Yuyutsu is the son of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra but he prefers to participate in the war from the Pandava side. He therefore hated by all the common people, the Kaurava soldiers and even by his mother; Gandhari. When he enters Hastinapur after getting badly wounded in the war, he is welcomed with rumors and bad words. People in the city shut their doors in fear of Yuyutsu. They perceive him as a sorcerer, a giant, a child-eater and a vulture. They look at him as some kind of supernatural spirit or ghost. There is a contempt shown towards him even by a dying Kaurava soldier. He refuses to drink water from Yuyutsu as Yuyutsu only killed him in the war. Yuyutsu is reduced to some ‘strange, unwanted’ phenomena. Interestingly he fought with lot of zeal and commitment. Yet he is dishonored. He is victimized because he did not follow the traditional path. He went to the Pandava camp and fought against his own father and brothers. He switches over to the Pandavas because he sincerely perceives them as the warriors fighting for upholding dharma (principles). He opposes Duryodhana for his behavior, which even the great people like Bhishma or Dronacharya could not do. In a way, Yuyutsu, by revolting against Duryodhana shows that Duryodhana’s approach and ideology are wrong. He shows the courage to oppose adharma. He feels that his birth in the Kaurava clan does not necessarily ensure his support to their evil actions but he can follow dharma by switching over to the Pandava camp.

Yuyutsu seems to rise above the petty individual concerns. He shows unflinching faith towards Krishna. Yet he has to undergo lot of physical and psychological suffering. He is humiliated by even the commonest of common but ever his own mother fails to understand that. She condemns him being a slaughterer of his relatives. She could not offer any solace to his torn mind. She even refuses to relate with him as his mother but refers herself as the mother of ‘his enemies’. Yuyutsu is thus marginalized from all corners of the society. The Kauravas contempt him, the
common people fear him and the Pandavas; probably in frenzy of the victory abandon him. He is paid for his commitment towards the larger cause of humanity. He seems to be frustrated by the dual behavior of the Pandavas and the passivity of Lord Krishna. Yuyutsu played his part in the war to uphold the dharma and truth. He has shown the guts to call spade a spade. However he feels lonely and dejected for a being different.

In the final analysis
whether you uphold truth
or untruth
you are damned.(AY75)

Yuyutsu is paying the price for ‘being too honest’. He supported the Pandavas because they held dharma and truth. They too turn out to be untrue and power-seekers. They do not probably wish people like Yuyutsu, who would remind them of truth and ethics. Hence Yuyutsu is being left out. Is this the fate of Yuyutsu or of anyone who wishes to uphold dharma? Can one not think of ideals transcending the self interests? Has the line between truth and untruth, dharma and adharma and the Kauravas been totally melted? What is the role of God Krishna or he too has deserted Yuyutsu?

Yuyutsu’s fate is sealed as the ‘hung’. He pays for being selfless and true. After war he could not keep his conviction about the Pandavas and especially on Lord Krishna. He feels that he has been cheated or rather he mistook the things. By joining the Pandavas, he has made a mistake as they also deserted the dharma and lost the moral bearing of the life. His support to them was inappropriate and in that process he has lost his own bearings. He feels lost and perplexed and hence could not decide his future route.

The real question is what is Yuyutsu’s mistake? He although tries to be what he felt true and right. Dhritarashtra explains his problem in the end. Yuyutsu is born to the blind parents and therefore he is cursed with that ‘darkness’. Yuyutsu becomes conscious and tries to defy the boundaries. He tries to transcend the very condition of which his existence is made up of. Dhritarashtra seems to understand his dilemma as Yuyutsu tries to transcend the blind conditions of his birth by thinking about the acts based on dharma. By showing faith towards Krishna, he tries to redefine his way of
life only to get frustrated of not attending the highest goal. Yuyutsu tries to defy the darkness around him and goes on searching for the light of truth. That turns out to be his mistake in the final judgment. It almost turns out to be a sin to think for better future, by breaking the barricades of injustice, untruth and self-centeredness. He suffers during the Kaurava rule right from his birth, but paradoxically he suffers even more in the Pandava reign. This is Yuyutsu’s ‘reward’ for being a different humiliation, mental pangs and forsaken. He is dishonored and being followed by a large crowd by children, lames and beggars. Yuyutsu is the example of discourse of self interest and darkness mutilate anyone who tries to defy it. He is also a victim of the ideological formation of the reality especially the concepts of true and false. These are not stable categories and keep on fluctuating. As a result people like Yuyutsu could not find his footings and always keep wondering. He suffers because he tries to be different, untraditional. However the discursive formations are so binding that he could not break them. Contradictorily he is humiliated by the Pandavas, whom he has identified with the truth and dharma. Vidura sums up Yuyutsu’s fate in the following manner

Whenever someone

turns away

from well-worn traditions

and seeks to find

his own path

the ignorant

the cowardly

the simple-minded

always treat him

with contempt. (AY73)

Yuyutsu is misplaced and misfit in the age of darkness and hence he is misunderstood. The worshiper of light has no status in Andha Yug as it is the realm of darkness – physical, natural, mental and spiritual.
In the series of these characters, who carry some kind of ‘darkness’, there are two characters who are exceptional to it – Sanjaya and Vidura. Both are with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari but they are not at the side of the Kauravas. They do not participate in the war yet they are the important components of the Great War, especially during and post war period. Sanjaya plays a crucial role by describing the action of the war to Dhritarashtra by using his visionary powers. He is capable of watching at far and through the obstacles. It is Sanjaya, who reports Gandhari and Dhritarashtra minutely about the war. Sanjay is thus their vision of perceiving the reality of war. Interestingly Sanjay himself has lost the war towards Hastinapur. On the eighteenth day of the battle he is carrying the news of the Kaurava’s final defeat. He does not know how to describe this ill news to the kind and the queen. What he has been doing for the last seventeen days, he finds the same thing extremely incommunicable. The defeat of the Kauravas has suddenly burned his words. He prefers to die rather than living shamelessly. Death can be the only solace in such carnage. Unfortunately he cannot die as he is being ‘blessed’ with the immortal life. This bless has turned into a curse after the war. Sanjaya is condemned to live so that he can ‘tell the truth’. Sanjaya has been telling the truth about the war honestly but how he has lost the sense of truth altogether. After the Great War, thins are so complex that it is difficult to decipher between truth and untruth. Another problem is that he is telling the truth to the blind king and blind queen, who would hardly be able to understand anything as they are ‘visionless’. There is no one probably to understand his truth. The discourse of darkness, self interest has made all the surviving people extremely insensitive and hollow. The very concept of truth has changed and the line between the truth and false is thin. In this context Sanjaya himself is skeptic about the very ideas like truth, morals, ideals and faith. Thus the question remains now that how authentically does Sanjaya speak ‘truth’ in the post war era.

Sanjaya has to lie in spite of anything and everything. He cannot die however he has experienced death closely. He has felt the ‘supreme terror’ when Satyaki’s sword was about to hit him. He was terrorized like any other common man. He faced the terror of death until unknown to him. This feeling must have changed his perspective. He himself is doubtful about his capacity to tell the truth. After this event he probably is not the right person to describe all the happenings to the king and
Gandhari because being the medium or mediator, it is very difficult for him to remain faithful, objective observer. Thus Sanjaya suffers from the self doubts. The ideas like dharma and truth are blurred for him. The skepticism in his mind is coupled with his neutrality or inaction during the war time. He took no side in the war. He was neutral. Even he describes things with extreme objectivity. He does not offer his opinions or assessment about people and situations. Sanjaya’s role seems to be absurd as he is speaking about his concepts of ‘truth’ and ‘dharma’ when darkness engulfs around. Another possibility could that he is shading away from his responsibility by being neutral at the crucial time, a merely passive participant who does not have enough courage to speak the truth. People like Sanjaya, by being neutral seem to help the discourse of self-interest to consolidate. They are the victims of such discourse and also a part of discursive strategy as well.

Sanjaya seems to understand his own helplessness in perceiving the situation and altering it. His neutrality leads him to nowhere. He is not respected or even considered by the both the parties. He just like Yuyutsu swings in between the poles. He has to be a part of ‘action’ by being ‘action less’. He does act or speak probably because he is conscious that he is not going to be heard by anyone seriously. He puts his condition as,

I am Sanjaya
Exiled from the world of action
nailed to the axle
between two great wheels
I am only a small
Useless
Decorative wheel …
My greatest misfortune is
that I can never
stop spinning on that axle. (AY91)

Sanjaya’s tragedy is evident here. He cannot change the situation yet he has to participate in it. He has to communicate eventhough meaningless. A person like him
could only participate by being neutral in this dark scenario. That could be the reason why his visional power is terminated in between. He is trying to show Gandhari the scenes on the battlefield but abruptly his vision is lost. He could see only walls around him. Sanjaya is confined to live forever. He now could not ‘see’ in the past or future. His present on the hand is unbearable. He feels that he has gone blind. The one who was showing the truth to others has turned out to be blind. It also connotes that there is hardly anything is left which is worthy to be seen. Blindness of Sanjaya is not a curse but a boon.

The discourse of darkness has covered the reasonable person like Sanjaya. Hence he could only think but not act. He has lost visionary powers and he is exposed to the limited world. He carries this dissatisfaction of knowing the world in parts and yet lives eternally. The tragedy is that having the moral uprightness and reason, Sanjaya could not do any action. He even could not save Gandhari and Dhritarashtra from burning in the fire. His existence is cursed with inaction. He roams aimlessly after the death of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra. Unlike Yuyutsu or Vidura or even Duryodhana his pains would not end with death. He suffers death-in-life experience. He tries to reach towards some meaningful end but he is unable to get the mental satisfaction. He knows that he will never reach the ‘ashwatha’ tree; a symbol of ‘moksha’, salvation and complete knowledge of truth. Unable to transcend his physical and spiritual limitation, Sanjaya becomes ‘deformed and paralysed’. This deformity is more of mind and spirit than of body. He is condemned to live when the present is intolerable and the future is dubious. He is so much sunk into the cesspool of darkness that he forgets the real purpose of his life. He confesses,

I have slowly forgotten

the meaning

of existence. (AY155)

Sanjaya’s predicament is not about living but ‘existential’. He, being a knowledgeable person could not create meaning out of the chaos of darkness at least for himself. He is the passive victim of the conflicting interest between the big players – the Kaurava and the Pandava. His passivity contributes towards the spread of this darkness. He is filled with so much darkness that he loses his ‘vision’ but has even done with ‘sight’ also.
Vidura is also a victim of this discourse in another sense. He stands for faith and moral uprightness. Vidura is the devout disciple of Krishna. He has seen all the traumatic events in the royal palace before and during the war. He can be seen as taking care of almost everything in Hastinapur including the king Dhritarashtra and Gandhari. He is ‘caretaker’ of both of them. His views are respected by everyone. He is the one who feels threatened when a guard informs him about the vultures flying toward the battlefield. He perceives as a ‘bad omen’. He only makes Dhritarashtra aware about not to violate the code of honour by entering into the war. He argues with Dhritarashtra over his blindness, towards the topic of the war. He openly admits that the Kauravas were ‘weak and vulnerable’ from the beginning of the war and hence their defeat is not a surprise for him. He even warns Gandhari about not blaming Krishna for the war. She rather was supposed to advice Duryodhana. He is constantly present with both of them almost till the end. He thus can be seen as ‘critical’ as well as ‘caretaker’ of the royal couple. He can tell certain things directly to the blind king, which others could not do. He can do this probably because he is ‘uninvolved’ or his ‘interests’ are not selfish. He is a firm-believer in Krishna’s powers to do anything. He looks at Krishna as ‘the Lord’. He seems to believe in the complete surrender to the Lord. He believes that suffering and defeat endure life and blindness. He makes the king aware that ‘imperfect knowledge’ can create fear. He advises Dhritarashtra to undergo the physical and mental suffering. Vidura feels sorry for Gandhari as she has lost faith in Krishna and requests the Lord to forgive her. He believes in Lord Krishna’s powers to even change the course of all the celestial stars. Therefore whatever the Lord decides about fate must be accepted with humility. Vidura speaks out his mind on this issue.

Great suffering must be endured with grace. (AY75)

Thus on the one hand Vidura analyses the situation critically and he also speaks out the traditional knowledge. He through his critical remarks tries to assert the Lord Krishna’s supremacy. He equates all powers and controls to Krishna. He demands complete surrender towards the Lord. He shows unflinching faith towards Krishna. However the question can be asked that is Vidura just expressing his faith or
the traditional ideological formations. He is a knowledgeable person having faith in Krishna. Being a knowledgeable person puts him in the privileged position in the Royal family. He is very critical of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari over the issue of the war but he does not seem to be convinced about the things he is criticizing. His critical position could be just a part of the ideological and discursive formations. He is critical about Dhritarashtra and the Kauravas but he hardly ever speaks about the Pandavas unrestrained behavior. His criticism is barren and is an outcome of his inability to stop all the events that are taking place around him. He seems to represent the predicament of the entire ‘knowledgeable class’ who have to be with the rulers in spite of anything. Thus there can be a series of question regarding Vidura’s role in the entire war affair. He does not seem to carry any ‘darkness’ inside him. He is not guilty of committing any crime. Like Sanjaya, he too is blessed with reason but it is useless. He probably knows that his words are not going to be taken seriously. He had prophesied about the Kauravas defeat but it was ignored. Therefore he uses his reason to critically analyse the situation. He advises but most of the time it is too late or out of the place. Hence it is unacknowledged mostly. Vidura therefore chooses to be a philosopher, who can talk objectively but does never indulge in action. He cannot reject or resist the discourse of darkness; hence he probably chooses to be apart of it for his benefit. He is incapable of any radical action and hence he depends on his ‘faith’ towards Krishna. It is quite contradictory that while Krishna himself suffers from the curse in the Andha Yug, how he could save Vidura from damnation. Probably Vidura’s devotion towards Krishna is also a kind of discursive strategy which gives him upper hand over the faithless people like Gandhari and Ashwatthama. He secures his position through his knowledge and faith. He is like those people who show detachment from those things whom they are actually attached. He criticizes, warns, prophesizes, accuses but he could not influence the situation. Probably he too is not very convinced with his actions. He rather prefers to live in the ideological world of his own, thinking that Lord Krishna is all powerful to save everything and him too; although ironically. Vidura thus responds to the discourse of darkness in the different way. He uses it, partially though to create and consolidate his position. He is not capable like Ashwatthama to ruthless act or even like Sanjaya to oppose it through reasons. Vidura accepts the framework of his existence and therefore weaves the ideological formations within it. Ultimately it is
evident that his stand is founded on those things which are more of his own ideological creations.

Alongwith these characters from the royal family, there are some common characters who also register their responses to the discourse of darkness. The old mendicant, a beggar is seen to be prophesying about the Kaurava victory since long. He is getting rewards for that time and again. Gandhari seems to believe his prophecies. The darkness has made Gandhari so much ignorant that she starts believing the false knowledge like prophecies. Even the old mendicant himself wonders about it.

Many false prophecies
broken dreams
half truths
lie scattered …..
It is unfortunate that Gandhari
fondly nurtures each one of them.(AY41)

The old mendicant does not probably believe what he says. Prophecies are more of a means of living for him. Prophecies are unauthenticated knowledge or claims. Dhritarashtra is the king and so he has power. Therefore he goes on telling those things which the ruler would like to hear. He tries to achieve his small interests in the large game of self-interest. He is killed by Ashwatthama mistakenly. His spirit appears and talks about the discourse of darkness. It is suggestive of what the common people cannot say while living in the dark conditions. He perceives the present age ‘a blind and turbulent ocean’. (AY90)

He could feel the ‘diseased atmosphere’ with bandages covering the wounds of soldiers and Gandhari’s eyes. The mendicant’s spirit is responsible for making characters open their real mind. He successfully shows that there is always some kind of contradictions in human mind. Even the great like of Ashwatthama, Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and Vidura live in ‘inbetweeness’. The mendicant is responsible for showing the inner rift of character in the age of darkness. Ultimately a spirit of common beggar can make one conscious about these contradictions. He is the victim of the discourse yet he helps to expose the real faces of the ‘great’ people. The perception of the ‘common man’ is presented by the old mendicant. The old
mendicant is witnessing the degredation of the principles and morality. Finally it is the mendicant who in the form of a hunter kills Lord Krishna. He catches the last words of the Lord. He wishes to pass the Lord’s message to the people. However there is no one to listen to him. This is the worst impact of the discourse of darkness, where the lord’s message goes unheard.

Is there anyone

who will listen to me. (AY161)

The old mendicant shows a kind of complex response to the engulfing darkness. He physically gets surrender to this discourse but ‘spirit’ually he exposes the inner fabric of that discourse structure. He finally remains all alone to witness the darkness overtaking the reality. It underlines the fact that in times of great calamity the great souls perish but the common one survives.

Another perspective of a common man towards the degrading discourse of darkness comes from the guards who are protecting the palace of Dhritarashtra. It is extremely ironical that they are protecting that palace which is deserted. They feel that their life is ‘meaningless’ as they are protecting sick and blind kingdom. They even feel exhausted to live such ‘meaningless’ existence. They witness the fall of great warriors, humiliation of Yuyutsu, animality in Ashwatthama, helpless conditions of Sanjaya and Vidura. They are the onlookers of this great destruction. They expected some change in the condition after the defeat of the Kauravas. Unfortunately the things remain the same even if the ruler has changed. After assessing the overall situation, they conclude that the rule of Dhritarashtra was far better. They feel that at least he knew how to rule though he was blind. They wish to have a strong and firm leader whose orders can be followed. They represent the common man’s stand about the situation. A common man may not be interested much in ideal and philosophical things. He is more concerned about the practicalities of life. The opinions of the guards clearly mention the fact that ideal things proves to be useless in day today practice. They show the ill-impact of the discourse of conflict on the common public. No one thinks about them the time of clashes but ultimately they have to suffer irrationally. The feeling of meaningless is really absurd for such people as they only see their lives getting tormented at somebody else’s hand. The predicament of the common man is because of the rulers or the selfish people. They at the end they
are happy for being survived. The common man always thinks about survival rather than achieving the ideals. They unwillingly become the part of discourse of conflicts of interest. They at a time become subject (through which the discourse gets operated) and also object (on which the discourse gets operated). They have to silently surrender themselves to this domination because there is other option left for them. In the context of discourse of darkness the common man is left with only two options – either to surrender like the old mendicant or to live meaningless life like the guards. Thus the discourse of darkness affects each part of the social structure. Right from the king and the queen till the guard, everyone suffers because of this discourse.

The discourse of darkness, which is a creation of self-centeredness, shows will to dominate and power thrust, engulfs all the characters. All these characters are from the royal family – having cultured, sophisticated and civilized background. Yet they show the utter darkness in the mind and heart. They could not transcend the limits set by the time. They all make futile efforts to achieve and consolidate power, which is never stable. Seeking power and domination are their only aims of life. The concepts of good and bad, truth and untruth, moral and immoral are bent according to the convenience. They cannot be marked distinctively. All characters are full of contradictions and chaos. The powerful lacks seriousness and the reasonable lacks power to act. Everyone is imperfect. Some die prematurely other continue to live meaninglessly forever. Most of them react and not respond to the situation in sporadic, emotional, physical and unreasonable ways, devaluing them to the animal level. The good, sensible people are passive. They show ‘muted acceptance’. They can change things but does not wish to change. There is a tremendous physical, sensual, emotional and spiritual chaos as a product of this discourse. Even those who have initiated this discourse, they have been engulfed by it. Everyone is blind in some or the other form. Human life has lost all its bearings and balances. It moves with a centre as the God itself is cursed. He has to sacrifice himself in the most painful and disgusting manner. Thus the control of dharma is lost. ‘Adharma’ or ‘moral licentiousness’ is pertinent everywhere. It is the loss of the ‘centre’ and ‘things fall down’ automatically. From Dhritarashtra to Krishna everybody is at same level are blind – physically, mentally or spiritually. Everyone carries blindness of vision and virtue. As a result there a rampant violence, destruction and corruption at all levels. Kali Yug is therefore Andha Yug. It is an ideological formation giving false notions of
self-prowess’s and will to dominate. This stage has turned the age into Andha Yug. It is not just a natural or time cycle that has turned it wheel towards a new beginning. Everyone struggling for the power and misusing it for serving self-interests for the power and misusing it for serving self-interests are responsible for this decadence. It is surely man-made act rather than divine or natural one. The fall of entire social system and fabric is an evident of the fact that there were already so gaps developed with it. Though apparently it may look like a grand structure but the internal gaps hollowed it towards destruction. The crucial point is about the burden of responsibility of the situation which should be carried either by the immoral kings and princes like Dhritarashtra or Duryodhana and even by the mother-queen who intentionally supports the bad cause instead of restricting it or even by the Pandavas, who show the unprecedented degradation from following dharma towards the petty self-interests. Due to the lack of such responsibility, the people like Ashwatthama are forced to be insane whereas the people like Yuyutsu who still desire to uphold their conviction in goodness, morality suffer endlessly. The tragic part of the situation is that ‘visionaries’ like Sanjayas and the Viduras, who in spite of knowing the past and the future, could not avoid the decadence of the present or like the all-powerful Lord Krishna who suffers from the curse for being ‘unethical’ even has to sacrifice. It is not only an individual who is responsible for this ‘waste’ but the hidden darkness of selfishness, barbarism, immorality, domination, horrendous, physicality, ignorance, dissonance, vanity, skepticism, irrationality, treacherousness. The discourse of darkness is not just operated through system, institutions and agency but it originates and influences the remotest mind. It divides people in classes and hierarchies. It makes them alter their behavior and makes them do these things which ‘otherwise they will not do. Thus Andha Yug tries to capture the inner working of the discursive practices which are not limited to the individuals or the groups but it covers the entire generation and the social structure in existence of that time. The discourse of darkness would keep on coming out of blind faces and gloomy hearts again and again, as the human being carry such darkness in every birth and at every place. As the old mendicant announces in his prophecy,

Duryodhana shall never

be defeated. (AY60)
Probably he is referring to the darkest side of Duryodhana’s personality. The dark and destructive spirit of Duryodhana cannot be defeated permanently. The darkness of his heart will continue to appear in different forms. In the same manner the ‘discourse of darkness’ will keep reappearing in different forms. Labels may change, individuals could be different, place and times may alter; but the spirit of darkness will make its presence felt. Probably that is why the Lord has to assure Arjuna that he would take rebirth wherever dharma is about to extinguish; that is when the discourse of darkness will reappear.
Counter discourse is generally situated against discourse as a kind of resistance. In majority case such counter discourse is obvious, explicit and direct. Resistance, at the ideological as well as discourse level, is composed more of direct challenging, physical clashes and the revolutionary ousting however counter discourse can work at more subtle levels. It sometimes tries to expose and destabilize the ideological foundations of discursive formations. It exposes the small gaps, margins, ignored reference points to focus on the hidden strategies. Such counter discourse strategies can be seen in working against the overarching discourse. In the present context of *Andha Yug*, there are no discrete, separate discourses but there is one all-encompassing discourse of darkness exists. It is more concerned with the mental or psychic setup of almost everyone. They are not distinguishable classes of good and bad, dominant and dominated, powerful and powerless. Such binaries are impossible to mark in *Andha Yug* as all boundaries are melted or at least blurred. Nothing is permanent and truth is provisional. What is considered as ‘truth’ becomes ‘untruth’ the next day. The overall situation is full of disarray. In this darkness, no one is able to stand out and pronounce the resistance. Hence there is no clearly demarcated, well charted out counter discourse. There are only small, individual attempt to register the protest against this chaos. These meek voices of countering range from Gandhari to Lord Krishna. They announce the plight of those who unfortunately survive the war to see more horrors and melancholy. They speak against all types of orders, structures and existing ideologies in order to dislodge them. Obviously these attempts are extremely vacillating. They are spontaneous and unorganized hence it will be very difficult to call them as ‘strategies’. They moreover express the present plight and looks at creating personal positions against the injustice done to them.

When it comes to speak against the changing nature of the Pandavas and the ‘adharma’ deeds of Krishna, Gandhari leads the protest. She is extremely agitated and even dejected because of the loss of all her sons. She is also on the verge of losing her dear Duryodhana at the end of the war. She blindly accuses the Pandava for enforcing
the war. She is more critical of Krishna because he has forgotten every kind of dharma. When Vidura speaks about faithful surrendering to Krishna; Gandhari contemptuously asks,

Did he

who violated

the code of honour

over and over again

say what? (AY 36)

She directly accuses Krishna for being the non-follower of moral principles. Krishna cannot help anyone genuinely and hence he goes on committing the acts of violations. She feels that during in the Great War and afterwards concepts like dharma, duty and honour have turned out to be mere ‘illusions’; one can play with it but cannot live with it. Morality, honour, selflessness and surrender to Krishna are nothing but just ‘masks’ with which one can entertain oneself. These are all outdated things. Everyone is full of hypocrisy, probably including Krishna. Therefore Gandhari has voluntarily accepted the blindness. She feels that Krishna is nothing but a fraud and opportunist, who ‘changed the code of honour to suit his own ends.’ (AY 38)

Though Gandhari’s expressions owe lot to her mental status, she raises some crucial issues regarding the Godhood, its impact and the present darkness. She seems to be already been aware of these ‘appearances’ of goodness and morality. Gandhari’s blindness can be perceived as a kind of counter discourse against this hypocrisy, in which even Krishna is a party. She has the honesty to analyse the true nature of the Great War, which is devoid of dharma. No one is victorious as there was no honour for dharma from both sides. Her allegations against Krishna put question-marks on his role in the entire warfare. Even if she is upset with rage, the validity of her point remains. If the God himself is ‘corrupt’ and ‘fraud’ then everything would doom to darkness. Gandhari appears to pronounce the exit of God from this world. Contradictorily the war is referred as ‘dharmayudha’ which is full of violations of dharma. Gandhari raises very fundamental issues regarding the morality and unrighteous of the parties in the war and especially the role of divine agent in all this. Gandhari’s arguments raise many doubts regarding the sanctity of the Great War and its actual motives.
Gandhari, after her disillusionment from the Pandavas and especially of Krishna, begins to hate them. She is obsessed with the thought of killing the Pandavas and taking revenge against Krishna. She therefore supports Ashwatthama’s deeds. Although Ashwatthama’s acts are illegal and immoral yet Gandhari supports it. She feels proud of him and desires to see him once. She even asks Sanjaya to transform his body into a ‘bright diamond’, i.e. extremely tough. She thus protects the destructive element. In this way Gandhari tries to build her own resistance through destructing the Pandava clan by means of Ashwatthama. Gandhari creates her small attempt to resist the victorious Pandavas. She is the only one to support Ashwatthama openly. She probably wants the Pandavas to realize that they have mistaken in behavior. She helps Ashwatthama to deprive the Pandavas from enjoying the victory. Gandhari does not stop at resisting the Pandavas. She punishes Lord Krishna by giving curse.

I curse you
and I curse
all your friends and kinsmen
They shall attack and kill each other….
you will return to this forest
only to be killed. (AY 122)

Her curse is devastating as it is applicable not just to Krishna but to the entire the Yadava clan. She justifies her curse by telling Krishna the reasons behind it. She accuses Krishna for not stopping the war and using his ‘divine power for unjust ends’. (AY 122). She has the courage and determination to even curse the God. By giving curse to Krishna, she probably wants to highlight the fact that even the God can err and the humans have to suffer. It was unjust fighting between the Kauravas and the Pandavas as Krishna was backing the Pandavas. Thus Gandhari’s curse is a kind of attack of divine tendency to intervene in human life. In spite of divine intervention adharma has creeped in the war. The crucial point is about the divinity of the divine. The God seems to suffer from the lacunas. Lord Krishna is guilty of some wrongs on the battlefields then he must suffer. That’s why Gandhari curses him to suffer the pangs of watching his dear ones to fight and get killed. This is the beginning of what would be known as ‘Kali Yug’ (age of demon). Gandhari’s allegations are so very
true that Krishna accepts the curse. It highlights the fact that ultimately only victory does not mean anything, the means and the intentions while achieving it do matter. Gandhari’s curse to Krishna is an act of not just retaliation but introspection over the role of the God in the moment of crisis. If the very concept of Godhood suffers from the shortcomings then *Andha Yug* (i.e. the age of darkness) is inevitable as it is. She also challenges the traditional idea that the God is omnipotent and hence cannot be punished. The morally efficacious person can penalize the erroneous God also. Generally it is the other way round. Gandhari’s curse has reversed this belief. It tries to establish a new idea, a kind of new episteme. At the same time it offers a strong message to the rulers like the Pandavas that they maybe victorious and powerful but their victory is not chaste and their power is not unrestrained. Gandhari’s curse therefore must be perceived as the highest point of counter discourse, not just against Krishna but against everyone who contributes in creating the discourse of darkness.

If Gandhari sets the tone for the resistance then Ashwatthama completes the song. Ashwatthama is a peculiar character who supports Duryodhana earnestly. He is deeply moved by the assassination of his father. He firmly believes that his father is killed according to a set plan by the Pandavas. Lord Krishna too is a part of this treachery. He is burning in the rage and he wishes to take revenge. He feels that in such situation no one remains ‘neutral’ like Sanjaya. He pronounces ‘whoever is not with me is against me.’ (*AY* 55) Thus from frustration he moves towards the action. Though his actions are improper, he shows the courage to speak about his problems. He is critical about Yudhishthira especially as his ‘half-truth’ about Ashwatthama has murdered Ashwatthama’s future. He turns in madness and even strangles the old mendicant. He kills him without any reason. He accepts his fault immediately by admitting that he has done the act without any intention. He is completely unaware of this act. He admits that he felt utterly detached about the mendicant’s murder. He actually is not conscious of the murder but he wanted to end the prophecies of the mendicant. He puts it clear words

\[\text{I wanted to annihilate}\]

\[\text{The future which has been}\]

\[\text{prophesied. (AY 63)}\]
Ashwatthama’s acts look abnormal and eccentric. He seems to suffer physically and emotionally. He feels deceived by the Pandavas. His insanity and destructiveness therefore could be seen as the counter strategies to resist the Pandava’s wrong acts. One cannot face the unethical ways of the Pandava with sanity and morality. He even asks, “Have the Pandavas left us any other options?” His insanity is a kind of protection and also the way of expressing his innermost unrest. He probably wants to show that ‘being mad’ is the only way to cope up with the situation. His stand against the mendicant’s prophecies is also to indicate the fearful, unknown future. His all earlier prophecies proved to be wrong. Hence Ashwatthama does not want him to continue with that false business. His strangling of the mendicant is a symbolic act of closing all the discussion regarding future as there is no future left under the Pandavas’ rule. It is also an attempt to get rid of the half-knowledge. His attempts may seem absurd but there is no chance of perceiving with reality except this. Thus Ashwatthama makes a brave effort to adjust with the meaningless reality. His obsession with ‘killing’ anyone, the transformation into a wild beast and abnormal behavior are all indications to challenge and subvert the existing conditions. These things indicate abnormal behaviour on anyone’s part however one cannot remain normal in the conditions like this. Hence his response is an outcome of this ever decreasing discourse. Ashwatthama directly challenges the ways of the Pandavas through his reactions and abnormal thinking. By killing the mendicant, he dismisses any possibility of the future. He is more concerned about ‘existence’. The Pandavas, in whose rule people can think only about existence and not a meaningful life.

Ashwatthama decides to adjust with the darkness outside with his own way and he acts accordingly. He develops his own logic to kill the Pandavas as ‘they are vile’. (AY 80) He is not at all sorry for that. When he is accused of spreading adharma by Kritavarma, he questions the strange expectation from him in regard to follow dharma. When everyone else, including all the great souls, are violating and insulting principles of dharma, it is absurdity to expect a person like Ashwatthama to follow it. He is not at all burdened to follow dharma. Ashwatthama is very clear about his behavior and action. If there is a rampant spread of immorality and unethical acts by the rulers, then why should a common person think about it? Thus for Ashwatthama the means or ways are no more important but he wants to achieve the end, and that is
the complete annihilation of the Pandavas. His confused mind gets the idea to retaliate
the Pandavas when he witnesses the fowl attacking the sleeping crow. He gets the
idea to do the same by attacking the Pandavas at the midnight. This strategy may
again be unethical but Ashwatthama is not much concerned about it. He is so insane
with revenge that he even decides not to spare Uttara’s womb. He thus determines to
wipe out the entire Pandava clan. He shows the resistance through hatred. He feels
that this is the only way to revenge and he has ‘found the truth’. (AY 87) The apex
point of his revenge-counter discourse reaches when he uses Brahmastra to destroy
the earth. He wants to wipe out all the possibilities of goodness, creativity, morality
and enlightenment. Probably these things are outdated in the present Andha Yug. He
feels that no one is born beast or murderer; it is the policy of the rulers that makes one
to behave like this.

I was not born a beast.

Yudhishthira made me one. (AY 116)

Ashwatthama’s comment is a kind of slap to all those who are responsible for
the discourse of darkness. People like Ashwatthama are not born but made out of the
social conditions. Probably this is the reason why he is blessed by Shiva. He aims at
killing those Pandavas who have violated the dharma of war. Shiva’s blessing to
Ashwatthama is a kind of acknowledgement to his resistance. When things grow out
of proportion, they must be cut to size. Ashwatthama’s counter discourse presents a
direct challenge to the Pandavas. He does not allow them to enjoy their victory. His
approach underlines the fact that violence and destruction led to more violence and
destruction.

Ashwatthama’s counter discourse is vividly seen through his challenge to
Krishna’s role in the Great War. He accuses Krishna as the main force behind the
Pandavas frenzy. Therefore the total annihilation of the Pandavas is actually a part of
his resistance to Krishna’s ideology of war and violence.

But Krishna’s
insatiable hunger for war
will not be satisfied
till all the Pandavas
have been killed. (AY 113)

He believes that Krishna is the real culprit behind this carnage. He therefore uses Brahamastra which no Pandava can defend. Thus his resistance rises to the level of fighting the Lord. He continues to blame Krishna even after the Lord’s tragic end. He feels that Krishna is too ‘dreamy’ as he tried for something new. For Ashwatthama the ‘dreamy’ and the ‘intoxicated’ (insane) are the same. Thus he compares himself with Krishna. Krishna killed his own people, i.e. the Yadavas as Ashwatthama killed the Pandavas during the night. In strange way though, both of them have used the violence and destruction as the means to achieve their end. How the Ashwatthama can alone be blamed for the ‘inhuman’ violence even when the God does the same? Ashwatthama places him at the higher degree than Krishna as he killed his ‘enemies’ while Krishna slaughtered his own ‘kinsmen’. Thus Ashwatthama by equating himself with the God tries to justify his action of resistance. Ashwatthama of course has to pay a heavy price for this counter discourse. He has been deprived of the talismanic gem by Krishna and condemned to live eternally. Others are at least reached the end of pain through death; however Ashwatthama continues to suffer till Krishna’s death. At the end of Ashwatthama realizes the charge in his immortal yet cursed life.

I know feel relief
from past suffering
is this experience
the beginning of faith? (AY 152)

He is getting a new vision of life – ‘gain through pain’. Ashwatthama seems to be lucky enough to get this experience which even the ‘Dharmaraj’ Yudhishthira or other Pandavas do not have. Even the Lord Krishna has to sacrifice himself for his deeds. It indirectly stamps Ashwatthama’s counter discourse as just. He can be called as a product of ideological and discursive formations of the contemporary socio-political structures. As a result of this Ashwatthama can be put in higher ranks than the Pandavas and even Krishna. He is the only one who survives and yet satisfied. His resistance is therefore justifiable. Thus he is a complex character who manages to challenge, subvert and yet manage to survive the discourse of darkness. He therefore is the front-most person to lead the counter-discourse platoon.
Gandhari and Ashwatthama form the larger part of the counter discourse space in the play. Along with them there are smaller instances of resistance, either way of creating doubts about the existing rulers, ideologies and institutions. Yuyutsu has shown the rebellious spirit since the beginning. He switched over to the Pandava camp as he felt that they are fighting for the principles of dharma. He has the courage to stand by the right and oppose the power centers like Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana. He is in this sense greater than the Pandavas, who could not rise above the petty self-interests. Yuyutsu had the mantle to do it and face the consequences for it. He does all the revolutionary things because he has the unshaking faith in Krishna and his righteousness. Yuyutsu faces lot of humiliation from the common people as well as from his mother, Gandhari. Even in this testing time, his faith on Krishna never gets diluted. However at the end he starts doubting his own faith. He feels that though Krishna has achieved victory in the Great War but will he save Yuyutsu from damnation? He cannot sustain his conviction regarding Krishna and his morality. He kept his conviction throughout the period of the war. However after the war he finds his foundation shaking. He feels that the concept of ‘truth’ and ‘untruth’ are so obfuscated. It hardly matters on which side you stand, the damnation is inevitable. Therefore he feels that he has spun ‘on the wrong axle and have lost his bearings’. It seems to indicate the utter loss of faith on Krishna. There is an understatement showing that faith is an outdated thing in the post war world as Krishna lost his ability to save people from the damnation. This could be the reason that Yuyutsu attempts to commit suicide in the end. As Ashwatthama turns into an insane wild beast, Yuyutsu is left with no other option but to surrender in Yudhishthira’s kingdom. His suicide attempt is a kind of counter strategy to exhibit his disgruntle about the overall situation. He is forced to suicide as no one understands him and Krishna has deserted him in between. He feels that life is a kind of punishment and death is the only solace. Yudhishthira’s reign and Krishna’s blessings fail to protect people like Yuyutsu. This event itself shows the degradation of the situation. Yuyutsu feels kingdom of death much better than kingdom of Pandavas. Though he is saved, he cannot recover his lost faith.

Faith is a worn-out coin ....

I discovered it was false

and counterfeit
a long time ago
and threw it away
on a garbage heap. (AY 153)

He criticizes Krishna as ‘imposter’ and ‘impotent’ as he ran away from his responsibilities and could not save Parikshit. Yuyutsu feels that the death of Krishna is a kind of ‘drama’ to enslave us. His death is another way to capture people’s emotions and mind. Krishna’s death appears to be so trivial. Yuyutsu indication about Krishna’s death is to be considered as a part of his larger discourse. He wants to suggest that even Krishna is political while leaving this world as he is forced to enact this ‘death drama’ to keep his position intact in the world. Yuyutsu shows the darker side of faith. He indicates that when a man becomes faithless he starts thinking about his existence. He feels that the fate of human being is not linked with death of Krishna but ‘to the future of mankind’. (AY 155) His counter discourse strategy basically subverts the traditional and a kind of ‘logo centric’ attitude. Once you are free from this attitude, life offers you many possibilities. Yuyutsu realizes this and hence gets another chance to live his life.

In the line of Yuyutsu, Balram, Krishna’s elder brother, in his brief appearance criticizes Krishna for being unfair in the war. He feels that the Pandavas breached the code of war and honour. Their victory is not spotless but mudded with ‘adharma’. The Pandavas can dare to do this only because of the backing of Krishna. He comments on Krishna’s nature.

You have always been
an unprincipled rouge! (AY 79)

Balaram is extremely critical of Krishna’s behaviour right from his childhood days. It seems that Krishna never followed the way of principles and never honoured the code. He is the ‘rouge’, a dishonest and mischievous person, who always takes pride to break the rules. Balrama along with his criticism of Krishna’s behavior warns him that the Pandavas will be destroyed by adharma. The Pandavas always think about the result or the outcome and hardly respect the means to achieve the result. Hence they cannot enjoy the fruits of their victory. Their hands are dirty with the immoral stink. Their victory is therefore not permanent. Balrama’s criticism shows the basic shortcoming in the Pandavas. They are brave but they are not morally
upright. Hence they could not enjoy their victory over the Kauravas. These strong
remarks by Balrama again highlight the immorality of the Pandavas and Krishna’s
unconditional support to their actions. The Pandavas are ultimately human being and
hence they are expected to fall prey to the worldly temptations. However Krishna
appears to be blind towards the Pandavas’ deeds, and shows the possibility that even
the God can be ‘unprincipled’. It can be viewed as Krishna’s own desire for power
and domination which is getting fulfilled by the Pandavas. He probably asserts his
authority by showing that wherever he is the victory tags along. Thus Balrama’s brief
appearance leads towards problematic regarding Krishna’s ‘indirect’ involvement and
responsibility in creating the discourse of interest and domination. Persons like
Yuyutsu, Ashwatthama and Balrama adopt the counter strategy to resist by
questioning the traditional way of thinking. Traditionally Krishna is considered as the
‘Purnapurush’ (the perfect being), who is the model for others to follow. His actions
are to be repeated and his thoughts are to be cherished. However these characters
question the very idea of ‘ideal’ or ‘perfect’ behavior of Krishna. Though Krishna is
divine, he is human incarnation of divine spirit, a kind of avatar. Though divine,
probably such divine incarnation suffer from the human follies. Such personalities do
suffer from moral and ethical shortcomings. There is nothing called as ‘perfect’ at all
times. Things may change according to the context. In the context of the war
Krishna’s too have suffered from follies and mistake of judgment. He too therefore
has to undergo the punishment and sufferings. Yuyutsu in his final realization
expresses the idea that the God may not always be the ‘saviour’ of human being.
Human beings cannot rely on Him for moksha or salvation. The idea of complete
dependence on the God is challenged and subverted through the questioning spirits
like Yuyutsu. It is not the God but the good deeds that can only save you in the final
analysis. This idea itself is a kind of ‘new’ knowledge about the God-human
relationship. It is not just the dependency of man on the God is important but his own
‘bearings and balances’ of life are equally important. If this is done, one can survive
even if the ‘centre’ is lost or defunct.

Certain characters show direct challenge – ideologically as well as the through
actions whereas some characters indicate the degradation through their conditions.
Sanjaya is immortal and that is his punishment. He does not wish to live in the present
context. The present context is not suitable for any sensible and sensitive person to
live happily. Sanjaya suffers mentally and spiritually as he is not able to comprehend the things with his rationality. He suffers for the lacunas like neutrality, inaction, useless vision and immorality. These things may be considered as ‘good’ in other situation but in the context of the current discourse it shows Sanjaya’s ‘helplessness’. His death wish is a kind solution he finds to solve his problem. A visionary, rational being like Sanjaya wishes to die is itself a counter strategy to this discourse. He loses his divine vision and feels confined in the four walls. He feels that he too is ‘blind’ like others. At the end he realizes

All my life I upheld my faith
in the absolute Truth
I refused to act
Slowly I lost my divine vision. (AY 150)

Sanjaya suffers from a different dilemma. Was he blind earlier when he used to believe in absolute truth or is he blind slowly after this epiphany? Was he blind mentally or spiritually when he used to believe in something absolute? Has he lost the divine vision now but gained the enlightenment about the world? Is he more knowledgeable now? He is physically ‘deformed and paralysed.’ (AY 160) but he seems to be more aware. He does not carry the same blind faith about the Truth and the God’s existence. Sanjaya’s enlightenment can be seen as a part of awareness and resistance. He will continue to live as he suffers from the curse of immortality. However he will not be mentally and spiritually blind to believe that someone like Krishna would put the things back to normalcy. He may have lost vision physically but mentally he is much assured. He gains ‘enlightenment through blindness’. The stage of any counter discursive formation is considered to be the mental awareness. Sanjaya has achieved it. He is unlike Ashwatthama – direct and eccentric or even like Yuyutsu – sensitive and compromising. He is rational, meditative and composed. Hence he is not expected to behave like others. However the change in his mindset and attitude is a step towards a ‘new’ thinking. He has come out of the confines of the traditional mindset and looks at things with new perception.

Alongside Sanjaya there is another ‘transforming soul’, i.e. Vidura. Vidura as seen earlier is very much a part of the discursive strategies or at least witness of it as he is very close to the power center. In addition he has created his unique position
through his unquestioned faith towards Krishna. He is the one who is aware of the present while all others seem to be ‘intoxicated’ or ‘humiliated’. He believes that Krishna has the ultimate capacity to restore everything. Contradictorily he starts generating doubts about his own conviction. He feels that there is mere chaos where it is difficult to decide ‘where righteousness ends and falsehood begins’ (AY 77) He finds himself in utter confusion that he asks the question,

Are you there, O Lord?

Are you there? (AY 77)

His conviction about the God’s existence is dislodged. He accepts ‘my voice is full of doubt’. Krishna is no more a supporter and guide for him in this darkness. It is faith only cannot save him. He goes on to describe his Lord as ‘a useless axle’ (AY 92) His faith and the very existence of God seem worn – out things. At one point of time he announces that he cannot see anything (AY 103) He perceives that the time has come to end everything good and morally upright. Vidura is hopeless because he is faithless. The utter dejection around him makes him question the very existence of the divine spirit. He is full of doubts and dilemmas. The peace around is atrocious. He feels some curse in that. He asks desperately about the peaceful situation to Krishna as he is unable to understand the exact meaning of the silence around him.

The ‘peace’ is not a positive sign but it is more of a ‘horrible silence’. The greater problem is to whom the responsibility of this condition invariably goes. Anything that is pious, honest and faithful does not seem to fit in the discourse of self-interest and domination. Vidura’s plight again directs the question, “Is there God in this Andha Yug? If He is there, then why is the situation like this? Vidura’s dilemma and doubts again destabilize the very ideological foundation about the Godhood and orderly world. They seem to be more of bubbles of air creating only ‘sound and fury, signifying nothing’ in the wasteland. These seemingly unrecognized characters thus become the agent of resistance either through direct challenge or by questioning.

Most of the characters who pose challenge are either from the Kaurava camp or those remained neutral in the war. Interestingly there is one character that is from the Pandava camp and he is the ruler, still he shows counter discursive tendencies. Yudhishthira, who becomes as the king of Hastinapur after the Great War. His brothers are busy in celebrating their victory along with the soldiers. He alone is in
meditative mood over the issue of victory and war. He accepts that the war was full of
treachery, bloodshed and slaughter. In a way he accepts that their victory is tarnished
because of all this. He feels that those for which he fought for are ‘ignorant, foolish,
insolent or weary’.

With the imposition of war he feels that he has inherited the
tradition of ‘blindness and stupidity’ He is absolutely confused and scary about the
coming times. Yudhishthira shows great consciousness towards the approaching
darkness and sin by overcoming the individual blindness, which his brothers could not
able to do. He accepts that his brothers are ‘insolent’ or ‘weary’. Yudhishthira shows
the self-realization about the follies of his brother. He is critical about their behavior.
He even appreciates Yuyutsu’s courage and feels sorry for his sad fate. He is even
aware about the feeling of disgruntle about his reign amongst almost all people. He
feels more helpless after knowing the prophecy of Krishna’s assassination. He is
terrified with the idea of witnessing Krishna’s death. He could not even bare this idea
and hence wishes to quit Hastinapur. He wishes to desert everything and leaves for
the Himalaya. There only he wishes to perish, probably hoping to get some peace in
the God’s abode. Yudhishthira is thinking of leaving everything after achieving it.
Victory could not offer him the inner peace. Rather he feels torn and isolated. The
winner stands alone always. No one is ready to share his condition or his fate. He is
the victim of discourse created by victory. It is a wrong notion that victory offers you
everything. Being victorious and becoming ruler do not necessarily guarantee one the
peace and comfort. Yudhishthira is going against the traditional notion of war and
peace. War may not lead to peace; it may lead towards more grave consequences. He
looks at such victory, which is an outcome of immorality and fraud. It is worthless to
carry burden of such victory. It is going to damn one’s spirit gradually. Therefore he
admits

And what is
victory then?
Is that not also
a long and slow act
of suicide. (AY 143)

Yudhishthira’s comments are directed not only about the futility of war but on
entire human degradation. He comments on the human waste both materialistic and
emotional during the war. The victory which is based on the bleeding bodies cannot
give mental satisfaction for a long time. Yudhishthira therefore wants to go away
from this suicidal darkness of victory and rule achieved through it. He counters his
own rule; classification, hierarchies and ideology. He thus proves different from the
Pandavas. He is conscious of the present and more about dark future. He is conscious
about what they have done during the wartime and he therefore could not show any
excitement for such victory. He thus formulates counter tendencies to their own
practices and ideologies. He presents a more rational, sensitive and moderate face of
the ruler.

Yudhishthira, who is a ruler, is not satisfied with his rule and the nature of
their victory. On the other hand, the common people like the old mendicant and the
guards also show their unhappiness about the forced transformation after the war. The
old mendicant is a different personality – he is a beggar and also a prophetic person.
He has prophesized about Duryodhana’s victory earlier. It proves to be wrong.
Gandhari only believes in him. He is doubtful about such prophecies himself. He feels
that future is unpredictable. He feels that ‘will of man’ decides his future. Man with
action is better than the one who refuses to act. He targets ‘actionless intelligence’.
Even this is what Krishna says to Arjuna during the war. The mendicant too
announces that man can carve out his future through actions.

Truth resides
in the acts
we perform.
What man does
at each moment
becomes his future
for ages and ages. (AY 58)

The old mendicant disapproves the traditional way of prophesying the future.
He also challenges the idea that human future is ‘predestined’. Man’s actions can only
decide his future and not the God sitting above. He here seems to challenge the half-
knowledge of prophecies and the fatalistic view of life. He gives lot of importance to
actions and attitudes that decide human future. He prophesizes, “Duryodhana shall
never be defeated’. It is rather a warning by this seemingly common man. He does not just refer to Duryodhana as a man but as a ‘spirit’. He warns about the ‘spirit of darkness’ that will be created in the coming age. He speaks truth about the age by calling it a blind ocean. He is killed by Ashwatthama. It is also a symbolic act of killing the source of truth. Yet he reappears as a specter, a spirit. He was not allowed to speak truth when he was alive. However he speaks the truth as a spirit. The old mendicant stands for that element in the society which has the capacity to understand and speak the truth, but he is always dominated. Therefore his entry as a spirit shows his urge to warn about the darkness. By exposing the inner contradictions of the characters, the mendicant shows that there are no permanent positions of truth. He is able to showcase that even the great people like Ashwatthama, Yuyutsu and Vidura suffer from shortcomings. The mendicant is thus able to show the harsh reality of existence.

The old mendicant’s resistance is visible through his act as a hunter of killing Lord Krishna. Krishna is suffering from the Gandhari’s curse. He is undergoing the physical, mental and spiritual pains. There is no meaning left in his life as the Pandavas and the Yadavas have deserted him. By killing Krishna, the old mendicant releases him from all types of pains. Krishna believes ‘death is only a transition from one state to another.’ (AY 188) In spite of being a controller of the world, Krishna needs someone like the old mendicant to shift him from one stage (human incarnation) to another (divinity). Thus the Lord gets back to heaven because of the old mendicant. The question is who has saved whom? The spirit of a beggar, a shadow presence of the common man has saved the omnipotent Krishna. This is a subversion of the traditional roles of God – disciple. Traditionally the God is considered as ‘the saviour’ but here the common man becomes instrumental in saving the God from painful existence. The old mendicant thus presents the untraditional and also resisting dimension of a common man’s way of looking at the darkest abyss of the discourse of interest and domination.

The two guards who safeguard the palace are the silent witness to all the events. Their comments help to understand another dimension of the event. Their overall feeling about their existence is ‘meaningless’. They feel the entire war and post-war conditions as absurd, where no one is happy and satisfied. Krishna, the Lord will be responsible to save the warriors and members of the Royal family, according
to them. The real problem which they face is about their future. They are not participants of the war. They are common guards. They face the question, ‘who shall take responsibility for us?’ (AY 43) They live very simple life yet they are worried about their present and the future. They have not suffered like Ashwatthama, Sanjaya and Yuyutsu, yet they suffer during this age of darkness. They therefore feel more uncomfortable about their existence as they do not see anyone to think about their existence as they do not see anyone to think about their problems. They feel that the rulers and other people from the Royal family are so ‘self-centered’ that they cannot help them even Krishna, the Supreme God is unable to protect them. No one has time to look at these common, powerless slaves and they are condemned to suffer without any fault of theirs. Their questioning minds show the utter chaos where no one is able to protect them. The rulers, the Pandavas have lost all the reasons. Krishna is cursed. The intellectuals are actionless, whereas active people lack sense. Whenever there is a struggle for power and clashes of interests, the common man suffers. Both dharma and dharmayudha (the great battle) do not seem to consider the common man. Dharma and dharmayudha are nothing but the ideological formations through which discourses are enforced on the common people. The guards, though indirectly makes us aware of their condition as they are the victim of the discourse. By speaking about it they at least create awareness of a large section of the society who suffer with any reason and live meaningless life towards a tormented future.

The Guards do not find any change in their lives after the change of guards in the rule. Rather they feel that the earlier rule and ruler were better. The new ruler, Yudhishtira is ‘a saint and a philosopher’ but he does not know people and how to rule. The great people may not always be effective administrators. Hence there is no change is the common man’s life. ‘The sense of absurdity’ has filled the lives of these people. It is definately a tragedy of a common man when the Lord is present. Moreover their life has rather degraded. The great Pandavas have failed to rule in the expected way. These comments by the guards speak about the overall dissatisfaction against the Pandava rule in general. The guards through their perceptive comments make one realize the conditions of darkness. Their direct comments on the future of the mankind come as a shock. While referring to Krishna’s exit, they say

hall soon

abandon them
They are speaking about the earth with the God. They God probably cannot leave in such conditions. The earth will be deserted by the God, as there is no faith left in it. Godless earth is the future as man has already deserted faith about the God. This probably is the most sad and sarcastic comment on the overall situation of the life. The human life has to be Godless, faithless. This is a generation of new knowledge about the future, which other great souls probably could not understand. The common creatures can only know the alarming bells of future. Whatever happens, whoever comes and whoever goes, a common man exists at the end, rather he has to exist. The greatest of the whirlpools cannot defeat the resilient spirit of the common man. It is an indication that the great warriors like Arjuna, Bhima, Duryodhana, Yuyutsu lose the track; the great philosopher like Vidura, Sanjaya, Yudhishtira become frustrated but the spirit of common man endures all the problems. The message that is percolated through their behavior is, ‘The great suffers while the common survives.’ It is a kind of sarcastic comment on the discourse of war, which is futile. The common can only escape from this futility. Hence they feel

We are now ….

as we always were! (AY 145)

The guards thus express the overall disgruntle about the royal way of thinking, especially people in the power. It also underlines the fact that the common people ultimately has the capacity to survive any situation, which even the great warriors, saints and philosopher may not always able to do.

Majority characters in the play show their physical, mental, ideological and even spiritual resistance towards the overall degrading situation. Surprisingly though Lord Krishna too shows the awareness towards this engulfing darkness. Krishna’s counter tendencies become extremely crucial especially on the background of his harsh criticism by Ashwatthama, Gandhari and Yuyutsu. Krishna seems extremely passive through the play till Gandhari curses him with the tragic end. He, being the divine incarnation accepts the curse without any protest. He feels that he is already cursed as there is rampant corruption and fraud spread all over. He is responsible for
good as well as bad as he is responsible for everything. During the great war, the God suffers with every scar and every wound. He is present in Yuyutsu’s wounds and Ashwatthama’s suffering. Everybody is so busy in their own pains and that hardly anyone realizes Krishna’s plight. He is divine hence the magnanimity of his pains is also voluminous. He probably is the worst sufferer in the war time. He is responsible for everything but unable to do justice to it. Gandhari’s curse is a kind of blessing for it. It is not just retribution but a chance to save him through death. This is untraditional and surprising as the God is cursed and he is happy about it. The play presents a total different perspective about looking at the God’s image and its impact. God is more of an ‘organizing principle’ which helps to blind everything and everyone. He is taken the responsibility for all the acts of the people – good or bad. Hence the people; of all types are free to behave in their own respective ways; even ‘immoral’ and violent. Ultimately people forget the control of the God and seem to out grown of his control. Therefore there is no other option for the God but to sacrifice himself. This situation presents a kind of ideological shift where the God has to sacrifice himself in the ‘dark’ world, where human beings have lost the faith and reason. That is probably the reason why the God accepts the Gandhari’s curse and allows the old mendicant to kill him in the form of a hunter.

At the time of his departure, the Lord only speaks to the hunter, i.e. the old mendicant. Death is the end of anything but just a transition. Krishna is going back to his heavenly abode. It will be his transformation. More importantly it will be a transition for common people. Krishna was carrying their entire responsibility till now. In his absence, they need to ‘assume these burdens’. People of Kali Yug need to adjust with this unprecedented situation, the Godless world. He is sure that the divinity will be gradually ‘degraded, mutilated or destroyed’. The people will be baseless and they would not be able to visualize the future with their faiths in Krishna’s presence. Lord advises such faithful people to create something new.

…. find their way

past every difficulty.

They shall build a new life

on the ruins of the old. (AY 159)
Lord Krishna is suggesting a new order through old worn-out things. It should be ‘construction out of the destruction’. The ruins suggest the massacre caused due to the war. One can build a new order through these obliterations. Being faithless is a good mental condition as one is free to think liberally. One can be creative in approaching the world. Krishna now wants the people to act on their own. He assures that he will be always present with people, who are,

Honourable in their conduct

imaginative in their actions

fearless

courageous

affectionate

joyful…. (AY 159)

Krishna is suggesting a concept of the new world. Darkness could be the beginning of new awakening. Krishna will be present in such awakening although he will not be initiator of it. Good, virtuous people should develop this idea on their own. Krishna is showing ‘hope in hopeless situation’ for those who are doubtful about the future. He advises to keep our consciousness intact even in the testing situations. A small seed of consciousness should be preserved for more assured future. It will help one to keep away from the half-truths and the great wars. Such awareness about the ‘new world’ can be carved out of the immense darkness. It is this micro consciousness that,

…… saves

the future of mankind

from blind doubt

slavery

and defeat. (AY 162)

Lord Krishna is not speaking of divinity or any super natural intervention. He refers to the creation of new world order through the human efforts. Ultimately human beings have to architect their own world. Mere actionless faith in God is of no use. Divinity can only back those who are conscious about their own
burden. God cannot be burdened by that. The new world is only possible through the
labour and faith. Krishna’s advice about the ‘new order’ is a kind of acceptance of the
failure of the present order. Probably that is the reason why he supports or at least
passive about the destruction during the Great War. He also initiates this process of
the new order by killing the Yadavas with his own hands. The destruction is towards
the positivity and rebuilding. Krishna thus creates the new knowledge (a Godless
world or existence) and also indicates the future new order. His sacrifice is not an act
of running away from the reality but an attempt to organize it in more meaningful
way. His sacrifice should be a hope in the extreme darkness. His last words should be
looked as the counter ideology against the existing way of thinking and actions. He
tries to pave way for a ‘new world’ through destruction, violence and sacrifice. Thus
his sacrifice is the announcement of Andha Yug as well as the possibility of the new
world, which would be more assured and hopeful. The small battles, challenges,
struggles, even consciousness and sacrifices all contribute as a collective counter
discourse towards a new, assured future and order. Andha Yug presents a different
types of counter discourse/s which are constructed through small resistance at micro
levels than ultimately contribute in creating consolidated counter discourse.

Andha Yug is a play which is set in the postmodern times where so many
traditional notions have been deconstructed. If one thinks from the point of view of
correlation between discourse and counter discourse, most of the characters can be
classified in any of the groups. However Krishna is a different character and his
response to the overall situation of darkness opens up new threads even when most of
the other characters suffer from the tremendous darkness in the hearts and of course
about the future. All the characters suffer from the insatiable lust and the loss of
reason and purpose. No one is able to decide the purpose of dharmayudha where the
battle is supposed to be fought out for upholding dharma. Rather no one is sure about
the existence of dharma. The Pandavas have forgotten the reason for fighting the war
after their victory. Yudhishthira, after winning the battle, is unable to decide the exact
outcome of the victory. The line between dharma and adharma is extremely blurred.
Even the wise minds like Sanjaya, Vidura are unable to decide the difference between
‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Traditional ideas like truth, righteousness and war-for-purpose are
problematic in the Andha Yug and hence there is no clear cut distinction amongst
the things. The chaos in the play matches with the instable and transforming socio-
cultural conditions as sponsored by of the postmodern point of view. Krishna is the only exception to this. He is a different characters who is present but at the same time not involved in the action. In the context of the play, he does not appear to help the Pandavas, he accepts Gandhari’s curse though he could have easily avoid that and he saves Ashwatthama before his exit from this world. He does not kill Ashwatthama but makes him suffer by taking out the precious stone from his forehead. He accepts curse but enlightens Gandhari after that. He supports the Pandava earlier but could not save them from the moral death. He uses all the unfair means during the war and yet he stands for *dharma*. Everyone accuses him for the conditions but ultimately surrenders to him for the *moksha*. He is the God, omnipotent but gets killed at the hands of a common hunter. Thus Krishna’s character shows lot of contradictions. He is the only person in the play, and may be in all religions who shows certainty about himself. His self-referentiality is evident through his speech. He says to Gandhari,

If I am life
then, Mother
I am also death. (AY 123)

Krishna appears to be everywhere. He is in life as well as in death. He is in the wars and the wounds. He is in *dharma* and in *adharma* also. He is with the Pandava and the Kaurava. He is the saver and he is the destroyer. He is knowledge and he is darkness. Thus Krishna denies any kind of fixities and permanency of meaning. He is neutral; presents everywhere but belongs to nowhere. His moderateness and non-involvement makes him a special character. He is capable of doing everything but he could not stop the Great War, the personal battles after the Great War, Gandhari’s curse, Ashwatthama’s *brahmastra* or the annihilation of the Yadava clan and moreover he could not stop his own death. He can do all the things but probably does not wish to do. He probably knows that life is a process and everyone has his/her own share in that. Everything has a definite end in life but life as a process continues. Krishna’s neutrality and contradictoriness open new possibilities of interpretation of the play. Krishna, being a God, is supposed to the center or *a logos* however he only shows the decentring qualities by expressing non-conformity and fluidity. Traditionally any God is looked as a ‘source’ of absolute truth and knowledge but Krishna in *Andha Yug* deconstructs that image. He projects the permanency of
undecidability and inbetweenness. The play achieves a greater depth because of the problematization of Krishna’s character. The one, who is looked upon as the answer to all the existential and metaphysical problems, is himself problematized in the grey patch of transformation of Andha Yug.
4.1.3

Andha Yug— a stage or a condition?: The Mahabharata in the Modern age

The Vedic Prayer says, “Tamasoma Jyotirgmay,” meaning ‘lead me from darkness to light.’ However, most of the time darkness prevails over all other things. It is proved time and again that the darkness outside is comparatively less threatening than the darkness inside the human heart since it is—to use a title from Conrad—it is the ‘heart of darkness’ that determines an individual’s outlook. This darkness is mysterious, all engulfing and reaches demonic proportions at times. This darkness in the human heart exists since the primeval time. Human beings evolved from the uncivilised stage towards the civilised establishments by gaining knowledge and societal formations. Moreover human beings developed the cultural edifice to support their growth. As the cultures flourished the human being started showing signs of their mental, emotional growth. In this process human beings started establishing difference from other animals in Nature, due to their progressive inclinations. The secret of human development—both materialistic and spiritual largely rested on the foundation of values, which shaped the individual and social behaviour. Values, which are abstract mostly functions as points of direction to guide the members of any social group always. Cultural principles of any society are related to these values. A cultural group accepted these values as the ultimate, non-debatable, taken-for-granted assumptions. Unfortunately as the human beings progressed, they started playing with these assumptions or what is known as the natural law. Their inherent tendencies like power to rule, dominance and violence made them forget the core values in the culture. Man’s insatiable thirst for power and domination exploited in the wars and massacres. Man, ruled by this inner darkness behaved more like animals or even worse than that. The darkness inside the human heart continued to grow as he became more and more cultured. This simultaneous presence of culture and darkness is the perpetual paradox in the human civilisation. There are crucial junctures in history where this darkness outgrown in proportion, when all values got devastated and the systems became dysfunctional. The great epic Mahabharata is the best example the havoc created in the human life because of this unfathomable darkness. The
Mahabharata, the world’s longest epic depicts a story of almost seven generations which ends in the total destruction of the clan and the end of divinity also. It is a grave tragedy about the loss of life, material gains, systems, relations and values which take years together to formulate a particular cultural set up. The Mahabharata signifies the victory of evil, darkness over the good and innocent. It is therefore a core constituent of the Indian cultural set up. Sister Nivedita’s observations are representative in this regard:

About the Mahabharata: The whole philosophy of India is implicit in this romance, just as it is in common household life. The Mahabharata constitutes, and is intended to constitute, a supreme appeal to the heart and conscience of every generation. For more than the National tradition, it embodies the National morality. In this fact lies the great difference between it and the Greek epics, in which the dominant passion is the conscious quest of ideal beauty. (The Myths and Legends of the Hindus and Buddhists 118-9)

This saga therefore is always a tempting challenge to the creative minds in and out India. Undoubtedly all the Indian forms of art are filled with ingredients of the Mahabharata story over all these years. In spite of this the story continues to attract the postmodern artists like Dharamvir Bharati as it is inexhaustible and provides building blocks for the further construction. Andha Yug is a play written in 1953 has drawn lot of attention because of its creative and powerful statement against the contemporary situation by invoking the characters from the Mahabharata. The play, originally written in Hindi uses the characters and situation from the Mahabharata, especially the events from the last seventeen days of the great battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

The great epic consists of hundreds of characters and events stretching over the eighteen parvas. It is therefore extremely difficult and crucial to choose the events and characters out of this vast panorama of human drama. The selection is a key here as it marks the focus of the adaption. The most important event in the epic is surely the war between the two camps after following a serious of events full of treachery, insults, domination and political hara-kiri. The play begins on the evening of the eighteenth day of the war and ends with the final pilgrimage and death of Lord Krishna. It thus covers the events which have taken place during the seventeen days
of the battle. The play sets at different locations - basically featuring the Dhritarashtra’s palace and Kurushketa, the war field. The setting is suggestive of the two important dimensions of the story i.e. power and violence created out of it. Out of an array of characters from the Mahabharata, only some find place in the adaption. From the Kaurava camp there are Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Ashwatthama, Kritavarma and Kripacharya whereas Yudhishthira, Yuyutsu and Krishna represent the Pandava camp. Vidura, Sanjaya, Vyasa and Balarama are neutral in their approach. The minor characters are Old Mendicant, Guard 1, Guard 2 and Dumb Soldier. Thus only sixteen characters make their appearance on the stage.

These characters and their selection for the adaption serve definite purpose. These characters do exhibit certain tendencies and attributes which form the core part of any human civilisation. These characters are always present in Indian minds because of their association with these attributes. Their nomination for the adaption highlight their significance in the action and the timeless peculiarities attached to their personalities. In these sixteen characters only four characters are not from the royal family, all the remaining twelve characters belong to the high class royal family. That proves the fact that the entire action of the play is centered on the clashing interests within the family of the great warriors and the kings. On the other side the remaining four characters belong to the common class who witness this epic drama and also get affected by that. In short these characters are representative. They represent those behavioural attributes and tendencies which are central to any cultural establishment. The Mahabharata epic carries the elements from the Indian culture.

Indian culture represents one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Indian culture is not easy proposition to lay out. It is an amalgamation of different philosophical currents originating from the reservoirs of Vedas, Upanishadas, Darshanas and Bhagwad Gita. The basic idea that runs through all these seminal texts is regarding the omnipresent God. For Indian mind, the God is not entity which is external or existing somewhere above. God is everywhere for an Indian. It is in the Sun and the Moon, in brooks and in sea, in birds and the stones and moreover it is inside every one of us. This sense is condensed in the terms brahma and atman. The concept of divinity is not external or distant where God is descending from the above or confined to the institutions like the church. God, a free spirit is everywhere and there are no special efforts required to experience. The concept of God is more
domesticated and humanised. The very concept of avataar or incarnation, which is central in Indian spirituality, is an indication of the more emancipated idea of God. Rama, Krishna and Buddha are the more popular earthly avataars than the God in the skies. Divinity is more participative in the daily affairs just like a common human being. These humanised-divine spirits get elated, suffer pains and undergo the punishment. Krishna in Andha Yug is the best example of it. He is revered as the God but at the same he is criticised and accused by the other characters. Gandhari’s allegations to Krishna would serve as an illustration.

Did he

who violated

the code of honour

over and over again

say that? (AY 36)

Such direct attack on the divinity or the divine agent is only an outcome of the doctrine of the domesticated God. At another point she calls him ‘a fraud’. Indian culture celebrates this belief that God or Gods are not distant but very much a part of their routine life. S. Radhakrishan puts this as “This Divine Principle is not at a distance but close to us. God is not a detached spectator or a distant judge of the issue but a friend, sakha who is with us at all times” (A Hindu Way of Life 97). God or his incarnation suffers from the problems of living, even pains of living just like common human beings. He could not escape the physical pains and at the end has to die. Krishna expresses his role in this world while talking to Gandhari in the play.

In this terrible war of eighteen days

I am the only one who dies a million times.

Every time a soldier was struck down

every time a soldier fell to the ground

it was I who was struck down

it was I who was wounded

it was I who fell to the ground….
If I am life
then, Mother
I am also death. (AY 123)

The Vedic philosophy considers life as a circle which needs to be completed before attaining the \textit{moksha}; the ultimate emancipation. A common man could not escape from this life circle which is a mixture of pleasure and pains. Surprisingly Krishna, the divine incarnation has to undergo this circle. He even has to suffer the curse pronounced by Gandhari. At the end Krishna dies in a very abnormal way when a hunter hits his leg with an arrow mistakenly. The death of God in Indian context is not just a theoretical possibility but it is very much a common sense acceptance. Krishna’s death at the end of the play is an indication of the cultural difference that the Indians have as compared to the West.

Another important aspect of Indian culture emphasises the existence of soul and its functions on the body. Soul is the site through which the abstract things like values, morals and principles can be experienced. The highest importance is given to the realization and empowerment of the soul. In \textit{Bhagwad Gita} the focus of the discussion, especially in \textit{Karmayoga} is on the power of soul. It is through soul only we can experience the over soul. While summing up the Indian cultural heritage, Sri Aurobindo clearly demonstrated the three essential factors of Indian culture – the life factor, the mind factor and the soul factor:

The body of a nation consists not only its own landscape, rivers, mountains, rocks, but also the body of its inhabitants; whereas men or animals. The mental part of a nation consists of the individual-mind (mind of an individual), group-mind (mind of an entire group made up of several individuals) and successively the nation-mind (mind of an entire nation made up of several groups of individuals). He admitted the existence of a living soul, sometimes better known as Life-force.\textit{(The Foundations of Indian Culture} 213)

Soul is perceived as the Life –force for the Indians. It offers an opportunity for an individual to understand and respond the world around. It is the energy that makes him perform the tasks as well as to understand abstract things like divinity and spirituality. Therefore keeping one’s soul free from desires, temptations and evil
thoughts is absolutely necessary. If one fails to do that he has to suffer the dire consequences of it. Almost all the characters in the play suffer from this problem. Their souls are corrupted. The darkness inside every character has affected their souls so badly that they are blind, inert or misguided. Characters like Duryodhana, Ashwatthama or Yuyutsu are full of force but they are misdirected, Sanjaya and Vidura are sensible but they are passive and Yudhishthira or Krishna are right but helpless before the reality. The chaos outside in Andha Yug juxtaposed with the darkness inside the souls of all characters. If the soul is perverted then the doom is inevitable for them. Dhritarashtra realises his soul’s anguish after the massacre. ("Today I realised that there is a truth that lies beyond the boundaries of selfhood” [AY 35]) Therefore everyone suffers- winner or losers, king or mendicant, man or woman, powerful or meek, man or god without any exception to it. Andha Yugis not a tragedy of characters only but it is the tragic tale of the characters whose souls are the worst sufferers. Thus the sanctity of the soul depends on the actions one undertakes or what is known as Karma.

Karma is a concept associated with the deeds of human beings. The karma theory demands an individual to perform his duties as prescribed by the religion without expecting anything in return. Bhagwad Gita is the chief source of this doctrine. It recognises the rule of law not only in outward nature, but also in the world of mind and morals. In Rigveda Rta manifests itself equally in nature and in human society. It is believed that we are every moment making our characters and shaping our destinies. The old mendicant refers to this non-permanent nature of human destiny.

The lines of fate
are not carved in stone.
They can be drawn and redrawn
At every moment of time
by the will of man. (AY 41)

Thus the man is the architect of his own destiny through his deeds. It stands against the passivity which is advocated by some religions. They believe that only God’s grace can change the human conditions and not his deeds. Karma theory puts the burden of creating meaning to the doer instead of searching it somewhere outside the world. Krishna in Andha Yugspeaks in the same vein. He including himself looks
at everyone’s deeds in terms of their effects. The Dark Age is described as the time when “all thoughts and deeds of men were corrupt and perverse.” Sanjaya’s neutrality during the difficult times makes him feel ‘deformed and paralyzed’. He is unable to act when he knows about the future. Ashwatthama’s actions lead him towards the animality as he has lost the control of the mind. He is active but not thoughtful. Yuyutsu’s actions take him to the total annihilation of the spirit. His actions could not find the convincing logic. Dhritarashtra and Gandhari could not think about their selves and they meet the doom. Their actions to support Duryodhana are the real cause of their doom. The Pandavas invite their own trouble through their reckless behaviour. They could not keep themselves away from the follies from which the Kauravas suffer. Vidura, the wisest among the lot could not translate his prudence and hence loses his way in the ‘forest’ of desires and violence. Karma theory prescribes not only the acts but the burden of responsibilities that tag along with it. In Andha Yug every character is a sufferer of his or her own action. The Mahabharata epic is full of in-action or misdeeds of the great souls. The burning desire inside the heart has made most of the characters forget their dharma. One just cannot act but he has to carry the burden of these actions. The play is full of actions but all the actions miss the mark. The burden of actions sits so heavy on the life that one is not able to discard or wipe it in spite of all the cleansing acts. Yudhishtthira is Andha Yugis aware of the misdeeds of the Pandavas and suffers from mental agony. He could not therefore feel comfortable as the king of Hastinapur. He plans to go to the heights of the Himalaya, as an act of penance. He wishes to suffer in order to compensate their misdeeds. Vidura questions Yudhishtthira’s thought.

Maharaj

that too would be suicide.

Even the height of those slopes

will not redeem

such a sinful

and cowardly act. (AY 143)
Vidura’s words highlight the Karma philosophy where burden of the human acts remains with them forever. That decides the course of their life and even afterlife. The greatest emphasis has been placed on deeds in Indian culture. The idea of confession does not hold much ground in the Indian context. One is master of an act till it is not done. Once it takes place one has to face the music of it. Thus karma theory serves as the vertebral column of Indian culture.

Another aspect of this theory is described by Radhakrishan.

The law of Karma encourages the sinner that it is never too late to mend. It does not shut the gates of hope against despair and suffering, guilt and peril. It persuades us to adopt a charitable view towards the sinner, for men are more often weak than vicious. (A Hindu Way of Life76)

Krishna only saves Ashwatthama in spite of his violent acts. Probably because he has done the violent deeds but that is not his nature. It is temporary phase in his life. Krishna even warned Dhritarashtra about his deeds earlier but he could not stop himself from doing it.

Dharma is right action. In the Rigveda, rta is the right order of the universe. It stands for both satya or the truth of things as well as the dharma or the law of evolution. Dharma or virtue is conformity with the truth of things; adharma or vice is opposition to it. Moral evil is disharmony with the truth which encompasses and controls the world. It is one of the four supreme ends of life. The supreme traditional Indian moral-spiritual values of 'Swadharma' must be held aloft as the embodiment of moral goodness and spiritual holiness! The Good is and must also be the Holy in all our social life spiritual Holiness and Sanctity. In the play there are numerous instances where the characters are reminded to follow the dharma. People like Krishna, Sanjaya and Vidura have the authority to offer guidance in this regard. Obviously they are considered to be superior to others and expected to guide the others. Unfortunately none of them is able to provide the directives in following dharma as they are confused themselves or involved in adharma. Dharma is no more functional

Knowledge of the self is considered to be the chief goal of life according to Indian spiritual traditions. Aatmadynan is the most sought after thing which can lead to perfection and moksha at the end. Self-knowledge makes an individual capable of spiritual progress and distinguishes him from other creatures. Sri Aurobindo remarks,
“Indian culture is tremendously helpful for the transforming beastly natures into the divine natures of entire Indian race. The discovery of the existence of Self, whether of the individuals or of the entire nation, is essential factor for the development of Indian culture” (“The Ideal of Human Unity” 445). Vidura believes “where there is fear there is imperfect knowledge.” One can reach to this knowledge through pains and sufferings. The knowledge about the ultimate truth, brahmasatya however can be gained through devotion and faith in God.

The basic aspect of traditional Indian culture was the hierarchal system i.e. the ordering of the units which constitute a system of relation to the whole in superior-inferior gradation. The notion of hierarchy was present and all powerful in regulating human conduct in every minute aspect of life. While the ideology of hierarchy institutionalized inequality in every aspect of life. It allocated a secure and definite place to each individual and caste group. The valuation of individuals and groups and the distribution of societal resources were based on status and status was a scripture, though birth into a group was believed to be based on moral merit gathered during the previous birth as implied in the theory of karma and rebirth. According to these gradations the roles and duties for every individual were fixed. Chatur Varna system remained as the backbone of this hierarchy. This system contains four social sections of humans – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. The purity of these four social sects has to be strictly followed in the fear of Varna Sankara. These gradations were easily accepted. Andha Yug presents this hierarchal set up. Most of the characters belong to the first two varnas- i.e. Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, relating to the duty of religion, spirituality and administration. They had power of all kinds with them- political, military and knowledge. Dhritarashtra is the prime example of this structure. He is the king and he wishes his son, Duryodhana to rule the kingdom after him. His urge for the power never gets satisfied. However because he is the king, nobody can challenge his position and desires. Even the wise minds like Sanjaya and Vidura could not rectify him in time. Being a king, Dhritarashtra is all powerful and hence his position remains intact till the end. He is replaced by Yudhishthira after the defeat of Kaurava. He too could be not challenged even though the Pandavas have left behind the morals for which they initiated the great battle. The king is never to be questioned but he is always to be followed. Thus with hierarchies come the normative practices and patterns that govern the human behaviour. Within the royal family also
there are different levels recognized with the positions. One is supposed to be constant in performing the roles given by the hierarchy. If someone questions these practices, he has to suffer badly. Yuyutsu, who is Kaurava by birth, joins the Pandava camp as he feels just to fight with them. This amounts to a kind of challenge to Dhritarashtra’s authority. After his disillusionment in the Pandava camp, he returns to Hastinapur to take refuge with his parents. Surprising he is welcomed with stones and curses. A dying Kaurava soldier refuses to drink the final water from Yuyustu’s hand as he cheated the Kauravas. Even Gandhari condemns him such acts. Till the end Yuyutsu neverrestores to his earlier position as he has breached the position given to by the hierarchy. The powerful positions that come with hierarchies could be used for smothering other people. Ashwatthama is the victim of the half-truth enunciated by Yudhishthira. Yudhishthira misuses his position to speak the false which enrages Ashwatthama throughout the life. Ashwatthama’s expression, “Have the Pandavas left us any other options?” (AY82) is an indicative of the utter misuse of their positions and power given to them by the hierarchy.

Most of the characters in Andha Yugseem to misuse the powers obtained through their high class position including Krishna. (Gandhari accuses him, “You used your divine power for unjust ends.” [AY 122]) Other characters are marginal as they belong to the lower varna in the hierarchy. The guards are the slaves whereas the old mendicant also belongs to the lower strata. His assassination by Ashwatthama is symbolic of the everlasting dominance within hierarchy. Things do not change much for the lower class people even if the rule changes. They continue to suffer. The guards are slave who served Dhritarashtra earlier and then to Yudhishthira. Their condition hardly changes. (“The ruler change... but the conditions remained the same” [AY 132]) The irony of such people is that they have to live but they do not have any choice. The names of these guards are not mentioned as it does not matter much. Every person from the lower class ultimately suffers due to the whims of the powerful people. They are the victims of this imperial politics but the top brass never realises this fact. The hierarchal set up can be seen as the central in the entire play as it is the origin of the battle. The members of the royal family suffer due to the infighting to achieve the top position in the hierarchy. Hierarchy has to be maintained at any cost and therefore the entire play emphasises the order and positions.
Counter elements in play which stand against the cultural points earlier. In the galaxy of the great warriors and the superhuman deities, the old mendicant is shown as the one who knows about the future. He can read something from the ‘unwritten bool of fate.’ Surprisingly though he too could not predict anything in this unending chaos. Though he predicts Duryodhana’s victory he is unsure about it. He calls his predications as ‘false prophecies’ which are believed by Gandhari only. His inability to know future is extremely bleak as the Great War has changed all the equations. His expressions, “… how unpredictable the future is” (AY 58) is the expression of his surrender to the situation. He symbolises visionary powers which are of no use during the war period. The war leads towards galactic ruin. Therefore there is actually no future. Any predication would prove wrong in any way.

The guards who represent the common man in the play are unable to understand the situation. They do not belong to any side. They are unaware about the codes of honour and dharma. They could only see the degrading conditions. Their concerns are more about the existence rather than the quality and values in life. They are faithful but they do not know what will happen to their faith. Whether Krishna will save them or not is the bigger question in their mind. Life in their case is different, as they keep on guarding the desolate palace, “without any meaning without any purpose.” The absurdity in their life is starkly contrasted with the spiritual concerns by other characters. The unsuitability of the living conditions is posed by the guards which highlight the problems of existence. The existential problems of the common man remain unattended when the great souls are busy in analyzing the soul’s agonies. The distance created between the knowledge, religion, spirituality and the common living conditions is more horrified as the layman is unable to understand and the reality is unable to sustain his life.

Though everybody searches for the truth there is no fixed point of it. Truth changes according to the situation. The idea of brahmasatya or the ultimate truth is overarching on the minds of the people but it is difficult to describe in the fixed terms. The adaption seems to voice the same feeing where locating truth is really difficult during the time of crisis. Sanjaya, who is gifted with a special vision, is unable to locate the exact nature of truth in this difficult time.
but today
he experience of our final defeat
has changed the very nature of truth. (AY48)

In the modern context truth is never considered as stable and permanent, but always provisional. There could versions of truth with the fixed framework. In cases of war and disintegration it becomes more complex to fix these terms. War time is the time when different ideals and norms undergo a sea change. These concepts become extremely slippery ground. One does not understand the difference between the good and the evil, real and unreal. Gandhari is agitated with this changing nature of truth and positions.

Morality, honour, selflessness
and surrender to Krishna
are mere disguises
---masks that cover our blindness. (AY 37)

Sanjaya and Vidura are considered to be the wise amongst the lot who can perceive the truth about the reality. However it is extremely difficult for them to sustain their powers in the age of darkness as the very idea of truth has transformed drastically. The inability to comprehend the exact nature of truth makes Sanjaya restless. He demands death than telling the truth about which he is not sure and others would not understand it.

Kill me, Ashwatthama
release me
from the torment
of telling the truth
to the blind. (AY 56)

The problems with people like Sanjaya are two-folded. They cannot exactly locate the nature of truth in the utter chaos. Even he could find the truth, which would digest it. Who has the capacity to listen to truth? Truth is not fixed somewhere outside nut it is very much a part of the living conditions. Man is seeking the truth somewhere
outside however the truth is always created. It originated from the deeds what an individual undertake while living. It is these deeds that make the sense of that truth. Truth is thus very much situated within life. They cannot be separated. Acts are performative and through them only one can reach to truth. There is no possibility of knowing truth by sitting idly. The efforts one takes to act will lead to understand truth. The old mendicant comments on the nature of truth, which resides in the acts that we perform. His actions lead him towards the future. The old mendicant is speaking a postmodern tongue which believes in the inability to chart out the exact nature of truth.

The very idea of dharma has come under the sharp investigation in the modern adaptation of this great epic. Dharma is the guided principle for an individual as well as for the clan. It makes an individual to understand the responsibilities towards the society, nation and religion. Contrastingly most of the characters in Andha Yug appear to forget this idea of dharma or they appropriated it according to their own convenience. The Kauravas have lost the sense of dharma as they are mentally blind for keeping the power intact with them. Dhritarashtra is physically blind king but he misses the grander of the position. For him retaining the power becomes his dharma. He supports all the misdeeds of Duryodhana only to retain his position. He is so insensitive with this thought that he even asks Yuyutsu to be prepared to take up the responsibility of the empire if Yudhishthira quits. He never understands the real meaning of dharma, as he could not think selflessly. Gandhari too behaves in the same manner as she is insane because of the blind love for Duryodhana. She could not bear the fact that Duryodhana has lost the battle. She supports the Kauravas till the last moment. She even curses Krishna by using her divine powers just to revenge his deeds against the Kaurava clan. She too has lost the capacity to decipher the good from the evil. It is only at the end she realises her behaviour which in no way fits in the framework of dharma. It is only at the end she realises her mistake. They die in the forest fire indicating a process of purification when she gets conscious about her swadharma. Ashwatthama is also a misdirected character who could not follow his dharma because of his enrage against the Pandavas. He turns himself into the wild beast that goes on killing everyone brutally. Violence is the only motivation for his life. (“Kill, kill, kill. It is my dharma to kill” [AY 61]) Sanjaya and Vidura also have lost their sense of dharma as they seem to be completely perplexed with the
nature of things. Vidura feels the horrible peace circling him whereas Sanjaya is repenting for life which is meaningless. The very idea of dharma is extremely shaky for both of them. The Pandavas have lost the sense of dharma after they become powerful. Victory has intoxicated them so much that they could not remember their cause to fight out the battle. The greatest tragedy is of Krishna, who in spite of being the originator of dharma could not stop the doom. He suffers from the so many allegations to bend dharma in his favour. Ultimately he has to sacrifice as a kind retribution. Krishna too could not upheld dharma in this Dark Age. Thus the very idea of dharma is fluid and keeps on changing according to person to person. Dharma is supposed to objective, impersonal guiding principles but in Andha Yug the concept of dharma is personal, self centered destructive. The line between dharma and subjective perceptions is very thin. They overlap so much that it is difficult to distinguish. The invocation to the play sets tone for this by mentioning the conditions of the age, where at the end of the great war all thoughts and deeds of men would be corrupt and perverse. Hence there is solace to common people even after the war is over. The adaptation poses certain very serious question regarding the concepts like dharma and truth which destabilizes the foundation of the Indian culture.

The hierarchy creates divide and norms through which different practices and modes of knowledge are established. The members from the lower group are supposed to follow these practices. They are never given any other choice. In case of Andha Yug however, the members from the lower class seem to create counter elements through their behaviour and attitude. The old mendicant is the proper illustration for it. He is the fortune teller and he prophesizes about the Kaurava victory. No one believes his predication except Gandhari. The old mendicant himself is unsure about his predictions but Gandhari agrees to it. Prophecy is a type of unauthentic knowledge and yet Gandhari believes it. The old mendicant is here shown as doing the task of the upper strata in the social structure. Knowledge and its expansion are supposed to be the duty of the upper class but here the old mendicant is using his skills in creating knowledge. This is a kind of reversal of the traditional hierarchies. Even after his assassination at the hands of Ashwatthama, he appears in the form of spirit and remains till the end. His presence throughout the play is representative of a common man’s consciousness about the wholesale degradation of the situation. In the end he takes the form of the hunter, Jara and kills the Lord with
his arrow. Thus he is responsible in bringing the Kali Yug on the earth. He is one who could kill the divine spirit. He reports afterwards about his role in killing the God.

To free my soul
from this spectral world

Krishna said to me:

'It is now time
For Gandhari’s curse
To be fulfilled.
Pick up your bow
And shoot the arrow.’ (AY 156)

The crucial point could be about Krishna’s choice to die at the hands of the old mendicant. This episode suggests that in Kali Yug the things have gone down so much that even the god has to take a common man’s help to obtain Moksha. Krishna’s death has set the old mendicant free from the spectral world and he himself has been freed from the confines of this world. In a strange turn of events the old mendicant emerges the saviour of the God. This seems apparently contradictory. Instead of saved by the God, he only save the God from damnation. Here a man, that too from a lower class is instrumental in taking the god to the other world.

At the end, these hierarchies crumble at the end or at least suffer from inner conflicts. The Pandavas achieve the top post as the ruler. However they lack any credentials to be in the power. Yudhishtira suffers from the internal conflict regarding the war. Though he is a king, he has guilt about the way they have come in the power. The burden of this guilt is so heavy on his mind that he decides to forego the empire and go to the Himalaya for penance. Other Pandavas are blind with the power that they tend to lose the sense of reality. They are either intellectually dull or ignorant to understand the demands of the time. They are more than happy to enjoy the present by ignoring the horrors of the future. The most importantly Krishna, the God, the torchbearer of dharma, the saviour of the mankind, the supreme source of knowledge, the compassionate and the forgiving is suffering from the curse at the hand of Gandhari. He has accepted the curse so his end in near. The degradation of the Pandavas and the suffering of the God are the indications of the crumbling down of
the political, administrative as well as spiritual and religion hierarchies respectively. This is the beginning of the blind age where all the systems and institutions crumble and there are no other viable options to replace it. All hierarchies however solid and gigantic they are, finally crumble down to the dust.

*Andha Yug* is a modern adaptation is many senses. It basically poses questions about the traditional ways of looking at things especially in the times of crisis. Questioning the established is the hallmark of modern and postmodern spirit. The adaption uses the mythological context to put this series of questions about the very basic issues truth, dharma, power-positions, viability of war and heroism. The mythical characters and events in *Andha Yug* are indicative of the fact that this is in no way a heroic tale of the Mahabharata tale. It is a meditative view about the existential issues after the excitement of the war recedes. It is a serious point of view about the human life by using the mythological narrative. The characters from the antiquity allow the pondering on the contemporary situation as they are representative. Every character in the play is of metaphoric value, signifying the beast in the human life. The dark side of revenge and imprudence is exhibited by Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, who fail to respond to the demands of the time. Sanjay and Vidura are the metaphor for the wise minds who feel utterly lost in the weird forest of the Kali Yug. Ashwatthama symbolises the hidden beastlike tendencies inside every human heart which can spring at any time. The Pandavas signifies the degradation from good to bad. The old mendicant represents the common consciousness which suffers yet survives till the last. He is just like Tiresias who witnesses the tremendous degradation in this ‘waste land’. The guards symbolise the predicament of the common man who unnecessarily suffer because of the power politics. The events are carries the metaphoric value. There is a constant presence of vultures that keep flying towards Kurukshetra in search of the dead flesh. The flying vulture is a bad omen as they indicate death and calamity. The presence of vultures indicates the swapping current of massacre which shows the inhuman nature of the wars. In another symbolic event the fight between the crow and the owl, in which the owl kills the crow by treachery is shown. It indicates the thoughtless violence and cunningness inside the human heart that can easily anyone without feeling any pain for that act. Ashwatthama is witness to this ‘dance of war’ and ‘dance of death’ where no moral principles are followed. The owl is merciless in killing the sleeping crow. The more painful outcome of this act is that
Ashwatthama gets the idea of attacking the Pandava camp during the night when everybody would sleep. The animal instincts in human beings are highlighted through this event. More horribly animals fight or kill each other for survival or physical needs. However the human beings fight or assassinate each other just to take revenge or prove the dominance. The violence is thus an unnecessary yet often used means by the human beings. Are we then the worst creatures than animals? The interlude presents three different objects – feathers, bandages and wheels. Feathers indicate which floats on the ocean which is a dark sea, where ‘snake skins’ are floating.

The ‘floating snake skins’ is a powerful symbol for the death and discard. The image carries the contaminated natural atmosphere because of the senseless killing in the battles. Bandages carry the meanings related to the diseases. It shows the mental diseases which convert human beings into beasts. The third symbol comes in the form of wheels which suggest time and its inability to stop. There are three wheels related to Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and Vidura. Yuyutsu’s wheel has lost its own bearing as it is unable to continue his conviction with the Pandavas and Krishna. Sanjaya’s wheel is destined to suffer in between the other two great wheels of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. He could not take anyone’s position. He has to remain neutral. Vidura’s wheel is moving on the single axis i.e. Krishna but it is useless as he is full of doubts about the faith and its use in the changing times. All these symbols are indicative of the difficult time that the play describes. There are no positive or creative symbols except the reference to the seed at the end. Through these symbols the adaption focuses on the destructive, inhuman, diseased, barbaric and dark side of human life, which is the outcome of the sick an perverted human mind, lust for power and will to dominate. Andha Yug presents the predicament of human life in almost all ages due to the power conflicts and the inhuman battles that destroyed whatever good and innocent in the human life. It is not just a destruction of human life but more sadly the annihilation of the ethical values that bind together the social fabric. It can be therefore observed that the essential cultural elements in the Indian culture can be seen in the making of Andha Yug. By turning into metaphors, the characters and events in the play achieve new significance. They do not just refer to the past, distant events but illuminate the present concerns. These mythicized elements influence the formulation of the textualisation as well as contextualisation process.
While thinking about the textualisation process, two aspects draw the attention. The first is about the selection of events and spatio-temporal frame from the epic whereas the second aspect which demands focus is about the characterization. The events in *Andha Yug* largely owe to the traditional epic story. Some characters and events are inserted to farther action. The playwright has made it clear in his note to the directors in the beginning:

> The main plot of the story is well-known; only a few events have been invented—a few characters and a few incidents. Classical aesthetic theories sanction such interpolation. (AY19)

By using the artistic liberty, the adaption has introduced certain modifications, along with foregrounding some of the events. The play covers the events that take place between the eighteenth day of the war and the death of Lord Krishna. The entire action is divided into the five acts with Prologue and Interlude. The Prologue describes the coming of Kaliyug on the basis of *Vishnu Purana*. The Holy Scripture describes the age of darkness as the time when prosperity and dharma shall slowly perish. The one who wears a false mask shall be honoured. The ruler will be greedy and common people shall hide in caves. The most important thing about the Dark Age is that all thoughts and deeds of men were corrupt and perverse. In this chaos only Krishna can save the world from this predicament but Krishna is ‘dispassionate and dispatched’. All other characters fail to read the situation.

> All the others were blind
> self-absorbed
> depressed and confused
> lost in the dark caverns
> of their souls. (AY 26)

This lays down the criteria and general condition for the action in the play. The time of action is suggestive as it depicts the mass destruction during the great battle. The reference of vulture in the beginning is an indication of it. This is the end of the epic battle where so many great warriors like Bhishma and Dronacharya, and thousands of soldiers have lost their lives. The battle has shown its cruel effects through the inhuman insults of human beings. All the characters have lost their ability
to think and those who can are not able to guide others. This is the beginning of an end of Dwaparyug. This time of action shows the transition from one phase to another, from light to darkness, from knowledge to insanity. The battle is already over and the Pandavas are victorious. However they could not enjoy that victory as they suffer from self-centeredness and short sightedness. They could not digest the victory. They are intoxicated after the battle and behave in the most inhuman manner as the rulers. Yudhishthira, the embodiment of truth is confused about his own role. He has already started thinking about renouncing the world or sanyaas. All other characters too respond to this battle in their own ways. Some of them are mad with revenge like Dhitaramsha, Gandhari and Ashwatthama and others are perplexed about the changing times like Sanjaya, Vidura and Yuyutsu. Andha Yug marks the shift from one normal, traditional way of life towards an unsure, chaotic life. The great battle is responsible for this shift where human beings feel lost and weird. The adaption is thus not interested in glorifying the war and heroic deeds of the great warriors but the focus is on this paradigm shift in the living conditions.

War is a romantic idea to entertain but it is harsh reality to face. The consequences of war are so long lasting that the winners and the defeated suffer because of them. The winners of such long drawn battles generally get disoriented and hence they lose their sense of rule. Right from the Mahabharata till the World War II this fact is reinforced. The winners have won in most cases by compromising with the moral and ethical values. Hence there victory is pure. Andha Yug precisely takes up the much debatable issue about the war and the winners. The Pandavas are hardly present in Andha Yug. Throughout the play they are referred and that too in the negative terms. They are mad in celebrating the victory. In this trance they even forget Krishna, who is the chief architect of their victory. Yudhishthira only is aware of the problems faced by them and even he is unable to control them. This is really a shocking representation of the Pandavas as they are mostly projected as the symbol for dharma and bravery. The time after the battle is so testing for every one including the Pandavas who have lost the moral bearing. The play probably highlights the inability of even the great Pandavas to face the consequences once they lose the ethical base. The wars are fought over the ethical issues but after that those very issues are forgotten. By projecting the time after the war the play makes a strong statement against the human follies of losing out the ethical side of the great wars.
The winners may not necessarily good or pious or at least they do not remain so after the victory. Power has its ill effects on those who are otherwise good. The play shows both the Pandavas and the Kauravas at the same level. There is hardly any difference between Duryodhana and Bhima in humiliating others. The time before the last doom is an opportunity to see everyone necked. By selecting the transition period the adaption brings down its focus to the vast desert of inhumanity and darkness after the mirage of the war. Wars have been fascinating the human imagination but the aftermath of it are unimaginable. Heroism, bravery and victory remain labels which fail to render any moral and emotional support to those who proudly celebrate them. *Andha Yug* is by all standards a statement against the beastly element inside the human being which gets wrapped through systems like religion and culture. However the time has proved again and again that this element cannot be eradicated permanently. The action in the play highlights that the deep darkness of desires, lust and power could finally end in the destruction of the all that is innocent, pious and faithful.

It is quite obvious that the adaption has introduced few new scenes to suit the purpose. The two distinguishing scenes in the play come in the form of the fight between the crow and the owl, and the other one in the form of the interlude, which is titled as ‘Feathers, Wheels, and Bandages’. The first fighting scene takes place in somewhere in the forest at the night time. The fight between the owl and the crow is referred as ‘dance of war’ and ‘death of death’. The owl finally manages to kill the crow after attacking it when he is asleep. Though the owl is victorious its victory is based on the unethical practice. It has lost the sense of dharma. The victories which lack moral foundations are bound to create problems. The owl represents the bad omen and its behaviour with the crow high marks the tragedy. Killing someone in sleep is against the laws of *Yuddhashastra*. The owl does not follow this principle. He probably represents the Pandavas who did not follow principles of *Yuddhashastra*. The scene also provides clue to enraged Ashwatthama to kill the Pandavas by using the unethical way just as they did. He witnesses the fighting by hiding in the bushes. He decides to attack the Pandava camp at night when they would be ‘unarmed and asleep’. Ashwatthama feels elated as he has found the ‘truth’ to combat with the Pandavas. The scene has symbolic significance, in which on the one hand the unethical side of the war is focused. The Mahabharata battle is called as
Dharmayuddha (the battle for upholding dharma) even the battle field is referred as Dharmakshetra (an area where the principles of dharma are followed) but the reality is something different than this. There is rampant violation of the Dharmashatra or the guiding principles during the side. The owl has the connection with darkness as it can only see clearly during the night. The darkness associated with the owl is darkness of power and immorality that lurks in every human heart. At another level this scene focuses on the character of Ashwatthama, who is the main most important character in the play. He is enraged with the thought of revenge but he could not able to chart out his strategy to combat the Pandavas. The fighting provides him the clue to attack the Pandava camp during the night which is though unethical is very effective. He feels so ecstatic after finding the way out of this fix. The tremendous darkness inside his heart gets revealed through his response to the scene where he equates the knowledge about violence with the truth. It is also indicative of the fact that unethical ways can be challenged by another type of unethical ways, but in the end the destruction of both is sure. It is a kind of ‘poetic justice’ for the Pandavas. The scene comes at the end of the act three and before the Interlude, which is supposed to work as an interval. Therefore it can be said that the scene reinforces, very forcefully though the enormous beast like qualities inside human beings which springs up whenever gets an opportunity.

The Interlude in a small patch of action, rather that presents a series of speeches by the old mendicant and the spirits of Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and Vidura. The old mendicant describes the condition of around him, which is marked by defeat, disgrace, disintegration and degradation. He describes the world around him as a ‘blind ocean’, which is confined by high mountains and holds ‘a raging whirlpool.’ It is a sea which is full of snakes, towards which everything moves in the end. The life in the Dark Age is ‘a blind and turbulent’ just like the ocean. The image of sea is generally used to convey the vastness, unfathomable aspects. The sea holds different meaning in the Indian philosophy. It is associated with the concept of samudramanthanor churning of the ocean. It has offered something to the God, the demons and the man. Therefore a sea is seen as the creative and supportive phenomenon. However that situation has changed completely in the Kali Yug. It the Dark Age the sea is black and full of snakes. It has lost its beauty and capacity to offer something new. The old mendicant has given a special power by using which he
makes the characters’ spirit appear and speak out their heart. The three spectres of Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and Vidura express the existential problems faced by them. They all face the contradiction between the real and the ideal. They all compared their lives with the wheel. Yuyutsu’s wheel has lost its bearing as it has lost the past conviction, Sanjaya’s wheel is dependent on other big wheels as he is neutral and could not force any change. Vidura’s wheel is useless as it moves on the wrong axes, i.e. his faith for Krishna. Three spectres show the problems of adjustments with the external environment. They are unable to distinguish between right and wrong. The foundational principle like truth, faith and devotion are much in questions. These characters are basically good and they are not involved in the game of power and domination. However still they do not understand the intricacies of the reality. There behaviour lacks conviction and their thought the faith. The inner contradictions get exposed through the Interlude. The contradictions in the human mind are expressed by this way. The word contradiction is very close to the modern mind as it is the regular experience of this time. The inability to fit oneself in the social, cultural, political framework creates these contradictions. Yuyutsu, Sanjaya and Vidura are the representative of the modern mind that is cluttered with these inner contradictions related to the existence. Thus the fighting scenes and Interlude are an important insertion in the play that reinforces the unethical violence present in the human mind and also the paradox of living- where one has to live even when one does not understand the meaning of it. The tragedy of the modern man gets heightened because of the existential problems that are beyond his control.

The action of the play ends with the ghastly tragedy of Krishna’s death. The ill effects of war are subsided with this calamity when the cursed God is killed by a common hunter. With the end of God, the Kaliyug begins where everything will be dominated Kali; the demon. The play thus marks the point in the transitional phase. One circle is completed with the death of Krishna. The earth is godless and therefore there is no dharma, no ethical or moral obligation, and no religion to guide and no incarnation to save. The death of God is the crucial point in the action. Krishna is killed by the hunter, who is an incarnation of the Old mendicant. He believes that his killing of God is predestined.

I was the instrument

of His metamorphosis. (AY 160)
The very idea of change or transformation even could not escape the God. He is surely transformed from the bonds of life on the earth. He has gone back to his celestial abode. God is realised from the pangs of life by the hunter. Rather the God must have made the arrangement for it. The life on the earth is faithless as it is Godless. Is not a transformation taking place on the earth also? The death of God means the human beings are free to behave according to their will and they will be responsible for their actions. God is as it is absent and hence he cannot carry the burden of other’s actions as he did earlier. Almost everybody in the play, Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, Yuyutsu, Ashwatthama, Vidura accuses Krishna for the situation. They blame him even curse for not saving them from this tragedy. The end of the God also suggests the end of this blame game. Everyone is free and everyone therefore can decide the course of his actions. The omnipotent God can do everything for the human beings but the question is to what extent? The question that Gandhari or Vidura faces, “Can Krishna unable to stop this war?” is pertinent in everyone’s mind. If the God can control everything in this world then was it difficult for him to avoid this carnage? The play poses so many questions about the war and its aftermaths but it also makes subtle point in favour of such mass destruction. War could be the most important ‘instrument’ in this metamorphosis. Unless the old is destroyed there is possibility of new. The mass destruction is the end of earlier reality but it is also the beginning of the new order. The reference to seed at the end is symbol of something new, offspring to come in future. Although Krishna is dead his principles can help to build the new order. The human beings would be more responsible in this new order as they will not have an option to put all the blame to the God. The Great War could be a part of the great transformation in the circle of life. The new order is waiting after some time and that is suggested at the end of the play. It is an awareness created through darkness and ruins of the past. Therefore it can be said that the span of action chosen for the textualisation is very suggestive as it begins with a warning of the approaching Kaliyug but at the same time it aware of the new order that can decide the future of the mankind. The New World is pronounced at the end with the mixing of hope and fear.

It is this small seed
that makes us fear
half-truths
and great wars
and always
saves
the future of mankind
from blind doubt
slavery
and defeat. (AY162)

Andha Yug is a call for this new order which embodies the fear about false
ideals and violence but it also saves the future generations from doubts, bondage and
defeat. The Mahabharata myth is adapted time and again but Andha Yug puts the new
way of looking at the story by eliminating the sensational aspect of the myth.

Action and characters are the two important dimensions of any dramatic
action. Characters are the vehicles through which action gets conveyed and reach to
the definite point. Andha Yug presents an array of characters from the Mahabharata.
The epic contains hundreds of characters as it is a story that expands almost over the
seven generations. The selection of the characters therefore becomes an important
issue to tackle in the process of adaption. “Which characters and why?” is the crucial
matter as it decides the focus of the adaption. There has to be a purpose of this
selection. As mentioned earlier out of the sixteen characters in the play, eight
characters are mythological - namely Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Ashwathama,
Kritavarma, Kripacharya, Yudhishtira, Yuyutsu, Sanjaya, Vidura, Vyas, Balrama
and Krishna. Other four characters are, viz. Old Mendicant, Guard 1, Guard 2 and
Dumb Soldier seem to be added in the adaption. Interestingly the selection of the
mythological characters is also very interesting. There are only four characters which
can be called as the major characters from the Mahabharata story i.e. Dhritarashtra,
Gandhari, Yudhishtira, and Krishna whereas the remaining eight characters can be
seen as the less focused or marginal characters. The common thing about these
characters is that they all are the survivors of the war. They are condemned to live the
horrors of the war. However other surviving characters like Arjuna, Bhima or Drupadi
do not find place in the adaptation. Duryodhana and Arjuna are mentioned only but
they are never to be seen on the stage just like Uttara. The Pandavas are projected in
extremely dark way where they are shown as licentious and insane because of the victory. They have lost the sense of reality except Yudhishthira. He is the only one who is suffering from the dejection and self-contempt. The heroines in the Mahabharata are baseless and downgraded in the modern version. They are not even given the space or attention in *Andha Yug*. The warriors like Arjuna and Bhima are reduced to blind rulers. Arjuna is equally guilty of using *bramhastra*, a weapon to devastate everything alongside of Ashwatthama. The glory of the Pandavas is fast diminishing. They stand for the principle, “power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The minimal role given to the Pandavas in the adaption is an indication of their moral corruption and blindness. It highlights the fact that no one can permanently remain pious and morally upright but changes according to the time. The decline of the Pandavas is suggestive of the inner desire which makes even the great souls like the Pandavas forget their priorities. They are somewhere in the background in the play and never attract any focus. *Andha Yug* hardly glorifies the military heroism and hence the Pandavas could not stand in the changing times. Yudhishthira is the only exception to this as he has found some space in the adaption. However even he is without his regular moral charm as the war has proved that he is no more ‘dharmaraj’, the one who always follows the dharma uprightly. Rather he is main cause of Ashwatthama’s insane rage and owe to destruction. Yudhishthira proves to an average king who is saintly but could not create his impact on the minds of the people. Unlike his brothers, he is unable to digest and celebrate their victory. Victory has made him feel knackered as the victory is based on the foundation false and immoral. The feeling of guilt slowly burdens his souls. He agonizingly asks the questions.

And what is victory then?

Is that not also a long and slow act of suicide? (*AY* 143)

Yudhishthira’s predicament is the agony of every sensitive mind in the hour of recklessness. He is sensitive but helpless. He could not change the situation. He could not stop his brothers from humiliating dharma or even stops Arjuna from using the
devastating bramhastra. He stands for that spirit which feels defeated and isolated in the carnivalesque of victory. He is the faint light of hope which holds some element of self-introspection in excruciating condition outside and inside the human heart.

The major focus in the play can be seen on three characters largely-Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Ashwatthama. The common thread in all of them is their antagonism to the Pandavas and Krishna. Dhritarashtra is the symbol of utter blindness- physical and mental. He is narrow-minded and he could not think about the future. He is a king and therefore he enjoys the privileges of power. The corrupt and uncontrolled rulers can destroy the future of entire clan with their short-sightedness. Dhritarashtra works as the blind consciousness, may be like Tiresias in ‘The Waste Land’. However Tiresias is conscious and detached whereas Dhritarashtra is full of desires and involved in the petty things. He wishes to retain the power at any cost for the Kaurava clan. He represents the self centered powerhouses who are ready to sacrifice the entire generation of common people to serve their interest. Wars in the recent times have seen leaders like Dhritarashtra who are mentally more blind than physically. The adaption is supposed to perceive through Dhritarashtra’s consciousness or point of view. The Prologue states,

This is the story of the blind---

or of enlightenment

through the life of the blind. (AY 26)

Dhritarashtra stands for the lens through which the action is conveyed. The question can be asked, “Why Dhritarashtra and not someone else?” it signifies that Dhritarashtra’, having view is the only view available in the contemporary realityor another possibility is that every view ultimately become Dhritarashtra’s view, having blindness and self-centredness. The Dark Age has shown the limited possibility of perceiving the reality. Dhritarashtra is a spirit of the modern ageand everyone is like Dhritarashtra. Gandhari on the other hand works almost like the alter ego of Dhritarashtra. She is the one who has chosen to be blind voluntarily. She is probably the most powerful woman in the Mahabharata, even more than Draupadi. She is blessed with the divine vision which can make anyone’s body stubborn like diamond. Gandhari with all divine powers and resolution to be blind shows indomitable spirit that cannot compromise with the reality. She occupies the major space in the plays as
she stands opposite the Pandavas and Krishna. She feels that Krishna has played foul
game with the Kauravas and hence he should be revenged. She shows lot of guts in
supporting Ashwatthama to fight against the Pandavas. She is so mad with the idea of
revenge against Krishna that she finally curses the God, pronouncing his death in a
very trivial manner. Why is Gandhari projected at length in Andha Yug? Rather she is
the only woman character in the play. She presents the tremendous force that a
woman carries, a force that is destructive and ominous. Her power helps
Ashwatthama to take on the battle against the Pandavas. She represents a woman with
lot of energy, mental as well as moral but her energy is properly utilised. It is
uncontrolled power that leads to the destruction. In her trance of power she even
forgets that she is cursing the God. Her acts are irreversible and it makes others to
suffer also. It is only at the end that she realise her fault. Gandhari in Andha Yugis
the destructive female force which has the capacity to create and nurture but it exactly
does the opposite. The blindness has filled everybody’s heart so much that even the
tender, delicate female heart has started emitting the vehemence. The corruption
transcends gender; the creative and nurturing principle also gets the heat of the
blindness. The retribution comes only at the end when Gandhari realises her fault. The
God however has already accepted her curse and he is ready to suffer the death. Thus
Gandhari becomes instrumental in punishing death to the God. The punishment is a
kind of bliss for him. Hence Gandhari inadvertently blesses Krishna and releases him
from the confines of this birth. Paradoxically Gandhari becomes that female spirit
who could not save herself from the damnation but who helps to release the God from
the earthly life. At least Gandhari shows some signs of understanding at the end. She
shows some possibility of change unlike most of the characters.

Vidura was indeed a superhuman being who was well versed in all the
shastras and all branches of knowledge given to a royal prince. His intelligence was
colossal and because of his immense learning and wisdom, he became the advisor of
his brother, King Dhritarashtra. To Vidura, righteousness was far better than fighting.
Being a dharmic man his love was always for the Pandavas who revered him, and
always sought his wise counsel. During the war, however, he remained with
Dhritarashtra, pulled as he was by a sense of duty and brotherly affection. Vidura’s
life exemplified the virtues of duty, loyalty, simplicity, wisdom and desirelessness. He
was truly an incarnation of dharma. Sanjaya is another person who did not take part in
the war. But by the grace of Vyasa, he acquired the powers to see things happening hundreds of miles away. Sanjaya saw all the 18 days of war and narrated everything to Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya is considered fortunate for this. He heard this supreme and most profound yoga, directly from Yogeshwar Krishna. They stand for the virtuous and rational attitudes towards the reality although they are confused, passive and do not affect any changes in the degrading situation. Probably not such passive rationalism and blind faith but the active participation with awareness is more required in the age of darkness.

If at all any one has to be call as the hero or the protagonist of the adaption then it has to be Ashwatthama. He has got all the potentialities and possibilities to become hero or the leading character. Ashwatthama in the traditional story of the Mahabharata is almost marginalised. Even though he grows in the company of the Pandavas and the Kauravas since his childhood, he hardly gets the attention like the royal children. Ashwatthama is never in focus throughout the epic except the last part when he creates havoc in the Pandava camp. The play presents Ashwatthama is all his vigour. He is the revenge personified and he acts without any thinking. He is blind with revenge for his father’s assassination. He feels that the Pandavas have violated all the moral codes of the war and hence they should be paid back in the same coin. Ashwatthama after the end of the war continues the legacy of the Kauravas—ambition instead of peace, power instead of companionship, irresponsibility instead of justice, contempt for everything in place of hope for the well-being of all things. He therefore attacks the Pandava camp in the night and even uses bramhastra to kill Uttara’s womb. Ashwatthama is punished by Krishna by giving him immortal life but with perennial sufferings. Ashwatthama shows the signs of awareness at the end of the play when he realises that violence can lead to further violence and nothing creative can come out of it.

The blindness of this age

Flowed through my veins…..

I am condemned

Yet free! (AY 157)

Ashwatthama stands for the darkest core of the human consciousness and also an awareness that can dawn after the great pain. He continuously debases the idea of
dharma, continues to violate it for satisfying his personal desires. His character is multidimensional which exhibits the journey from beastly, animalistic human being who kills everyone to a more settled, thoughtful, enlightened soul who even witnesses the God’s death. Finally he is one who finds pleasure in pains and sufferings. He in a way represents the general human nature which in spite of so many follies shows the ability to rise and be different. Ashwatthama is not like others and unidimensional, that is his strength as a character. He shows flexibility, adoptability and awareness to cope with the situation. Realisation dawns on him that only violence is not going to take him anywhere. Therefore at the end a faint possibility of faith is created in his mind after meeting Krishna. His dominating presence throughout the play is an indication of the fact that the modern age, an age of blindness that demands people like Ashwatthama who have got the capacity to struggle, fight and change. Is he the hero of the play? He becomes central in the matters of appearance, focus and narration. He is the only one who is saved from damnation at the end because of his faith. He is the one who fights out all the battles, on the field and of the existence. A seemingly marginal character becomes the focus of this great drama. He is heroic but he can be seen as the violence resulting from the unrestrained Capitalist tendencies. He also stands for the dying human value-based civilisation. By putting such character at the focal point the adaption, the play reverses the traditional way of treating the characters. Characters which are conventionally placed at the periphery are brought at the center in this modern adaption. Characters like Dhritarashtra, Gandhari and Ashwatthama are portrayed in black colour in the past. In Andha Yug however these characters are shown with more realistic, humane way where they too have some good qualities or at least they are as bad as the Pandavas. By projecting these characters in the unconventional manner, the play deconstructs the traditional hierarchies and viewpoints. The hidden aspects in their personalities are exhibited to show the varied working of the human mind. These characters through their unconventional presentation open new avenues to know the hidden recesses in the human mind. The marginal are at the center in Andha Yug and therefore something new can spring from such adaption.

Krishna is the center in the play. He is the ever present reality, which never gets destructed but only can change the form of it. He is the divine agent in the action
who takes responsibility for everyone’s action. Whether to save or to punish lies in his hand.

I said to Arjuna:

‘I take upon my shoulders

The responsibility

Of all your good and evil deeds. (AY 123)

He represents the pious, sacred and innocent in the age of darkness. He gets defeated at the hands of blind people who could not understand Krishna’s divinity. His character though divine suffers from many faults. The Pandavas’ victory is possible because of the blessings of Krishna. He saves Uttara’s womb from Brahmastra released by Ashwathama. However he could not control the Pandavas. He is accused for supporting the Pandavas by even bending dharma for them. Therefore Krishna has to undergo the punishment for that and it was a death penalty as per Gandhari’s curse. Andha Yug thus shows the realistic aspect of divinity. It is not the detached or objective kind of divinity which sits somewhere above and interferes in the human life. Krishna is that element in divinity which participates in the human affair and even suffers like a common human being. This concept of humanised God is at the center of the adaption. While talking with Gandhari, he clarifies his position as a participant in the human relation.

I am alive

I may be a god

I may be omnipotent

But I am your son

And you are my mother. (AY 124)

Krishna is not just a God from the distant lands but very much a part of the drama that takes place on the earth. He is present everywhere and within everyone, in good and bad, in peace and violence, in battlefields and in palaces, in the Sanjaya’s mind and in Ashwathama’s actions. Hence his departure from this world is the beginning of Kaliyug or the age of darkness. By projecting the death of Krishna at the end, the play seems to highlight this humanized incarnation of the God. Death of God
is a difficult thing to digest for any mind in any time. It is the beginning point for the skepticism and nihilism. It signifies the destruction of the strongest belief system on which the human civilization has rested so far. The center of the culture and religious structure is getting fast diminished. The end for Krishna is tragic just like most of the characters. The inseparability of the human and the divine is the crucial point here. The God probably dreamt of the better world with his presence but it was a false conviction. Even his presence could not save the damnation. Krishna’s idealism about the age could be not actualised. The adaption thus by projecting a sort of defeat and death of the divine element poses lot of question on the viability of the issue of ‘ideal situation where everything is rested upon the God’s shoulders’. In the final analysis it can be said that Krishna’s presence and absence has underlined the idea that Krishna stands for something ‘sacred and divine’ but the responsibility of defending these virtues is not exclusively his. The burden lies on everyone. Krishna or any divine element will not be able to the load of human desires and evil deeds for a long. Andha Yug therefore is not a tragedy of the war but it a play that makes a statement in relation to the change in the human approach towards divinity. If the god is humanised then the human attitude towards looking has to be more rational and real. The focus of the adaption is more on pragmatic interaction between the human and the divine. If this happens then there is the possibility of the ‘seed’ of hope to be preserved and developed.

Along with these mythological characters, there are some imaginative characters. The two guards and the dumb soldier represent the common side of the life. The guards suffer while living the meaningless life whereas the dumb soldier suffers while dying. They show the routine way of how goes on. In case of dumb soldier, the issue of ethics gets extremely complicated as he refuses to drink water from Yuyutsu’s hand for the last time. Yuyutsu only is responsible for his condition. The soldier is not comfortable with this idea that his killer should assist him while taking the last breath. On the one hand he shows the prevailing sense of ethics whereas he is successful in bring the complicated issue of ethics in front. The guards face the existential dilemma as they suffer with no faults of theirs. They remain throughout the play, a kind of ‘witness’ to the entire action. The irony is that they are ‘guarding’ the palace when there is nothing to guard. The morality and self-awareness are already bygone things and mere ruins are left to guard. They are not the sufferers
like the other characters. Existence is the only concern for them, they do not feel or get affected by the conditions.

Guard1 We have not faced grief…
Guard2 not endured pain.
Guard1 We are now…
Guard2 as we always were! (AY 145)

The adaption offers different levels of existence and consciousness. Characters like Ashwatthama, Gandhari and Yudhishthira suffer the mental pains. They at least show some kind of awareness while facing the end. Other characters have undergone the soul’s agony when they could not digest the changing conditions like Sanjaya, Yuyutsu and Vidura. The guards however show the bare physical level of existence which does not get affected by the outside happenings. They are too meagre and ignorant to feel such soul’s pangs. The guards stand in the sharp contrast against the other characters. They continue to live with a little disturbance. The life force continues to make its own journey in spite of all the hurdles. They appear at the when the age is heading towards the utter chaos. Yet they continue to exist as their urge to live is predominant. The life force that supports the human existence continues to make its journey through this waste land and towards a black sea but the most importantly it continues.

If Krishna is the centre of the play then the Old mendicant is the central pole on which the entire structure rests. He is the probably the most important addition in the adaption. Alongside Ashwatthama he gets the opportunity to remain throughout the plays and that too in different capacities. He is a fortune teller in the beginning who predicts the victory for the Kauravas. He is supported by Gandhari and Dhritarashtra for that reason. Ashwatthama kills him for his false prophecy. Later on he appears in the form of spirit who helps to ring out the contradictions within the minds of the characters. At the end he becomes Jara, an old hunter who kills Krishna. At the end he only tries to pass Krishna’s last words to the world but no one is there to listen. Thus his presence in different forms continues throughout the play. The obvious question is, “Who is he? A person, a tendency, a practice or a spirit? Is he a combination of all this? His main function, as seen in the most of the instances is to initiate the actions, invite responses and reciprocate them. He seems to be an even
present human consciousness which gets expressed through thoughts and actions. He has the capacity to read the call of future by transcending the limits of time and even the physical limitations. His killing at the Ashwatthama is merely the killing of the body or material framework, the spirit remains intact. His existence as a ‘spectre’ allows to him to peep into the minds of the people. It is he who helps Krishna to get rid of this birth and go back to the divinity above. The old mendicant works as a common thread to link all the episodes and characters in one single chain. The effect is, though he is not able to avoid tragedy, he can at least bring the enlightenment in the doom. Probably he saves the plays from becoming a grotesque, ancient tragedy where there is no scope for any future consideration. It is through his characters the ‘seed’ of the future gets secured. The mendicant only can do this as he is in spite of having the human follies can preserve the ‘sacred’. He unlike most of the characters is selfless, as he is not powerful in any sense. He is ‘mendicant’, a beggar who does not with for something grand, in addition he is an old person who has already left behind the physical concerns. In a way he has no bodily or material concerns and hence he only can show the right path of the future. The selfless, desireless soul only has the capacity to change the course of the future. While describing Krishna, the old mendicant has only stated,

… when a man
surrenders his selfhood
and challenges history
he can change the course
of the stars. (AY41)

This comes true in case of the old mendicant. He reaches to the stage of being ‘selfless’ and hence he has the moral strength to survive, though at the spiritual level all the atrocities and odds. He performs those tasks which Krishna or wise souls like Sanjaya or Vidura are expected to do. Andha Yugby keeping the old mendicant at the centre stage promises the possibility of saving humanity from the complete doom. His addition in the adaption therefore links to ‘enlightenment in the age of darkness’ what is pronounced in the Provocation. He preserve the seed which will be useful for the coming tomorrow. It is this small speck of hope which will reconstruct the future of mankind from the ruins of the past.
Honourable in their conduct
Imaginative in their actions
Fearless
Courageous
Affectionate
Joyful
they shall find me
present
again and again
in every moment
of their lives. (AY 159)

Andha Yug in spite of its reference to assassinations, infightings, tortures, accidents, treachery, chaos and blindness of all sorts saves from becoming ‘a tragedy without hope’ surely because of the old mendicant. He suffers yet he secures the future of the mankind. Even it can be said that what Krishna, the supreme God is unable to do in the age of darkness, the old mendicant has achieved to do. Hence he is the only one who can listen and burden with the last message of the God.

Andha Yugcontains numerous elements which are suggestive and can connect to the reality outside the text. It is play adapted from the story of the Mahabharata but it is not just a mythological play which celebrates the heroism of a particular supernatural or mythological personality. It through the invoking of the past focuses on the contemporary problems. Rather that is the task that every playwright does in the modern time. The ancient stories provide him with enough ammunition to speak about the present conditions. The characters, settings, events may change but the basic human tendencies remain the same over the period of the time. The timeless human nature and the complexities related to it are at the foundation of any mythical adaptations. Myths are readily available material for speaking about the present things in the indirect but the most effective way. The present play appeared on the scene in 1954, the period following the India’s independence and more importantly the painful reality of the partition. The country was passing through the passage of transition; an
anxiety about the future on the one hand and the terrible mental and physical suffering because of the consistent infighting and violence. The country was going through the testing time as new order was coming to shape and the old ones were crumbling. The common people were searching for ethical, religious and philosophical foundations. The overall situation was chaotic and lacked clear cut directions. In such existential and ideological muddle, the age-old ideals were worn-out. The post independent Indian context was also a post war period where the appalling effects of the World war continued to haunt the human minds. The sensitive minds could not find the plausible solutions. The dwindling situation of 1950s found it correlative in the tragic yet enlightening tale of the Mahabharata. The great epic carries all the events which show the chaos, violence, destruction, anti-establishment and the possibility of new order.

The adaption presents the period of transformation between the Dwaparyug and the Kaliyug as mentioned in the Vishnupurana. This phase of transition is marked by paradoxes and fluctuations just like the Indian situation was bundle of contradictions. Andha Yug presents a series of paradoxes like real x imagined, history x contemporariness, blind x enlightenment, life-in-death x death-in-life, desire x knowledge, victorious x disintegrated, essence (i.e. ideals, restrain, responsibility, human values) x existence, time x timeless, dharma x half-truths, seamless x mediocre, selfish x social, human x divine, cultured x barbaric. These and so many conflicts resided in the post independent India. The basic paradox came in the form of independence and partition. The very idea of Indian nationalism was challenged by the act of partition. The communal harmony was in danger which even the great ‘Gandhi baba’ could not control. He becomes just like Krishna who could not translate the much sought after victory in the welfare of the people. The saintly but too idealistic Yudhishthira (someone like Nehru) who was surrounded by the dull, intoxicated Pandavas (the overall political leadership) could not reach to the height shown by Krishna, hence even the God had to sacrifice his life for the cause of manava-dharma (for the sake of humanity). The tremendous paradox that filled the human existence and the lack of effective and immediate ideals is the connecting line between the Mahabharata and the Post Independent India. On the one hand India was casting off the colonial rule, and preparing for the new self-rule but did the things change with the change of guard? Largely the initial years of the post independent era
showed the gross disillusionment and false idealism. The ideas like nationalism, unity, independence, progress, democracy and people’s rule came under sharp scrutiny. The convincing minds turned into the doubtful heads. Failure of the political, social and religious leadership to direct the masses further added salt to the injury. The falling economic condition, the problem of communal harmony, uncontrolled conduct of the leadership, absence of central controlling authority, spread of the self-centred, materialistic tendencies and the rampant use of violence to dominate were some of the chief characteristics of the Indian situation. In addition the threat of nuclear weapons, the worst gift of the Second World War was lurking over all the times. The constant occurrence of famine, the China wars, and instable conditions at the North-West borders changed the atmosphere of curiosity into disquietude. The questions were also raised about the faith and religion by the intellectuals during this period. Andha Yug takes up all the doubts and anxieties of the existence. The age of darkness was at a stay and hence the adaption speaks about destruction, not only of human lives, but also of ethical values. In the Mahabharata, both the victor and the vanquished loose eventually, as the victory that Indians fetched against the British costed out heavily. By using the form Geetinatya or a poetic drama, Andha Yug presents the predicament of the contemporary India which was groping in the ethical, cultural and ideological darkness of the modern age. This socio-cultural context found the apt verbatim in the panoramic tale of the Mahabharata. It is therefore observed,

In Dharamvir Bharati’s vision in Andha Yug, ancient tradition offers no certitude or solace, but only a symbolic framework for enacting and enabling the contemporary conditions of communal violence and moral ambiguity. (Jyotsna Singh 154)

The adaption uses the Indian form rather than using borrowed forms for the Western playwrights. It is a general accusation that the Post-Independence Hindi drama is largely imitative and largely founded on the European models. Indian English dramatist did not use Indian Dramatic traditions and myths creatively. Indian English drama needs real theatre for stage performance and live audience. As M.K. Naik puts it,

A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, needs a real theatre and a live audience. It is precisely the lack
of these essentials that has hamstrung Indian drama in English all along.

(81)

*Andha Yug* is surely a significant exception to such criticism. It uses the traditional form which is known as *Geetinatya*, which uses verse instead of prose for dialogues. It is a combination of *nataktatva* (dramatic element), *kavyatatva* (poetic element) and *rupaktatva* (metaphoric element). Dramatic element brings the actions and conflicts whereas poetic element contributes through experiences and emotions. The emotions are more important than the content is such structure. It ultimately stands for search of some truth in thus dark chaos. The search for truth is just not philosophical, religious or mythological in *Andha Yug*, but it offers truth at the human, scientific, psychological and structural levels by presenting war-sufferers, war-initiators or neutral characters. Privatisation of morals is the matter of great concern in the modern times. Universal truth becomes the imagined truth and imagined truth is presented as universal truth. The play is not limited to the conflict between good and evil but it makes a nation aware about facing the changing times of the postmodernity and post colonialism. Through the intelligent employment of the past myths, it helps the modern people face the present with all its ambiguities and chaos. The adaption of the Mahabharata in the post independent context offers a new dimension towards looking at the present reality in the light of the past where the traditional ways of thinking, perception and behaviour undergo drastic changes. *Andha Yug* does not therefore remain a tale of mythical characters but becomes a dialectical narrative where the past undergoes so many changes in order to comprehend the present. Hence it can be called as the (post)modern play those talks about the timeless tendencies and possibilities regarding human beings and human life.
This is a play by India-born writer Uma Parameswaran who migrated to Canada in 1960s. This play was first staged in April 1981 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada. It is a dance drama written for arangetram. Based on characters from the Ramayana, mainly Rama, Sita and Lakshamana; though the story is purely imaginative. The play has following characters

- Narrator
- Lakshamana
- Rama,
- Sita
- First Girl
- Second Girl
- Gypsy Queen
- Valli
- Dancers

The play though deals with the mythological subject, it has modern setting. The screen projector and the screen of 8’ x 15’ is at the back drop on which appear slides appropriate to each scene. Rama, Sita and Lakshamana are on the stage throughout the play, they only move sideways when the dancers perform.

**Outline of the play**

The narrator informs that it has been ten years since Rama left Ayodhya. He along with Sita and Lakshamana has travelled far and wide in the forests of India. Rama and Lakshamana enter in the scene. Lakshmana is carrying a bird. Rama is more concerned with the playful nature of Sita and Lakshmana. Sita enters and sees the injured bird. She feels sorry for it as it has lost its way from oceans to an inland forest. She soothes the bird by taking it into the hut.

Hermitage girls comes and talks to Sita about their new dance dances. They perform for Sita, who appreciates their dancing skills. Rama feels that it is
very peaceful there but Lakshmana argues that nothing is left for them to do there. Sita reminds them to visit sage Agastya on their way back. Rama expresses his unwilling to go back though they have to plan for that. Sita too feels that the life in Ayodhya would be full of ‘noise and worry’. She asks about the injured bird. Rama informs her that it is an Arctic tern that flies ten thousand distances every year from South to North Pole. Its destination is primeval ocean where Lord Vishnu reposes on snake Adisesha. Lakshmana suggests that the bird wants to go to home. Sita is thrilled with the thought. Rama is not very enthusiastic about this idea. After the dance a gypsy wishes to read Sita’s fortune Rama strongly opposes this idea. He explains that it is not good for man to know about his future. He says,

On the next day three of them are climbing on the hill next afternoon. Rama reiterates his views that if future holds sadness then what is the use of knowing about it. Rama argues that only God can see future because he alone is ‘Lord of Time’. While walking they see a girl on the floor. Sita pities her as she really beautiful yet sad, desperate and lonely. Rama feels that she is intoxicated and hence ignores her. Sita speculates that the girl is probably from the future and refers to the events which have not taken place.

Over the issue of the girl Lakshmana gets very angry with Rama and says that he always talks by the book. He does everything; like helping hermits, destroying demons, not because he likes or dislikes it but because it is his duty. Rama tries to pacify Lakshmana by elaborating on the importance of duty over love. He even argues that Lakshmana has come with them in the forest because of his sense of duty. Lakshmana politely disagrees by saying that he has not come with Rama because of the sense of duty but because of love. Rama replies by saying that Lakshmana’s argument is right. Rama generously accepts that he has learned so much wisdom from Lakshmana and Sita. After a short gap, Rama informs Sita that they will start journey the next day and take the bird to its home in the far north.

Now three of them are on the journey towards the north and reach Brindavan on their way. Sita keeps talking about the serene effect of the majestic natural beauty. She feels sad and guilty for Urmila as she is not with them.
Lakshmana consoles her by saying that Urmila is always with him. She comes to his dreams and offers strength to him. She is the source of divinity within him.

After reaching King Himavan’s place, they are directed to Parvati’s sacred land. Everyone out there worship Lord Siva in ‘innocent abandon’.

They are very excited to see Lord Siva’s dance in the golden hall of Tillai temple. The temple appears on the back screen with Siva in Nataraja pose. On the shores of Agassiz rises Lord Vishnu who is happy to see Rama. Rama wishes to stay there eternally but Lord says that Rama has to return to Dandakaranya and visit sage Agastya. Rama agrees to follow his instructions. At the end Sita enters with some native children, who look at her as daughter of Manitou. The play contains total ten dance performances at different intervals.
4.2.1

‘For Duty must always, but always come first’:

Rama’s Discourse of Code and Responsibilities

When one thinks about culture, one ultimately ends up in thinking about different codes, images and responsibilities related to that. Culture is constituted of different set of practices and rituals, which of course form a large part of human existence. These practices are normative and regulate human behavior to the large extent. Cultural practices dominate most of the other spheres of human existence. Cultural practices operate indirectly in most cases. It achieves its normative function by projecting various models and influences on thinking of human beings. Myths provide immense material for that purpose. For providing these standards and models i.e. the supernatural / superhuman characters through which different norms and practices can be reinforced. Myths form the part of what Jung calls ‘collective unconscious’ of any culture. Psychologists in the modern times have endorsed the view that ‘the mind’ has always been a cultural space. In away all human behavior, including the social one is influenced by culture. Mark Smith while explaining the role of culture further adds, “..Cultural meanings are tacitly involved in the process of knowledge construction.” (2) Through the employment of mythical characters and events, knowledge-creation process takes place. The two great epics; the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have provided variety of characters and situations on which the Indian cultural edifice rests. Especially Ramayana provides enough material for providing norms for human thoughts and behavior. Most of the characters in the Ramayana exhibit certain traits or principles. The central characters; Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, which of course are part of the present play, offer models of behavior or Dharma. These characters follow different codes and fulfill their duties. Duty and responsibilities related to Dharma are the key focus of this poetic drama. Through the obedience of these duties, the characters gain specific identity. To illustrate this point Rousseau’s account can be referred, “The cultivation of manly and womanly virtues is, he argued, tied to the maintenance of proper duties.” (Smith7) The present play is surely the best illustration of this statement. Rama, the prince of Ayodhya; who is considered as the incarnation of the God Vishnu presents the
ideal example for conduct and thinking. He is equated to the God and hence he has the moral responsibility of maintaining the code. At the beginning, the narrator introduces Rama in the following way.

Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, was banished for fourteen years by his father, Emperor Dasaratha, at the behest of his stepmother Kaikeyi who wanted the throne for her own son, Bharata. Rama left his father’s kingdom, accompanied by his wife Sita and his brother Lakshamana. (*Sita’s Promise* 47 henceforth referred as *SP*)

The introduction of these characters, especially of Rama informs about his sacrifice for the sake of his brother, Bharata. He respects his father’s orders without questioning them. It shows his ‘unflinching’ devotion towards his father and even his stepmother Kaikeyi. Thus at the beginning Rama’s character is established as the adherent son, morally upright and desireless man. Further the narrator informs, about Rama,

…. always helping the wise and holy men who lived alone or in hermitages. The brave brothers fought against rakshasas, and killed or drove away rituals and mediation. (*SP* 47)

The background is created for the play by thrusting Rama’s role in protecting human beings and *Dharma* from the devils and demons. Rama’s character is endowed with those virtues which are ideal for any common human being as well as for any ruler. He is presented as the perfect combination of human, king and the divine spirit. He is fitted in a particular image, which automatically places him at the higher position than others. Rama’s behavior and thinking become the ‘standard’ or ‘ideal’, giving it almost a status of normative practice. Such practices are recognized and followed by others. Rama, after his banishment from the empire establishes his own ‘identity’ in the forest. He is a prince that means he is already a part of the royal hierarchy. He is banished by the king on the queen’s advice. There are political and familial hierarchies, which result in the formation of normative practices. According to these practices, Rama is not supposed to question the king’s as well as his father’s decisions. Adherence to these practices makes Rama the ‘perfect’ or ‘ideal’ prince and son. It also establishes his ‘identity’, which again results in formation of different normative
practices. In the exile (vanavaas) Rama is the spearhead of the family hierarchy and hence his word is final in every case. Sita and Lakshmana seem to follow his decisions and wishes to the large extent. Rama’s image as ‘helpful’ and ‘protector’ indicate that unconsciously certain things are accepted. Such image remains generally unchallenged and becomes a part of ‘common sense’ knowledge. The play establishes the ‘traditional’ image of Rama, which enlarges certain characteristics. He is thus privileged over others, to that extent that he is almost considered as the divine-human being. Discourse gets operated with different institutions; these institutions develop different ways of looking at things. Such ways are congenial for the ruling ideology. Therefore various images are created and circulated for the common people to follow. It is through these images, consisting of virtues like good and bad, disciplined and rebel, normal and mad, the ruling ideology enforces it way of looking at think as the only and right way to look at the things. These images operate as the chief instrument in developing discourse strategies. Rama’s discourse of code gets its emphasis through its attachment to specific identity, which prioritizes him over others.

Rama can be seen as following the codes and images as expected. At the entry point itself, he is seen to express his concerns about Sita and Lakshmana in a very serious manner.

He feels that both of them have not attained the maturity. He seems to be preserving his traditional image, which he has received from the age-old hierarchies. He is serious and meditative. He seems to be worried about Lakshmana and Sita as they are not like him. (“You are as playful as children.[SP 48]) Rama’s discourse of codes thus bifurcates between what is ‘his’ way of thinking as against ‘others’ way of thinking. Ideology binds one with certain images and codes to follow. Through the ideological operations, it becomes almost a part of unconscious behaviour to follow certain type of behaviour as it is ‘normal’ and ‘standard’. These impressions are so solid that it is almost impossible to get away from them. Rama too seems to be confined by the traditional knowledge about the behavior and thinking. He behaves and thinks accordingly and even expects others to do the same. “Can he not be someone else?” is the crucial question. His ‘position’ as Rama is rested on his ‘image’,
which is carved out from the traditional or received knowledge from hierarchies. He therefore cannot approve the behavior of Lakshmana and Sita.

Rama’s discourse of code is reflected through his attitude towards Sita’s behavior. He praises Sita for being ‘innocent’ and ‘spontaneous’, for being so lively. Contrastingly he doubts about her role as ‘queen’,

A girl-wife is a delight, brother, but a girl-queen?....

She should be a mother to the highest and the lowliest.(SP 48)

These words express his priority for Sita as the ‘queen’ more than a human being. The real virtue of any man for Rama lies in his strict adherence of duties. He wants them to ‘grow’ towards maturity as they are getting closer to become kings and queens of Ayodhya. He has many doubts regarding Sita’s behavior as the ‘would-be queen’, who lacks seriousness. In the near future, when they would return to Ayodhya, they have to take up royal responsibilities. He is doubtful about Sita’s readiness for it as she by pampered by the sages and their students. Rama’s concerns about Sita are evident in this expression. His worries are about not Sita but with her ‘image’. He is more worried that Sita does not match the traditional image of the queen. Qualities like ‘innocent, spontaneous’ or ‘wonder and joy’ do not go well with being a queen. Rama’s discourse is based on the issue of identity. He is very conscious about his own ‘image’ and he is also very alert about the images of the others. He probably wishes that Sita should behave like him – serious and meditative. Something which people expects even though it may be unnatural. He constantly thinks about Ayodhya and his responsibilities as the king. He probably feels more comfortable with the idea of being a king than a hermit. Rama’s engagement with the questions regarding Sita’s suitability as the queen shows his inner wish that everyone should match his standards. What he calls as ‘people’s wish’ about Sita’s behavior may be his expectations about her behaviour. All these observations actually reinforce Rama’s discourse dominated by the sense of duty. He thinks more about the duties and responsibilities, which belong to the rational side of the mind but he does not follow emotions or sentiments.

Rama’s detached behavior is evident when Lakshmana brings the wounded bird to their hut. Sita feels very sorry for its condition. However Rama
seems unmoved by its condition. He offers information about the bird rather than sympathy. He fails to support the bird at emotional level which Lakshmana and Sita do very easily. He probably is unable to forget his ‘image’ of Prince and the would-be-King, which restricts him from being at the level of common people. Rama is accused by Sita for having only ‘two options’ i.e. *this* side or *that* side of things. She wants to stress that he is extremely stereotypical in the thinking. He questions Sita’s statements regarding the Dandakaranya and Ayodhya. (‘Too peaceful Rama’ and ‘Ayodhya is too busy and noisy.’[SP 49]) What Sita refers about Rama is his way of looking at things i.e. one dimensional view. For Rama everything can be approached from the fixed angles only. There are only two options like black and white, day and night, exile and house, good and bad, playful and responsible, etc. There exists no other way to approach the things. This stereotypical thinking again owes to his ‘image’ which makes him think from ‘fixed’ vision. He is always burdened by the duties and expectations. He has got ‘knowledge’ about the things which are at distance as it is evident in his account about the bird. However he refuses to undergo some new experience. He offers a very stock reaction when Lakshmana opinions that they should take the bird to its home in the Arctic region. Rama rejects this idea outrageously, without even giving a thought to it. He keeps talking about their visits to sages, who need his help and then he is too much concerned about the situation back at Ayodhya. Instead of following all these duties, the task of taking the bird to its home appears to be ‘foolish’ to Rama. He is interested more in visiting sages and hermits. It is more important probably because he has already decided to do so. Visiting and protecting sages are suitable to his image. His thinking is constructed in such a way that he dares not to do anything unconventional or unplanned. His discourse is weaved through a very complex and rigid web of ‘decorum’, which hardly allows him to think and behave in the normal way. Spending time for the bird’s sake is not a welcoming proposition for him for these reasons. Lakshmana and Sita are emotionally attached with the bird whereas Rama looks at it from the dry intellectualism. He prefers serving the sages and hermits than the bird, as it is his duty. He therefore projects himself as the ‘protector’ but in reality he fails to sympathize with the bird’s agony.
Interestingly he even fails to understand the emotions of Sita and Lakshmana. Sita is too curious to visit a new place and to have a new experience before returning to Ayodhya. She feels that this is the best chance for them to see the new area before they are bound by the duties at home. Sita is not very keen to return to Ayodhya as the queen as it would be a kind of ‘closed’ life. It would be a kind of confinement for all of them as once they enter Ayodhya they cannot go out easily. Rama interestingly shares Sita’s opinion about Ayodhya when he claims that he too is not very enthusiastic to return to Ayodhya and is more happy in the forest. Rama here seems to deviate from his codes and norms, but he immediately adds that, “But duty calls us.” (SP 50) The paradox in his personality is quite evident at this instance. He does things not because he is interested or involved in it but it is his ‘duty’ to perform something. He unknowingly ignores the emotions while performing things when he is not personally interested in them. Why does he prefer duty over personal likes and dislikes? Is this necessary for Rama to keep his discourse intact? Rama seems to prefer ‘duty’ to ‘desires’ in his thoughts and actions. ‘Duty’ is generally posed against ‘desires’ as the first is related with personal and unrestricted whereas the other is public and orderly. They are generally perceived as opposites. Duty and desires can be described in Saussure’s term: ‘binary opposition’. Duty is prioritized over desires in the traditional ways of looking at social set up. The one who follows duties by sacrificing desires is looked with respect. His position in the social hierarchy is automatically elevated. The social acceptance can be achieved through this as such person is considered as the ‘morally upright’ person. In the Indian context, such person is revered by all as he has won over Shadvikar (six inherent constituents which determine the course of thinking and behavior), whose personality is considered to be the most ideal to follow. This is a process of creating ideal and moral values for others to follow. The person endowed with these values becomes automatically ‘close to ideal’ i.e. close to the God. The complex web of discourse of code thus expects an individual to sacrifice his ‘self’ in order to achieve ideal status. Rama’s character shows such traits that make him morally upright, dutiful, responsible and ideal; but all this does not take place naturally.
Rama’s behavior shows his efforts to achieve ideal by way of adhering to the codes. However he does not seem to be happy about it. He undertakes certain duties even though he does not enjoy them. Rama seems to accept duty without involvement as in his case ‘vocation’ and ‘avocation’ do not match with each other. Rama can never be ‘free’, ‘playful’ or ‘imaginative’. If he gets transformed like this, probably he wouldstop to be Rama. The play poses so many crucial issues regarding Rama’s discourse of code, which might make him a good prince or a notable king, but it is doubtful that he could be a good human being. Discourse of code may help to establish yourself in the image given by the society, however there is a danger of losing your own face; the real identity. Discourse of code results in being rigid, imposing and stereotypical. It restricts Rama from thinking or behaving different. He has to follow the prescribed way of life. He is supposed to follow his duty as a ‘king’ towards the people of Ayodhya because that what is a king is expected to do. Therefore he thinks about these duties all the time. Rama can be seen as speaking about ‘duty’ towards the people of Ayodhya but fails to understand his duty towards the bird and his own wife. It would not be improper at all to say that Rama is selective about his duty. He is interested only in fulfilling those duties which stamp or endorse his authority either as the king-or as divine – human being. Is this an inherent paradox in his personality or is he politically correct in his bahaviour? Rama through his views and actions always distances himself from common human beings. Such act automatically makes him ‘different’ from the commonest in a way ‘special’ person. He thus enjoys the privileges of being the special person.

Rama seems to carefully maintain the distinction between the divine and the mortals. Through such hierarchal distinction, the superiority of ‘divine’ is normally accepted over the ‘human’ beings. Rama makes conscious efforts to keep this distinction between the Gods and the human. He believes that the Gods are always superior and different than the human beings. Therefore the authority of the Gods has to be accepted without any challenge. His attitude on this matter is expressed on the issue of obtaining knowledge of future. He strongly opposes Sita’s plan to know her future from the native girls. Rama calls it a dangerous thing as it may hold ‘sadness’. He rather advises her to remain what she is, ignorant and trusting.He further adds that only God can see steadily into the future.
as He alone is ‘Lord of Time’. He clearly distinguishes the powers of the God from the human beings. He is trying to establish the God as the Supreme Being, who only is capable of having full knowledge. He claims that the Gods are different from the human beings in many respects.

…… I only know there are at least two levels of awareness – the human and the divine …. we can see only the trees around us but someone who is perched on a cloud can see the whole hill and to someone who is way above the earth, the hills and plains and forest and sea are all laid out flat – the past and present and future all come together as the Eternal Present. 

…… if the veil of Maya is ever lifted from us, we shall see as God sees for we shall be in Eternity … (SP 53)

Rama establishes the superiority of the divinity over the world of human beings. It is the God, as he perceives, who can only know things in the true sense. All of us suffer from the sense of Maya (the unreal). It is almost impossible for any human being to understand the reality fully. He further says that only God can lift the veil of Maya for the ordinary beings.

Rama here clearly echoes the traditional, religious idea of the superiority of the divine. Man is always incapable of knowing the reality and hence he has to surrender to the God. As already discussed, every discourse creates categories and distinctions, where certain things are prioritized over others. Here Rama gives weightage to the divine and puts the human world secondary to it. Rama indirectly makes Lakshmana and Sita aware that getting ‘true and complete’ knowledge is not possible for any human being. Knowing about the future would be a kind of transgression of human limitations. He opposes Sita’s attempts to gain knowledge about future for this very reason. Absence of knowledge keeps human beings ‘ignorant and trusting’. It indirectly indicates towards the view that if human beings are knowledgeable they will be faithless. According to Rama’s view ultimately the human beings have to surrender to the God for gaining knowledge. This appears to be a kind of ideological formation through which the superiority of the God is established unquestionably. Rama appears to be the mouthpiece of the idea ‘logocentricism’. God’s presence is necessary for human being to understand the ultimate reality. The ‘absence’ of God is necessary to create significance for the ‘present’ human being. The presence of absent God is
really crucial to create meaning/s for the human beings. Through Rama, the age old hierarchies, endorsing the dominant ideologies are reestablished and consolidated. He is the one, who rejects any claims from Sita or Lakshmana’s side that challenge the traditional, dominant ideology.

Rama’s discourse is evident again and again through his views regarding human behavior. Alongwith duty, the self-control is the most important virtue in human life. He clearly creates two categories on this issue – those human beings who possess self-control are considered as ‘normal’ while those who do not restrain themselves are labeled as ‘abnormal’ or ‘insane’. Rama can be seen as creating another set of binary oppositions(normal and mad). It is quiet easy to categorise and dominate through this formation. In a way another normative practice is created out of it. Rama, as seen earlier, does not appreciate anyone at the level of emotions. His coldness is visible when they come across a girl who is ‘on the floor’. She appears ‘lovely’ but ‘desperate’ to Sita. Rama, on the other hand finds her ‘intoxicated’. He criticizes her for the unrestrained behavior. He ignores her.

Leave her alone. She is half mad. Such open lamentations and declarations of love are (*he shrugs contemptuously.*)(SP 53)

Rama does not appear to be happy at all with her free way of expressing emotions. He refers her as ‘half-mad’ and ignores her. It is easy to dominate or reject somebody when he/she is labeled as ‘mad’. Foucault speaks elaborately on the issue of madness. It is not a mental stage but a ‘created’ condition through different discursive practices. Madness is an easy way to marginalize someone. According to the traditional knowledge ‘normal’ is accepted as against the ‘mad’, which indicates some type of problem or lacuna. It is these discursive formations which decide the categories like mad and normal. Once someone is marked as mad, it is easy to dominate him by delinking him from the rest. Madness shows the lack of something, and hence that lack should be compensated by some type of retributive action. According to Rama, control over emotions is necessary condition for every human being. Those who fail to do so are ‘abnormal’ or ‘mad’. They are automatically sidelined from the main current. This is referred as ‘the practice of exclusion’, which is repeatedly used in discourse formations. Rama is a symbol or an example of ‘self-control’ and hence it gains the value of
standards or normative practice. Those who do not conform to this practice, automatically gets marginalized and they are stamped as ‘mad’. Rama’s expression always endorses the view that one should not make an open display of one’s emotions as self-control is a cardinal virtue.

Paradox or double standards in Rama’s behavior come out sharply through such expressions. On the one hand, he talks about human welfare and external knowledge, but he fails to understand the pains of a common girl. He rather condemns her for such ‘uncontrolled’ behavior. He does not appreciate her commitment towards her lover; Lord Vishnu. Lakshmana feels that the girl is desperate because she is ‘separated’ from the God. Rama does not seem to think from this point of view. He rigidly repeats his stand again and again; prioritizing control and duty over everything else. According to his view, reason and duty should rule instead of emotions and desires.

Rama finally expresses his ideas about the ‘perfect’ human being. He should prefer reasons than emotions and duty than desire. Reason and duty are only two essentials for any man to follow, according to Rama. If one fails to adhere to these set standards, then s/he can be easily set aside by stamping it ‘superficial’ or ‘insane’. Rama strongly advocates this view while debating with Lakshmana. Lakshmana argues over the conflict created between love and duty. In such situation what is expected from the human being – should they strictly adhere to duties or should they listen to their ‘heart’s call’? Rama categorically puts his views in favour of ‘duty’ than emotions.

Where love conflicts with duty, it must be made to give way, brother, for
Duty must always, but always, come first. (SP 55)

Rama’s opinion is directed in favour of duty than emotions. ‘Duty’ is related to the social behavior, whereas emotions are mostly private or individual things. Rama probably means that personal or individual life must be sacrificed for the sake of the preservation of social codes and structure. One ultimately gets recognition and status by sacrificing the ‘personal’ to follow the ‘social’. In the traditional perception, the sacrifice for the sake of society and especially for the principles is always regarded high. The ‘great’ people like the kings and the queens are expected to behave in this manner only. They are the torchbearers of
the social codes and their behavior therefore is considered as the ‘standard’ for others to follow. They have to set the precedence for others to follow. Hence Rama always speaks for ‘duty’ and sacrifices the personal emotions. He even tells Lakshmana that as the prince of Ayodhya he knows all these things already. He makes Lakshmana aware that he too has followed the same path of duty by sacrificing the personal. Rama makes his brother aware that Lakshmana has come with them in the forest as he feels it was his ‘duty’ to do so.

Rama, like a very intelligent but dominating dictator tries to assert his opinions upon Lakshmana. He quotes Lakshmana’s example to support his argument. Rama is using different relations and events to weave his own discursive formations. He involves Lakshmana in his formations by referring to his actions. He makes Lakshmana feel the part of his discourse. Rama’s discourse of duty operates at two levels. On the one hand, he tries to create his own knowledge, a set of statements; which generally go unchallenged. As seen in earlier instances, knowledge formation is necessary part for maintaining any discourse. His views on duty and emotions seem to form a specific set of ideology, which prioritizes ‘duty’ over ‘emotions’, ‘social’ over ‘personal’. Such knowledge formation is absolutely necessary to project the only one dimension of any situation. By doing this other possibilities are kept away from any serious consideration. Knowledge support is absolutely necessary for any ideology to consolidate its position. Rama seems to create his own code of behavior, which afterwards gets consolidated through his efforts of knowledge formation. Thus he combines his ideological positions with his knowledge formation procedures. His discourse is directed towards creating standards and codes of behaviour. To facilitate its operation, Rama indirectly imposes his view by recoloring them as the ‘universal’ knowledge. Through the protection of knowledge, Rama’s discourse of code gets consolidated. Like any dictator, Rama too requires knowledge to foster his discourse. All this is done to preserve his position as ‘the prince’ and the ‘future king’. Interestingly he has left kingdom (Ayodhya) but he has not been able to get rid of the thought of kingship. He always puts human beings at the secondary position after the God or the divine. Rama himself is considered as the incarnation of the divine and thus he gets the priority over other ‘common’ human being automatically. His discursive formations are supported by
these classification or bifurcation of things (referring to Saussure’s term of ‘binary opposition’). In such bifurcation one thing gets foregrounded over the other. Gods becomes important than humans, man becomes important than woman, a hermit or*anyasi* than a common man, intelligence than emotions, duty than desires, sacrifice than possessions, simple than intricate or fanciful, peace than conflicts, serious than playful, studied than spontaneous, conformist than innovative. These and many more such categories exist due to different discursive formations. Rama, who is in *vanvaas*(exile), continues to form his own discourse through his expression and behavior.

Generally it is believed that discourse is a necessary medium for anyone who wishes to dominate others and keep his powerful position intact. In the earlier analysis, the discursive formations of Kreon or Ephraim Cabot or the Greek kings have proved this fact. They have some power positions, institutional support, and the state machinery to form and consolidate their discourse. All of them have some or the other power position. In case of Rama in *Sita’s Promise*, there is no such situation at least apparently. Though he is a price of Ayodhya, he is in exile. Hence he does not hold any powerful position. He has no one to rule or dictate directly. No position is held therefore there is no threat of losing it. He does not have any material interests like the Greek kings or Ephraim Cabot to achieve or any political interests like Kreon to keep. Rama who is a symbol of decency, restrain, good behavior, and moral-uprightness. He is respected and worshipped for these virtues. Therefore it is off bit and awkward to associate Rama, in the same line with Kreon, Ephraim or Agamemnon. In what sense, Rama’s discourse is different from others. For what purpose does he form discourse? What are its implications? Such and many more questions are lingering in and out of the text.

The play presents Rama, not as the king and the prince, but as a human being. Though he is endowed with the divine powers, he is basically ‘human’ being. He too has wishes and dreams like others. He may suffer from different human emotions. In the traditional epic and traditional stories, only the divine side of Rama is highlighted, but what about his ‘human’ aspect. Rama in the context of the present play is more ‘human’ than ‘divine’. Once he is put into the role of human beings, he has to suffer from the human lacunas. Human beings make
constant efforts to establish their identity and authority over others. Power is the irresistible thing for any human mind. Such power could be political, economic, social, cultural or even moral. One wishes to assert his / her identity through the consolidation of any type of power. It gives a human being much needed attention and recognition which is absolutely necessary for him to build and maintain his identity. Power thus is a mental requirement for almost everyone. Rama, though apparently seems to be powerless as he is, holds the moral authority over others. He is known for his truth, justice and poised behavior; which is considered as the supreme virtues in any society. Most of the common human beings could not exhibit or follow these virtues for a long time. Hence the rare people like Rama are respected for following these virtues. They become the metaphor for ‘moral authority’. Their behavior is regarded as the standard path for others to follow. This is necessary for any culture to come into the proper shape. Certain models are created for others to follow. Rama is one such model of moral and pure life. He is the ‘unique’ case of such model behavior. Rama is being granted the special status in the cultural setup. Rama gets automatically powerful because of this status. He is considered as the epitome of the moral standards. There are many expressions in Indian languages referring to Rama’s authority like ‘Ramarajya’ or ‘Ramaneeti’. The image of Rama is already established and Rama has to follow that image. Hence Rama is uni-dimensional, rigid, conservative, and repetitive in the play. Rama’s discourse of duty is necessary for protecting his moral authority. It is a kind of power position which gets consolidated through discursive formations. He has to create different ideological practices like generating doubts regarding Sita’s maturity or his constant stress on duty and responsibility. In addition he creates epistemic formations to safeguard his position and interests by way of creating distance between God and human beings. Rama’s discourse is surely for keeping his ‘moral’ position intact over others. Once he is brought to the levels of human beings, it is easy to show his struggle to keep his position intact. Rama’s image, his thoughts and actions; all contribute towards creating discourse of code. This discourse prescribe to certain rules and regulations related to behavior; it upholds certain aspects or qualities ‘superior’ over others; it sanctions certain pattern of behavior over other; it offers different images and stereotypes to follow; it also excludes those things which do not prescribe to the above codes. Rama can be seen as doing all these things to protect his moral
authority. Rama’s discourse is an inseparable part of any social structure, irrespective of time and space considerations. It encompasses almost everything and presents everywhere. Even the most celebrated and revered characters like Rama or Krishna (as in Andha Yug) are not exceptions to this ‘anxiety of discourse’.
4.2.2

‘Our Noble brother is finally amused’:

Countering the Code – Discourse of Lakshmana and Sita

Discourse moves in a circulating manner, instead of a sequential way. Every discourse gives birth to counter discourse/s. As every discourse establishes itself through different strategies, its counter discourse uses the same strategies to destabilize discourse. Any discourse generally stands on two foundations – ideology and institution. Counter discourse/s target these foundations. It deconstructs these foundations by challenging their validity. Institutions are power centers through which power gets operated as it consists of different positions and relations. Ideology supports these institutional operations by mentally capturing the very thought process. In the present play, the main or traditional discourse is formed by Rama; discourse of code. He carefully employs different strategies to establish his moral authority. It includes projection of images like ‘responsible and immature’ or ‘God and human’ or ‘knowledgeable and ignorant’; creation and enforcement of different codes for example ‘a queen cannot be playful, ‘one should not make open expression of emotions’ and prioritizing certain things over the others, in which duty is favored over desire, reason over emotions, responsibility over love etc. Rama seems to follow all these procedures to design his discourse which is challenged and destabilized by Lakshmana and Sita. Traditionally Sita and Lakshmana are considered as the inseparable part of Rama’s identity and thinking, to that extent that their identities are merged with Rama. They are always presented as the ‘follower’ of Rama. They traditionally occupy the secondary positions to Rama, maintaining their distance and difference from the human-God. In the context of the present play, their roles, images and identities undergo a sea change. This is a kind of counter discourse. Unconventional projection of the traditional characters is challenging their age-old images. Lakshmana and Sita do not appear in their traditional manner but they not only show different traits of thought and behavior but even question and oppose Rama at many instances. Their counter discourse can be seen at three levels in its operation – they present themselves in unconventional ways for example both of them are free and lively, they have a good fusion of emotions
and sensibility. Secondly they challenge the normative practices or accepted things by question traditional thoughts, attitudes and actions for example Sita criticizes Rama for looking at things from two dimensions only. She suggest the possibility of some other option which is never considered by traditional Rama, Lastly they show skepticism about Rama’s actions and thinking. They question his philosophical positions in the matters of relation between man and god, and even challenge his actions as in case of the girl when Rama criticizes her behaviour. Theyin turn create their own ideological strategies and new models of knowledge.

Mythological characters always present themselves in a particular manner. They carry their own image, with which many characteristic features or virtues are attached. Sita, for example is always to be seen as serious, deep, obedient, introvert. Lakshmana too is always perceived as the shadow of Rama, who is the staunch follower of his brother’s words and actions. Sita and Lakshmana are always to be seen on the periphery the circle, the centre of which is obviously Rama. Both are respected but not in the same line that of Rama. Projecting these age-old images of Sita and Lakshmana can be seen as the starting point of counter discourse strategies. Lakshmana, unlike Rama, appears to be very fresh and in jovial mood. At the time of entry, he is shown as ‘smiling with boyish satisfaction’. (SP 48) He is carrying a small bird. He wants to show it to Sita as she would like it. His excitement at the entry is contrastingly juxtaposed against Rama’s serious attitude. The difference in their characters and attitude are established at the beginning. Sita too is shown in the unconventional ways right from the beginning.

She is in her twenties, but as Rama has said, she has the naivety of an unspoilt girl. (SP 48)

Sita is described as ‘innocent’ and ‘unspoilt’ girl. She is still not a woman and she is a pure. Does the narrator wish to suggest that she is ‘pure’ as she is not contaminated by codes, traditions and inhabitation of becoming the queen? She appears to be extremely ‘natural’ and ‘spontaneous’ when she comes across the wounded bird. When she looks at the wounded bird, she feels sorry for the bird. She gets attached to the bird very easily. She feels for the bird whereas Rama is very much detached with the bird. Sita’s purity is also evident in her approach
towards the local or native girls. She is extremely comfortable with them. She gels well with them even though she hardly understands their language. She teaches them dance. Lakshmana too seems to be interested in such small matters. They stay in that local for over a period of ten years. Sita and Lakshmana have mixed themselves with the environment and the people of Dandakarnya. They have assimilated in the geo-cultural set up. They have adjusted with the changes and new ways of life, especially Sita. She seems to possess this natural trait to get along with any responsibility that is given to her. Lakshmana appreciates this quality in Sita when Rama raises doubts about her prospects as ‘a girl-queen’. He defends Sita in front of Rama by saying that the Sita belongs to the royal family and therefore she knows what is required to be a queen. He confidently tells Rama that they will easily switchover from the free life in forest to their duties in Ayodhya. Lakshmana, very interestingly, is telling something about Sita to Rama. This is an unconventional projection of the relation between Sita and Rama. Lakshmana seems to know more about Sita than Rama. Their informal and natural relation continues throughout the play. Untraditionally Lakshmana seems to share so many things with Sita and vice-versa. She too appears more at ease and confident with Lakshmana. Rama fails to understand Sita’s capacity to adjust with any type of situation. Lakshmana makes Rama aware about her royal birth. He distances himself from Rama by calling him ‘Sire’. Sire means ‘father’; a kind of senior person. Lakshmana is ‘sarcastic’ in calling him father. It probably shows the inability of Rama to understand the real nature of Sita. It also indicates the distance between both of them. Lakshmana seems to challenge the very base of Rama’s discourse, when he ironically distances himself from it. All these events are actually unconventional. Lakshmana is supposed to follow Rama in everything, without questioning anything as Rama is always considered to be ‘right’. The play presents another version of Lakshmana. Lakshmana in Sita’s Promise does not follow Rama in any sense. His appearance, thoughts, attitude and expression differ from Rama. He appears to be direct and sarcastic. Thus the counter discourse is established through unconventional images and new positions within family. Sita and Lakshmana seem to be closer with each other than their relation with Rama. It is like brother-sister as well as friendly relation. She shares so many things with Lakshmana instead of Rama. Lakshmana too participates with Sita in many activities like mixing with local people or fortune telling or
even later on helping the mourning girl. Sita seems to trust Lakshmana more when it comes to sharing emotional things. They support each other over the issue of taking the wounded bird to its home in the Artic, when Rama is not very keen for that.

Lakshmana : It wants to go home. Why not we take it back to its home?

Sita : (thrilled) Yes, yes, let’s. Rama, Oh. Please let’s do that. (SP 50)

This is a kind of reversal of family hierarchy, where Rama is supposed to be the unchallenging centre. However Rama is questioned by both – Lakshmana and Sita and they do not follow his opinion. They are posed exactly opposite to Rama. They appear to belong to two different camps – Rama in the one and Sita and Lakshmana in the other. Rama’s serious, upright, dethatched, calculated, mundane behavior is put in contrast against lively, natural, creative, mixing nature of Lakshmana and Sita. This is a type of rearrangement of hierarchy where Lakshmana and Sita are not placed below Rama but beside him. Thus the rearrangement creates parallel positions instead of descending positions. There are different ways of looking at the same things. In the counter discourse traditional things are positioned in the new manner.

Image projection is one way of creating counter discursive strategy. Along with this unconventional image delineation, conventions or normative practices are challenged to dislodge the traditional perspectives. Challenging the standard procedures or norms is the main instrument in destabilizing the dominant discourse.

Any discourse, as shown earlier, prescribes to different norms and practices, which in turn consolidates the discursive formations. Practices are the smaller blocks through which larger missions can be achieved. Normative practices are helpful to create an atmosphere of consensus could be created. Rama, indirectly though suggests certain norms of behavior and thought for others to follow. Interestingly these norms and practices are challenged by Lakshmana and Sita. Lakshmana at the very beginning seems to challenge Rama’s perception about Sita regarding her suitability as a queen. Rama feels that Sita is bit ‘pampered’ in their stay in Dandakarnya. However Lakshamana seems to be sure about Sita and her behavior than Rama. He does not hesitate in expressing this in
front Rama. Lakshmana seems to be more caring about Sita than Rama. He is not hesitant in expressing his grievances and queries about the standards pronounced by Rama. He looks at Rama with respect but having doubts about his attitude and convictions. He looks at Rama as a person having great knowledge of the world. When Sita is curious to know about the wounded bird from Lakshmana, he redirects her to Rama. He puts it as, “My brother is better versed in such knowledge.” (SP 50) Through such apparently simple statements, Lakshmana seems to challenge Rama’s attitude towards looking at the world. He wishes to suggest that Rama looks at everything as an object that manifest some type of knowledge. Rama is not interested in the bird itself but more in the knowledge about it. Lakshamana keeps questioning the attitude and perception of Rama regarding the world. Lakshamana’s real intentions could be to show that Rama is only ‘knowledgeable’ about things but he fails to understand emotions inside the things. Traditionally Rama is known for his dynamic and divine capacity of knowledge. However knowledge cannot only make man’s life complete and perfect. Lakshamana is a way distances himself from Rama in this regard. Probably this could be the reason why he asks Sita to know more about the bird from Rama instead of him.

Lakshaman, on the other hand emerges as ‘sensitive’ though not knowledgeable. He is the one who comes with the idea of taking the bird to its home. He shows lot of sympathy to the ‘lost’ bird probably because Lakshamana knows the pangs of ‘separation’ from the home, family and dear ones. His perspective towards looking at the bird differs from Rama drastically. Rama looks at the bird with compassion while Lakshamana looks at it with emotions. The counter discourse breaks the conventional structures and hierarchies. Discourse projects Rama more significant than Lakshamana. However the counter discourse strategies place Rama and Lakshamana at the same level. Rama lacks certain things which Lakshamana possesses. Making Rama and Lakshamana appear at the same level is itself a very small but a revolutionary task. The counter discourse proceeds with such small task towards consolidation and the final effect. If Rama is considered as the centre of discourse, which enforces code, responsibilities, images then Lakshamana is the epicenter of counter thinking and behavior.
Lakshmana mocks at Rama’s attitude on many occasions. When Rama express his disapproval about the open lamentation of the woman, Lakshmana remarks,

Lakshmana *(with an inflection of sarcasm)* Our noble brother is not amused. *(SP 54)*

Lakshmana is mocking Rama’s ‘serious’ attitude about everything, where nothing ‘amuses’ him and he cannot amuse anyone. Such instances show Lakshmana’s attempt to expose Rama’s too divine, in-human and unnatural behavior, which is unfit for any human soul. Sita too joins Lakshmana in challenging Rama’s way of thinking and actions. She too mocks at their stay in Dandakarṇya by calling it ‘too peaceful’; she probably refers to their mundane, uneventful life during their stay in exile. Contrary to Rama, Sita is not at all excited to go to Ayodhya as it is full of ‘noise and worry’. She differs in her opinion with Rama. Rama wishes to go back and take the responsibilities of the kingdom. Sita however does not seem interested to join the rush of the kingship. She loves to live more calm and natural life, like a bird. That could be the reason why she sympathizes with the bird, which is unable to fly. She does not wish to lose her freedom by confining herself in the royal palace. She wishes to undertake new experiences. She mocks Rama for being able ‘to see only two options’. She wants to be more creative and innovative than just thinking about Ayodhya or spending the time idly in the forest. She seems to challenge Rama’s plans.

..... can’t I be bored with our routine here and still not look forward to the duties that await us? Can’t I long for something else, to see the world. *(SP 50)*

Sita is full of vigour and imagination. She challenges Rama’s views regarding their duties in Ayodhya, about the wounded birds and regarding the limited view of life. Both, Lakshmana and Sita are in no mood of compromise on certain issues with Rama. They not only differ from him but make it a point to voice their dissent. They do not accept Rama’s views without criticizing it. They both have analytical ability and poise of emotions with sensitivity. They blend emotions with thoughts. Their challenging roles made them unconventional characters. Both of them do not imitate Rama’s thoughts and actions. Rather they try to discover their own self. They are not the blind followers of the traditional
hierarchies and conventional roles. Therefore Sita appears to very natural and pure. She feels for the bird, she loves to wonder at new places, she mixes with common local girls. She wants to learn from the native girls about how to be so happy and carefree. She is with the common people and she does not have any airy ideas life. As compared to Rama, Lakshmana and Sita are more assimilated in the local environment and people. Rama seems not to appreciate all these things as he has Ayodhya in his mind all the time. Sita and Lakshmana offer a complete new way of looking at life. For them emotions and journey are the two most important things, as they help one to understand human beings. They attempt to develop a different philosophy about life. The sense of the present is more important for them than the anxiety of future. They love natural and carefree behavior than finding knowledge in each thing. They appreciate the happy and sad events in life rather than criticizing them like Rama. They are more balanced, satisfied than Rama. In Rama’s contrast, Lakshmana and Sita are surely better persons having their own philosophy to face the life. Their differences with Rama and challenges posed through their words and actions form a core part of counter discourse strategy.

Lakshmana continues to challenge Rama on various issues both philosophical and practical. He has already shown his differences with Rama’s ideology practically through his emotional concerns about simple and common things. At the level of spirituality also Lakshmana seems to differ from Rama’s views, especially on the issue of man and divine relations. Rama believes that human beings are different from the divinity and hence cannot attend to it. On the contrary, Lakshmana perceives human existence as inspired by the divine. He appears to disagree with Sita’s views that man is weak. Rather he feels that man is ‘divine’. These views stand against Rama’s perception of the relation between the man and the God. Rama distances man from the divinity whereas Lakshmana believes that divinity resides in man. They are united and one. There is no separation. Rama looks at the external world as *maya* or something fictitious. Lakshmana on the other hand looks as it as the manifestation of the divine.

…. Look at the works of humankind – our temples silhouetted against the dawn, our gardens and golden fields carved out of forests and deserts ….”

*(SP 58)*
Lakshmana looks at human creation and man’s creativity as the manifestations of the divine. The unity of ‘atma’ and ‘Brahma’ is accepted by Lakshmana. He seems to be sure about human capacity to reach to the God. He feels that poets have touched the face of God that shows his belief in human capacity to reach to the level of divinity. He believes in the inseparable nature of human and divine, which cannot be broken because of any external thing. He questions the very doubt in this regard,

…. How can any seeing, feeling, touching merely human being doubt the divinity of the fire within us? (SP 58)

Lakshmana disapproves Rama’s argument that any external bodily actions can impure the divine elements within us. In the matters of divinity, Lakshmana scores over Rama. Rama has got inherent doubts about man’s capacity to find and know the divine, while Lakshmana believes that there is no need to search the divinity outside. It is very much present within us. Here Lakshmana can be seen as the one who has come out of Rama’s influence completely. He is now liberated individual as far as his thinking and actions are concerned. Traditionally the hierarchal set up would project Lakshmana as always the true follower of Rama, in word and spirit. He is supposed to exist as the shadow of Rama, as an astute follower. Lakshmana, in the context of the play has already left his traditional image behind. He is meditative and challenging regarding the expression of his views. He challenges the very foundation of Rama’s philosophy which separates the man and the divine. He appears to be more natural and balanced and yet he is philosophical. Lakshmana’s character actually is placed at the centre stage in the play, which on the one hand compliments and strengthens Sita and also initiates changes in Rama’s attitude. Putting Lakshmana at the centre-stage is itself an act of counter discourse. Bringing the elements, which are at the periphery to the centre of attention, is one of the effective counter discourse strategies. This strategy allows the ‘marginal’ or ‘supplementary’ elements to voice out there feelings and expressions. Lakshmana, in the traditional sense cannot be expected to challenge Rama’s attitude or his philosophy. Revisiting these characters can offer a unique opportunity to understand them from the different perspective and perception. Lakshmana’s placement at the centre induces the re-arrangement of all other related elements. Hence Rama is pushed in the background and Sita and
Lakshmana are elevated at the same level. Close observance of the counter discourse strategies offer the chance of looking at the same things from a fresh way, counting the gaps and breaks in between the dominant discourse.

At other instances too Lakshmana’s philosophical bend of character and thought is visible. Lakshmana offers his unique knowledge about the issue of ‘separation’ from the near and dear ones. He offers the unique interpretation about reality when he discusses his separation from Urmila. He tells Sita that they always ‘see and feel’ each other even they are physically separated. He dreams about her and he feels that dreams are often more real and satisfying than actual sight and touch. Lakshmana seems to prefer dreams than the reality. Is ‘imaginative’ reality more beautiful than the physical reality? Is imagination or fantasy better than the ‘real’? In the absence of the physical reality, one can feel the loved ones in spirit only. That probably is the best way to feel for your people. He knows the pangs of separation but at the same time separation has given him the opportunity to experience ‘spiritual’ love. There exists a world outside the sensual world. The real pleasures can be found in the spiritual experiences. He describes his experience as follows,

As Sri is not Narayana, as Shakti is to Siva is Urmila to me. Without her I am nothing. At times I feel strength surging through my body and I know then that she is thinking of me, praying for me, reaching out in spirit and embracing me.(SP 59)

Lakshmana is referring to the tremendous spiritual energy that human beings possess in spite of the physical separation. Urmila is the ‘power’ behind his divinity. Thus Lakshmana knows the power of love even in the absence of the person, which even Rama does not have experienced so far. Rama has never been separated from Sita the way Lakshmana is away from Urmila. He knows how one’s heart can be enlightened by the feeling of love and devotion. Hence Sita wants him, instead of Rama to accompany and guide Valli, a girl in search of her lover-God. Sita too believes that Lakshmana is more ‘knowledgeable’ than Rama in the matters of spiritual love and physical separation. Lakshmana seems to be more ‘sensitive’ and ‘knowledgeable’ than Rama in this regard too. Moreover Rama stands for more formal, bookish knowledge whereas Lakshmana stands for empirical knowledge. The reversal of hierarchies can be seen again in this event.
Rama is always considered as the epitome of knowledge of all types. In the present play though Lakshmana emerges as the centre of philosophy and knowledge. He is the one who challenges the age-old, traditional, bookish, repetitive mode of Rama’s thought and actions. He comes up with a new type of arrangement regarding the relationship between man and God, spiritual love and physical separation and meditative and sensitive approach towards life and beyond. Lakshmana in this sense can be called as the central character in the play, which replaces traditional arrangement which was centered on Rama. Providing voice to the voiceless and marginalized is one way of achieving the deconstruction of the hierarchies in the social structure. It offers a chance to understand the reality from totally different perspectives, which was hitherto hidden or was kept hidden by the dominant discourse strategy.

Alongwith challenging the conventions and normative practices, Lakshmana and Sita show lot of questioning spirit regarding Rama’s views and even his philosophy. Through this skepticism, Lakshmana and Sita destabilize the ideological and philosophical foundation of many ‘normal’ or ‘taken for granted’ things. In this process they create their own philosophy or a mode of knowledge. Destabilizing the current modes and creating new forms of knowledge is another counter discourse strategy exhibited by Lakshmana and Sita. Rama is always respected for his restrains and knowledge. He is always to be seen as the staunch follower of the principles – moral, social, cultural and hierarchal. He speaks with some position, mostly judgmental on any issue. Though knowledgeable, Rama fails to appreciate things emotionally. He lacks experience and sensitivity. Being the god in a human form and the would-be-king, Rama fails to sympathize with the girl, who passes across them. She is lamenting for losing her lover, who is turned out to be Lord Vishnu. Rama criticizes her for displaying the emotions openly. He emphasizes the importance of duty and reason than desires and emotions in the human life. Lakshmana appears agitated by Rama’s expression. He actually counter attacks his brother-God by making him realise that Rama always talk by the book. He doeseverything, for the sake of duty and not because he enjoys it. Lakshmana here seems to question Rama’s abilities, especially his capacity to know the things. He accuses Rama for responding everything in the bookish (already decided) manners. Rama has borrowed his knowledge as written
in the holy books or scriptures. His responses to everything are ‘calculated’ or ‘studied’. According to Lakshmana, Rama does not do things because he likes them; rather he does all his acts because it is ‘expected’ from him. He behaves according to the prescribed rules and not because he is involved in them. Lakshmana criticizes Rama’s dispassionate behavior.

..... You help the hermits not because you admire their renunciation, but because it is your duty; you risk your life fighting demons not because you are angry at their vilenes but because of duty; you love your wife not because she is so lovely, so pure, so devoted, but because it is your duty.\(^{(SP 54)}\)

This is probably would be the most harsh comment on Rama’s behavior throughout the play. Rama’s character and expressions are labeled as ‘bookish and dutiful’ by Lakshmana. Rama, as quoted above, lacks the interest and involvement in the life. His approach is mechanical. Too much rationality and discipline can ruin your life, is what the message that Lakshmana wishes to offer through his comments. He further questions Rama regarding his authority to teach people.

Rama, who are you to preach, you who have never felt temptation or the sorrow of separation, never felt torn between love and duty?\(^{(SP 55)}\)

Rama is above the common man yet he is a man. Though he is an incarnation of the divine, he cannot avoid the human element inside him. Lakshmana refers to the very common and yet unavoidable small emotional battles, which every human being faces. How can Rama keep himself away from it? Is it possible and advisable to ignore your emotional side of life? Is it possible to live with rationality only – a kind of imbalance? Is Rama an ‘imbalanced’ person, who is only governed by the sense of duty? All these questions amount to the dissipation of Rama’s conventional image. At the same time Lakshmana emerges as the revolutionary character. He is successfully reverses Rama’s argument that Lakshmana has also given importance to duty than desires when he accompanied Rama in the forest. Lakshmana strongly opposes his by making him realise that it was Lakshamana’s love and not just a sense of duty that has brought him with Rama to forest. Lakshmana makes Rama conscious that human relations
are not governed by the sense of duty but by the strong bond of love. He explains his stand to Rama.

My duty was to my mother …. my duty was to my father …. my duty was to my wife, whose youth I have abandoned to fade and wilt in solitude and barrenness. *(SP 55)*

Lakshmana surely reverses Rama’s argument by making him aware about his ‘sacrifice’ of his desires for Rama’s sake. Lakshmana makes him conscious that there is a domain of life that goes beyond ‘duty’ and ‘reason’. Desires are the chief motives for anyone to live life and create bonds. If one does not have desires and feelings, one would miss the zest of life. Ramacannot experience or understand this probably because of his divine orientation. Lakshmana criticizes Rama for being ignorant practically about the ‘soul’s anguish’ or the ‘body’s hungers’.

Lakshmana through the issue of feelingsprobably indicates the difference between the human and the divine. Rama’s existence probably lies beyond ‘emotional’ and ‘physical’ realities. If it is so, is he doing injustice to Sita? He seems to touch upon this point when he refers to Rama’s Godliness and ‘relates it to Sita’s condition. Rama is divine and hence he may be beyond all the physical and soul’s pangs, but what about Sita’s emotions and desires. Lakshamana is making it clear that Rama unintentionally though is rejecting these humanly emotions to Sita. Lakshmana is focusing the very crucial point in their relationship. Rama may be an obedient son, dutiful prince but he may not equally be a ‘good’ husband. Lakshmana’s indication is towards the sufferings of Sita and himself too because of Rama’s divine nature. Rama cannot share the same level with Lakshmana and Sita, physically as well as emotionally. Hence he probably fails to understand their ‘emotional’ needs. He performs his duties but cannot involve himself with them. Lakshmana highlights the problems in Rama’s personality. This is a kind of image – destruction of Rama. Rama is respected as the God’s incarnation. He symbolizes many virtues and principles. However Lakshmana reveals the other side of coin. Problems with great people are also towering. Rama is too towering a person to mix with common ones, but then all those who are with him also suffer because of his magnitude. Lakshmana presents his counter discourse against Rama and his philosophy. Counter discourse
strategies involve creation of new modes of knowledge. New modes of knowledge can be created through challenging and replacing the existing one. Lakshmana exposes the fundamental problems related to Rama’s divinity. He reverses Rama’s argument in favour of duty and rationality. Rather he shows that emotions and desires are the key elements in human life. Lakshmana manages to shift focus from Rama’s traditional knowledge and principles to something which was considered as ‘lesser’ or ‘unimportant’ hitherto. Reversal or replacement of traditional forms is a part of counter discourse. Lakshmana becomes the centre of counter discourse strategies in the play because of this reason only.

Sita is always considered as the inseparable element of Rama’s existence and personality. She is expected to support and follow Rama in everything he does. Her personality is always seen as immersed in Rama’s personality. However in the context of the play, Sita’s character is projected in different dimension. She can be seen doubting, questioning, contesting Rama’s views and perceptions, leaving her traditional image behind. She incites Rama on many issues, which ultimately reveals Rama’s discourse of code and dominance. She criticizes Rama for being too rigid and narrow-sighted. She shows lot of zest and passion to live life, instead of restrain and discipline. She poses challenge to many traditional and patriarchal ideas of Rama. She expresses her serious concerns regarding Rama’s claim about man’s relation with God, issue of self-control and duty. She can be seen to support Lakshmana when he challenges Rama’s notion of responsibility in the bookish manner. She is the one who can share the pangs of separation. She makes Rama aware of their inseparable relation,

What’s Time? This mysterious Time that makes a day seem a year when you are away, and a year a day when you’re near? (SP 52-58)

It is impossibility for Sita to live without Rama as she is emotionally involved in him. This could be the reason why she can understand the condition of Valli. She probably therefore insists that they should take the bird to its home in Artic. Sita is responsible to make Rama realize his mistake to ignore the emotional aspect of human life. Rama finally appreciates the condition of Lord Krishna as ‘human lover as a god, God as a human lover.’ Change in Rama’s perception is surely due to the Lakshmana’s direct and Sita’s more subtle counter discourse. They all take the bird to its house, where they get the opportunity to
experience Siva in Tillai and Vishnu. Thus Sita and Lakshmana are responsible to take Rama to the divinity. Rama could only see and meet Siva and Vishnu due to their insistence to go to the Artic. Rama is turned into a wise person from just a unidimensional knowledge person. Challenging the stereotypical image of Rama and initiating transformations in him are due to the counter discursive strategies of Sita and Lakshmana.

As every discourse has specific purpose to serve, in the same manner every counter discourse has some specific purpose to meet. In case of the counter discourse practices employed by Sita and Lakshmana three basic purposes can be laid down. They project the unconventional image of the age-old characters, they question and challenge the discursive formations of Rama and finally they are successful in establishing their own modes of practices and knowledge. They wish to establish their individual identity as well as ideology. At the end they almost change the traditional hierarchal set up of perceptions like human and divine, knowledge and wisdom, fixed and change, duty and reason, emotions and responsibilities, freedom and confinement. They almost occupy Rama’s central position. Their counter discourse is directed towards the tendencies, views, perceptions and attitude of Rama rather than Rama as an individual. They seem to challenge the traditional modes of established knowledge which is represented by Rama. All established modes of behavior and knowledge might not be necessarily permanent. They can be shaky and destabilized by the innovative modes of knowledge and actions. Sita and Lakshmana are the characters of new age and new spirit. They do not just challenge Rama’s discourse but at the same time, ensure the creation of new and alternative modes. It shows that countering involves the process of destruction and construction together. Sita and Lakshmana show this sense and action, which ultimately create transformation in Rama’s attitude. It is quite rare that counter discourse is successful in bringing the change in the established or traditional discourse. The play present this rarity, where traditionally subsidiary, dependent, common characters like Sita and Lakshmana are able to challenge and change all-potent, unique, central Rama’s discourse through their subtle counter discourse. Rama is transformed so much that those aspects of human life which he would not considered hitherto have stared ‘amusing’ him.
4.2.3.

The Ramayana’s New *ArcticaKanda*: Reimagining and Reimagining Sita

The Ramayana, the epic written by Maharshi Valmiki is the spirit and backbone of Indian culture and life even in the 21st century. It is a story voicing the most fundamental emotions of the humanity i.e. love and compassion. It is therefore referred as *adikavya*, an epic in the realm of poetics. Mythology in India is not just an academic or historical subject but it is a vital and living topic of contemporary relevance. India cannot be understood without an understanding of our myths and their impact on the collective faith of people. Sister Nivedita observes, “To Indians however, the characters in these myths are not just superhuman beings of some hoary past rather, they are paradigms. This is why these religions and myths are still living today.” (Myths and Legends 37)

The mythical characters serve as paradigms for ideal ruler, hero, householder, hermit, devotee, wife, husband, brother, servant, monk and so on. The Ramayana myth provides numerous characters-superhuman, human and animals also exhibiting different ideals and dimensions of human life. Along with Rama, Sita is the most sought after character in the entire volume of Indian mythology. Sita is revered for her character and infidelity. Since Kalidasa’s *Raghuvaṃśa* or Bhavabhuti’s *UttaraRamacharita*, Sita has been portrayed as being utterly and unquestioningly in love with her husband. She is always shown as brave, always dutiful and does everything to preserve the fabric of the traditional family set up. She indicates her anguish and exerts her autonomy by departing from this world after being asked to take the fire test, but only after having completed the full circle of her duties. Sita, in some version of the Ramayana is perceived as the principle excuse for the defeating Ravana and conquest of Lanka. Gandhiji saw Sita as a symbol for a woman’s struggle in a man’s world precisely because her chastity holds off Ravana. She has always been shown as brave and powerful but at the same times she is subdued and passive. This Sita is a full of opposite forces which could be the reason for her continuous appearance in the Indian culture, arts and other fields. Even inthe contemporary time, the number of workson Sita in different languages has kept her image alive in the minds of Indian readers. From the early in the 20th century examples like *Sita-Suvarnamrga natak* (1913), the Kannada playbyDugdhanath
Khaund, Gopinath Nanda’s Oriya play *Janaki Parinaya* (1915) and the Marathi play *Dhanurbhanga Natak* (1917) by Narayana Bamanagaonkar, till the contemporary adaptation of Sita story through works like *The Day of the Golden Deer* (2009) by Shashi Deshpande and *Sita’s Letter to Her Unborn Daughter* (2009) by Chandra Ghosh Jain the hypnotic exploration of Sita’s character continues. All these works are based on one of the four important episodes from the *Ramayana*: the marriage of Sita, the incident of the golden deer, the abduction of Sita by Ravana and the banishment of Sita by Rama. The focus of such works are more on showing her bravery or sacrifice and thus making her more of ideal than a human being.

*Sita’s Promise*, a dance drama written by Uma Parameswaran stands out in this string. This dance drama uses the mythical characters from the Ramayana, like Rama, Lakshamana and Sita and places them in the imaginative situation. They are at *Dandakaranya* in the exile of fourteen years which is about to end. One day Lakshamana and Sita find a wounded bird, which has migrated from the Artic. They decide to take the bird to his homeland towards the northern region. While going there, three of them get to know so much about each other. Their perspective to look at each other changes. They leave the bird in its homeland and experience the presence of Shiva in the most divine form at Tillai. During this journey Sita and Lakshamana come to their self. They discard their traditional image as secondary to Rama. The story at the end shows Sita and Lakshamana in more spirited and independent way. Thus the adaptation of the Ramayana story into the imaginative situation directs towards the revelation of Sita’s character which is conventionally confined under the garb of particular image. Sita is uncharacteristically deviant from her traditional image in the new adaptation. By imagining Sita in a totally different geo-cultural context, the adapted play sets her free from all the confines of traditions. This process of reimagining Sita in the different role is done through the adaption of the Ramayana characters, not a particular story or event and placing them into an unknowingly different cultural context. The characters from Ramayana are travelling in the Arctic region is purely a fantastic story. Rama, Sita and Lakshamana can be seen talking about or doing those things which no one would have imagined about them. The adaptation allows these characters to exhibit their ‘new’ identity as they are in free environment. Hence it would be proper to take the review of the interconnectedness between culture and its reflection in myth.
The Ramayana projects different characters with different traits. Rama as even shown in *Sita’s Promise* is extremely righteous and compassionate. He upholds the dharma than anything else. He carves for the *brahmasatya*; the ultimate truth by exceeding the veil created by *maya*, an unreal temptation. Rama is an embodiment of *dharma* and therefore he is an ideal and perfect human being. He is labeled as *maryadapurshottam*, the ideal for following the restraints of behaviour. He is an adorable king, proficient administrator, immaculate son, amiable husband and loving brother. He destroys Ravana to protect the dharma and the innocents. Sita too carries an image of herself. She is brave, beautiful and determinate. She decides to stand by Rama when he leaves the kingdom. She, being a queen lives in the exile with Rama. She has an unquestioning loyalty for Rama. Although she accepts Rama’s decision to desert her but does not surrender. She on her own gives birth to her son and nurtures them. When she feels that her circle of duties is completed she surrenders herself to the mother earth. She stands for the sacrifice for the others and guardian of principles. Sita thus embodies the womanly but the gusty spirit. Lakshamana always appears as a shadow of Rama, who always follow is brother’s word with utmost sincerity. He stays back and supports Rama in his actions. He is considered as an inseparable part of Rama’s existence. As compared to Rama and Sita, his sacrifice is much more. He leaves his wife, Urmila behind in Ayodhya to join Rama in exile. Lakshamana is a silent support to make Rama a perfect divinely human being. Thus every character in the Ramayana stands for an attribute and a quality, which exceed the human world and signifies the divine reality. The mythical characters do not just show the different personal traits but ways to understand the social and cultural reality. That is why in the words of Sri Aurobindo, the Ramayana

has been an agent of almost incalculable power in the moulding of the cultural mind of India: it has presented to it to be loved and imitated in figures like Rama and Sita, made so divinely and with such a revelation of reality as to become objects of enduring cult and worship. (*The Foundations of Indian Culture* 74)

The Ramayana thus is not just a holy scripture but it is a beacon to everyone. Its cultural value is immense as it assimilates the core elements of the Indian or Hindu culture. Any culture consists of certain basic values, principles and codes which help to foreground the essentials of that culture. It is through these elements the cultural set
up is preserved and nourished. Kroeber & Kluckhohn observe, “Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.” (qtd. in Adler 14)
The Ramayana fits into the above description as it embodies the fundamental Indian cultural values through providing metaphors.

Indian or what is also known as Hindu culture is in no way an easy proposition to define and elaborate by counting few things on the figure tips. It is a complex whole in which many currents and cross currents related to values, practices, norms and models intersect. In spite of this complexity there are certain foundational components of Indian culture which can be put in black and white. Indian culture is rested upon the solid foundation of Vedas, Upanishadas and Bhagavad-Gita which consist of different principles regarding the human behaviour and code. The spirituality and religion are the main aspects of Indian culture which are present almost everywhere. Human life is marked with four ends in life- dharma or righteousness, artha or wealth, kama or artistic and cultural life, and moksha or spiritual freedom. These ends can be achieved through different means. In the history of the Indian mind, there is no value more impressive than the emphasis laid by it on the pursuit of knowledge. The Indian mind is, of course, eternally oriented towards the attainment of the ultimate goal of life, which is said to be moksha or liberation: but the basic thing, significant in the present context, is that knowledge is universally agreed to by the Indian mind to be the main, if not the exclusive, means of the attainment of that goal. Knowledge is always held as the key to achieve the intellectual as well as spiritual progress. Knowledge is not a thing to be used for other material purposes. That is the reason why Rama is not very keen about Sita’s anxiety to know about future. He says, “... he accepts each day as it comes, that he works with hope and prayer, not with some knowledge that would make him laze and despair.” (SP 51)

Values like mutual tolerance, accommodation and assimilation form the basis of social-cultural traditions of Indian life. Hindu culture based on the Vedic tradition was essentially tolerant; it assimilated various other groups. Pluralism as a value implied tolerance of other styles of life while preserving one’s own religion. As the
Hindus believed in the existence of many paths leading to the same ultimate reality, it was possible for rulers and peoples of diverse faiths to survive and even prosper in India. Doctrines and rituals certainly differed, but the followers of different religions lived in relative harmony in India.

The concept of Dharma is the central in the Indian traditions. Dharma was an important way of life. The stability of Indian life and culture for long centuries rested on the firm foundation of Dharma. Through the inculcation of the spirit of Dharma high standards of ethics, clear cut codes of behaviour and widespread acceptance of non-material values as of higher importance than possessions came to be the expression in ordinary society of true Indian culture. “Dharma formed from the root dhr, to hold, means that which holds a thing and maintains it in being. Every form of life, every group of men has its dharma, which is the law of its being. Dharmar or virtue is conformity with the truth of things; adharma or vice is opposition to it.” (Radhakrishan, A Hindu Way of Life, 78) Dharma is right action. In the Rg Veda, rta is the right order of the universe. It stands for the satya or the truth of things as well as the dharma or the law of evolution.

The absolute faith in the God’s existence and His active involvement in the universe is the basic belief in the cultural mind of India. God is perceived as omnipotent that has got the exceptional capacities to go beyond time and space coordinates. Rama stresses this element, “But God only can see steadily into the future, for He alone is Lord of Time…” (SP 52) God is capable of holding the real knowledge about the world, which resides somewhere above the layer of false appearance or maya. The real world exists beyond and above this world which is maya however this world is only accessible to God. It is He who can make the common human being aware about the real world. “But God, who perceptually exits beyond Time, can lift the veil of Maya for us ordinary beings.” (SP 53) Thus the human world is separated from the divine world. Human awareness can only see the limited view of the world whereas divine awareness looks at the world where the past and present and future all come together as the Eternal Present. Every human being therefore hasto surrender himself to God through by following the principles of dharma.

Every individual in a society has his moral obligations as a dutiful member of the society, as a good citizen, even if he has also his religious obligations. , the
traditional Indian value of the 'Duties of My Station' or Swadharma is the highest or the worthiest to be preserved in all our future set-up. This sense echoes through Rama’s words’ “… for duty must always, but always come first.” (SP 55) when he advices Lakshamana. Following the duty is Swadharma for Rama. Religion for the Hindus is distinct but surely it is not dividing from others. The freeness and acceptability in Indian culture is a result of its foundation in the Hindu religion. Radhakrishan observes, “The Hindu attitude to religion is interesting. While fixed intellectual beliefs mark off one religion from another, Hinduism sets itself no such limits. Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, and outer expression to inward realisation. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience.” (A Hindu Way of Life 15) As a result of this all moral values are created through the religion. These values make an enlightened path for an individual.

The Ramayana story contains numerous elements which are associated with Indian culture. It consolidates the importance of dharma, a way of life based on the teaching of the religion. Religion creates codes and dharma is associated with the following of these rules. Rama is the embodiment of this spirit of dharma as he upholds the principles like duty and self-control (“Self-control is a cardinal virtue” [SP53]) Rama represents the strict adherence of the codes as it is understood as the way to God. As against this those who do not follow codes of dharma they seems to challenge the God’s existence and hence they are treated as ‘abnormal’. Thus when culture gets mythicized, it develops different codes. Based on these codes there are two categories- follower and non-follower. Following the codes is a normal thing but non-followers are looked as ‘abnormal’ or ‘rebel’. Such non-followers are generally get neglected or marginalised. Valli, the beloved who is searching for her lover is despised by Rama. She is criticised for openly mourning about her love. Rama’s remarks about her; ‘She is intoxicated’, ‘Leave her alone. She is half mad’, suggest the disapproval about her actions, as they do not fit in the framework of code. His skeptical attitude towards Sita for being ‘too natural and spontaneous’ is an indication of his conformity towards these categories. Categories automatically generate hierarchies and position in which few individual or practices are privileged over other. The socio-cultural practices also get divided into major and minor ones. Minor practices are associated with the powerless or marginalised elements. The general
assumptions that cultural practices are smooth or impartial prove to be wrong here, they can be discriminatory and supressing. Cultural practices create the atmosphere of ‘normalcy’ by establishing the certain normative practices as the accepted ones, which generally go unchallenged. They are accepted as common sense or common consciousness. When Rama accuses Valli ‘mad’ when she is mourning for her lover, his accusation goes without much challenge. Rama is just voicing the common feeling in culture. Culture thus excludes many practices by stamping them as ‘insane’ or ‘mad’. It projects things in black and white manner, where there is no scope for the multiple opinions or perspectives. Rama’s insistence on duty, self-control and restrains is an indication to such kind assortment. By projecting only one side of the reality, cultural practices offer the limited view of reality, and thus restricting them from complete knowledge. This is the most crucial function of the mythicisition of culture. Role models like Rama are projected through myths. They show positive and ideal manners but at the same time they supress other voices, which are not in tune with such models. It can therefore be said that the cultural practices are ideological and exclusive. They project a particular ‘world view’ and eliminate other type of modes. The myths target at projecting the ideal models like Rama through which specific meanings are authenticated and hence only certain normative practices get social approval. In the postmodern view any institutional practice and any technique ‘in and through’ which social production of meaning takes place may be considered part of discourse. It therefore can be said that culture becomes discursive through mythicisition.

Interestingly when culture gets discursive through mythicisition, the same myths provide scope and material for the contradictory elements also. Myths can be multivalent and dynamic. They provide opposition to such unidimensional projection of reality. These elements get reflected as a part of cultural set up. In Indian context for example the multiplicity of views and positions is a part of culture. As said earlier the Hindu culture is an amalgamation of so many diverse indigenous cultures, where there are different ways to reach to the ultimate truth. Hindu culture exhibits different faiths, rituals, practices and beliefs. Myths which spring from such cultural setup definitely show the many elements which are not complementary or even conjugal to each other. Sita’s Promise does not take up any particular event from the Ramayana but takes up the characters to develop a complete new narrative. The new
narrative allows the mythical characters to come out from their traditional image. They appear to be liberated and hence behave in the manner that is not expected from them. Sita is very open, natural and free in nature. She appears to be exactly opposite to Rama, as she is more spontaneous than calculated. She urges the local girls to teach her to be happy and carefree. Where Rama thinks about his duty towards the people of Ayodhya and the royal family, Sita is more attracted towards the natural life like a bird. That could be the reason for her sympathy towards the wounded bird. In addition she does not wish to go back to Ayodhya where she has to live a restricted life. Natural life attracts her as it is probably the best setting where one can realise so many things about oneself and about life. Sita believes that in such natural conditions only the divinity can be experienced. This new age Sita carves for the ‘simple’ life rather than the royal life. She feels at home with the tribal girls. She teaches them dance and in return learn their songs. Like a small girl she gets fascinated by the idea of knowing about the future through palm reading. Sita in *Sita’s Promise* is totally divorced from her conventional image, where she is shown as the ‘ardhanginee’ of Rama. Sita in the contemporary adaptation is in no way subordinate or even shadow-like figure to Rama. She could not hesitate to put forth her opinions about anything. She involves herself in dialogue with Rama several times on issues like knowledge, reality and *maya*. Their dialogue reminds the conversation between Shiva and Parvati. She convinces Rama about her views and more importantly she contradicts Rama over several issues. In case of Valli, she openly accuses Rama for being too ‘harsh’ to her. She even does not mindmocking at Rama for being too methodical in thinking. She joins Lakshamana on this issue. She prefers intuition. It is her wish to take the bird to its home at the North Pole initiates their journey. She even feels the emotions of silent bird. She could read the pangs of the bird in her eyes.

Hear how clearly she speaks to us through her eyes, her fluttering wings, her beating heart! Poor, lonely, lost little stranger, come make this your home. (*SP 50*)

Rama is known for his compassion but here Sita is more considerate than Rama. She only is responsible for taking the bird to its home to the Arctic. Sita clearly can be seen as coming out of her traditional image. She appears more to be a human being than a person from the royal family. Sita does seem to suffer from any kind of ‘class consciousness’ or ‘her royal image’. Sita, who can be seen at home with the young
girls by being just like them, appears extremely logical in her arguments with Rama. She clearly overshadows Rama in her blend emotional and intellectually balanced behaviour. The unidimensional character of Rama is set against the manifold behaviour of Sita. The unconventional adaption of the Ramayana characters is primarily used in *Sita's Promise* to break the set traditional images of these characters through the imaginative recreation of the story.

At the end Rama is blessed by both Shiva, through his dance at the Tillai temple and Lord Vishnu, through his appearance on Adisesha. Rama is greeted by Lord Vishnu as ‘my son’. He makes Rama aware about their return to Dandakaranya. Rama who was searching for such experiences through knowledge only gets them in reality. Rama expresses his desire to surrender for such blissed life.

All my days and nights have led to this moment, this beatific moment.

Narayan Narayana! Now I am ready to die for this is life everlasting. (*SP* 61)

Rama, who is known to be the divine incarnation, finally faces the enlightenment of the soul. He is transformed after this experience. Sita is responsible to this change in Rama. She insists to take the bird to the Arctic region where Rama finally gets divine bliss. In reality, Rama opposes the idea to go to such an unknown place to just drop a bird. For him it is a ‘foolish’ (*SP* 50) act. It through Sita’s humble insistence, Rama realises his ignorance to understand the world around. Sita by being extremely polite yet persuasive changes his way to look at life. She is not just a wife for him but a guide and a mentor, who without hurting his feelings creates consciousness about himself. He admits this fact,

I am ignorant and conceited. The sages have given me so much knowledge but the little wisdom I have received, I have received from you and him. (*SP*55)

Rama, the supreme human being, the storehouse of virtues seems to realise the essence of life. The world around cannot be understood through pontifical knowledge, but through compassion and love. Sita, along with Lakshamana is solely responsible for making Rama understand the practicalities of life through her behaviour. Therefore it can be said that the Sita’s role is seminal in Rama’s orientation towards divinity. She prepares him, physically and emotionally too undergo the divine
experiences at Tillai. Their journey towards Tillai is a quest towards self-realisation. The leading three characters from the great epic receive the divine blessings at Tillai and probably there only they find the direction for their future. The unidimensional, dogmatic Rama is transformed into a generous personality. Sita can be seen in the completely different role than the traditional depiction. Her freeness, spontaneous behavior is coupled with a serious and philosophical attitude. This is the new age Sita, who not only stands solid by Rama but she is able to influence his personality. The elements in myths are rearranged in such a way that it has given an almost reverse picture of Sita-Rama relationship. In traditional sense, Sita is worshiped as a goddess, a goddess who belongs to ‘panchakanya’ (the five pious women), who are to be remembered every day. She is revered for her sacrifice and the inhumanity inflicted upon her by the situation. She is always perceived as a symbol of suffering woman at the hands of men, first Ravana and then Rama. Sita as described in the stories was a brave in her childhood. Janaki was a strong young woman who could lift the Hara, Shiva’s bow, with one arm. If this was what Sita did as a young woman then why is she stamped as sufferer always?

Then why do I picture her weeping? When and why did she become a figure of weakness rather than strength? Sita, in our prevalent idiom, is weak, oppressed, a natural victim. Considering that Sri Rama’s wife---Vaidehi, Sita, Ramaa, call her what you will—is the primary archetype for all Indian women, a role model pushed and perpetuated by a predominantly patriarchal society, it is no wonder that she is someone the modern consciousness prefers to banish into yet another exile.” (Gokhale XIII)

The traditional image that Sita carries is primarily patriarchal. She connects with the common Indian women in the matters of sufferings and sacrifice in the predominantly male society. She embodies the female predicament at the hands of the male members who look at her as the possession in the political battle. She has been asked to prove her ‘chastity’ by undergoing agnipariksha. Sita becomes an archetype for generations to indicate the unending suppression of a woman at the hands of man, irrespective of whether he is a ‘God’ or a ‘Demon’. She is confined to a particular image of a woman who has to stand for values like sacrifice, chastity and openness to interrogation. The cultural of the ancient times reflect through such projections.
The early Indian culture, just like most of the cultures in the world was basically male dominated culture. On the one hand Indian cultural tradition proudly celebrates the contribution made by the erudite scholars like Gargi, Maitreyi but the overall condition of women was not very satisfactory. As the Christian world has held for nearly two thousand years that a woman must “obey” a man and consider him her superior, so in India that idea has been dominant. They were domesticated through different practices. Manu says that virtue, chastity and purity are the only armor that will protect a woman so long as she lives. Women were used as the chief cause for the political battles. They were given the responsibility to nurture the children. The overall situation was not supportive to women folks. Even in the Ramayana Kaikeyi and Manthara are held responsible for all the unwanted events. Thus women in Indian culture are given the status of a goddess or she is considered as evil or having bad moral character.

*Sita’s Promise* however projects a refreshingly new image of Sita. She is different from her earlier image. She is a fine balance of thought and emotion. Her perspective at looking at the world is natural and not knowledge-oriented. She responds to the situation intuitively, which marks her difference from Rama. Sita’s new avatar is indicative of the new spirit with which the woman of new age has emerged in all walks of life. She represents the thinking as well as sensitive woman, who if the time demands can argue and insist to prove her point. The adaptation of Sita in the postmodern context around 1990’s is special in many senses. Sita has been a part of Indian consciousness; ‘collective unconscious’ which has been rested on her image as a women with many qualities although she is always associated with sacrifice and chastity. The adaptation in *Sita’s Promise* has excluded the reference to both these issues. Throughout the play there is no reference to Sita’s *agnipariksha*(the test by fire) or her deserting by Rama. Moreover there is no reference to her abduction by Ravana and the epic battle. The adapted play concentrates on the totally imaginative situation. Rama, Sita and Lakshamana are in exile, which is about to end. They are preparing to go back to Ayodhya and take over the responsibility of the empire. In the mean while Lakshamana finds a wounded bird. They decide, only after some differences though to take that bird to his home in the Arctic region. The rest of the story captures their journey and stay in the Arctic region. The story ends at the episode of Shiva and Vishnu’s appearance and their blessings to Rama. At the final
instance Sita can be seen with the local girls who urge her to return back. Now, all these episodes are not a part of the traditional epic story. This is the new storyline developed through this adaptation. By taking the major characters of Rama, Sita and Lakshamana and by referring to certain traditional things like Ayodhya, Jatayu, Muruga, Janaka, Krishna, Vishnu and Shiva, the story develops along a very different line, which does not match with the great epic. The imaginative or unreal characters like Sage Agastya, Valli, and places like Tillai, Lake Agassiz are introduced to highlight the unknown world. The adaptation is marked by the blend of the real and the imaginative in the most impressive manner. The introduction of the totally different story located in the imaginative atmosphere makes the play an interesting combination of the real and the fantasy, the past and the present, the natural and the artistic, the royal and the common. The mixing of such elements, which can be called as Surrealistic makes this adaptation the really postmodern in spirit. In this case apparently opposite elements do come together to form a new structure, in which many traditional things are recoloured and represented. The postmodern context is important to understand the multiplicity of the elements and their meaning. The adaptation focuses on those events which are not present in the traditional epic. The central event of taking the wounded bird to the Arctic region is absent in the epic version. There is no reference to Sita’s abduction by Ravana in the play. The great battle between Rama and Ravana is also not referred. Rather there is a journey undertaken by Rama and Sita towards the North Pole region. These additions and deletions serve some definite purpose in the story. Interestingly the major events in the traditional epic story do not appear in the adaptation. Sita clearly appears to be foregrounded as compared to Rama and she is depicted as more confident and close to Lakshamana as compared to Rama. These and so many such observations can be raised about this adaptation.

The adaptation offers an opportunity for any traditional story or characters to reappear in the totally different manner. The adaptation allows certain foundational changes- both thematically and structurally in the mythic presentations. The traditional characters are seen in the new light and new characters are added to support the events. There are diversions from the traditional stories and new event are created to show the different angle of the same story. Major traditional events are subsided whereas entirely imaginative events are foregrounded to highlight the special
concerns. The traditional structures like third person narrative or verse-drama (geetnatya) are given way to more flexible and innovative forms like dance-drama (nrutyanatya). *Sita’s Promise* uses an entirely different form of play i.e. dance-drama, which combines the traditional Indian classical dance forms with the modern technology. The setting gets featured through the background screen.

*A behind-the screen projector and screen provide on 8’x15’ backdrop on which appear slides appropriate to each scene...*(SP 46)

The use of screen to show the slides which are appropriate to the ongoing scenes is a technique used the contemporary theatre. The insertion of the technical apparatus in the play based on the traditional epic is in itself an instance of a new form. Thus the play uses traditional characters, imaginative story, technology-supported setting and classical Indian dances to tell a tale from the all-time great epic. Such pastiche is the core of any postmodern structure. It denies any type of monotony and prescription. The use of modern technology while describing the ancient origin story is a way to combine the tradition and the new. The postmodernists like Lyotard do not approve of the grand narratives like the epics. Lyotard criticizes them as politically-controlled knowledge is communicated by means of such narratives. These ‘grand narratives’ are the theories that claim to explain everything and resist any attempt to change their form. Grand narratives establish universal and timeless notions and guard against any narrative that purports change or particularity. The postmodernity, through its antagonism to the grand narratives focuses on the smaller issues which generally go unnoticed. In most cases the epics focus on the heroism, battles, victories, sacrifices and great tragedies. Under these ‘grand’ things subtle, delicate things do not get a chance to bloom. The postmodern narrative concentrates on these small areas which exist in between the grand events. The Ramayana is famous for its monumental battle between Rama and Ravana. It is a mark of victory of good over evil. *Sita’s Promise* does not concentrate on this grand aspect of this epic. There is no battle and there is no victory. The adaptation on the rather hand imaginatively presents a totally different aspect by foregrounding the emotional and human sides of the characters. In this attempt Rama’s conventional image undergoes a sea change. Rama is shown as dogmatic and unidimensional as compared to Sita and Lakshamana. This is absolutely unconventional rather shocking. Sita and Lakshamana during the course of the play initiate lot of changes in Rama’s behaviour. He too accepts his wrong perceptions
about the reality and divinity. His insistence on the prescribed behaviour is put into question by Sita and Lakshamana. Questioning the established is the typical characteristic of the postmodernity.

The Ramayana is an epic with tremendous expanse, with an array of characters and events. There is a great possibility of selecting and rearranging the material from this huge collection. In addition some imaginative events can be added to create more stories with different focus. Sita’s Promise is the illustration of how the mythical characters and events can get adapted to achieve a different goal. Sita’s Promise was first performed in 1981 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada. The adaptation probably was written for Non-Indian audience also. The play therefore tries to bring forth those attributes of the mythical characters which are unknown to the world hitherto. Rama has always been revered for his acts of restrain and Sita for sacrifice and sufferings. The adaptation sets different positions for the characters. The usual top position of Rama is dislodged and he is brought down to the level of his wife and brother. Rama is shown as a common human being rather than a God. He is described as a God with some imperfections, which he realizes during the course of the play. Thus Rama is shown as a humanized God rather than just a divine spirit. He finally attains the divinity after the enlightenment through realization. Sita’s traditional role is also reversed where she carefully counsels Rama to be more humane. Lakshamana too is shown as a person with immense potentiality to understand the human nature and its relation to the divinity. In the traditional epic, Rama is always shown as ‘perfect incarnation in human form’ but the adaptation presents him more of a ‘human’ than a ‘God’. Probably the adaptation projects another dimension of this great Indian personality. He could be very respectful as a God or divine incarnation but as a human being he would have suffered from some imperfections. To highlight this aspect of the Ramayana story, the imaginary event of the bird is put at the center in the adapted play. By setting the characters in the totally fantasy like environment, the play has focused on the idea of humanized god rather than the God from the above.

The story is purely imaginary. Its only point of coincidence with the original epic is that Rama was exiled for fourteen years. The characterization of Rama is interpretive, not traditional. It traces Rama’s growth from narrow preoccupation with codes of kingship to an awareness
of what it is to be human to a point where he rises to realize his divine mission. (Parameswaran 11)

The purpose of the adaptation is made clear by the playwright through the above statement. Instead of showing Rama as a perfect soul the play traces his development towards that state. The journey towards the perfection is more valid and worthy to follow than just getting awed by the divine presence. The perfect God is a distant idea whereas a humanised divinity is more digestible concept. Ultimately the journey towards perfection is better ideal than the perfection itself in a postmodern reality. This journey is a journey to search literary the external things like Tillai, where Shiva dances in the “golden hall of Tillai to the worship of all creation.” It is the place where one can experience the divinity to the fullest. The search for Tillai is the search for the God. The journey by Rama, Sita and Lakshamana is marked this search for the God, which became possible because of their concerns about taking the wounded bird to its home in the Arctic. Thus the journey towards divinity begins with a small seed.

The beginning of realisation of the divinity is situated in a very humble event and that too with the insistence of Sita and Lakshamana. This journey at another level is inner also. It is a search of within, oriented towards those hidden recesses of the human mind which are filled with the darkness of ignorance. One has to undertake such a journey to find the divinity within. Tillai is very much a destination inside everyone. Rama makes it clear when he explains his understanding about Tillai.

It may be that Tillai the eternal city is the heart of Man. The golden roof and jewelled pillars will rise to reach of us when the time comes. Maybe it is a promise he had made to each one that he will dance in our heart, infinite flux in eternal harmony, circled by a ring of fire. (SP 60)

Thus one can reach Tillai physically and emotionally as it is outside and inside. It is everywhere. It is the human efforts only which will take him to the divine, instead of waiting for the divine to visit to him. Rama finally understands the secret of the human life especially of reaching the divine. However his journey begins at the point of compassion created in the mind of Sita for the bird. Thus it is compassion, and not the intellect and righteousness can lead to the realisation of the divine. Sita is instrumental in making Rama understand the crux of human life.
Divinity is to be searched outside as well as inside, but by way of love, compassion and humanity. The traditional positions like the knowledge center and the enlightened soul are bestowed upon Rama but the adapted play shows Sita as much more wise and compassionate. The transformation of the mythical characters into totally new positions, based on imagination is the way of creating new models for behaviour. In the contemporary world, Sita cannot hold the secondary position as she is emotionally and intellectually well-equipped to face the situation, rather than surrendering to it. Her freeness has come from the fact that she is self-aware about herself and the world around her. She is a better communicator as she understands the commonality better than the male counterpart. Her behaviour cannot be measured in codes as the codes are not fixed and keep on changing in the postmodern society. Nothing is fixed and permanent is today’s world and the reality is also a kind of projection. The world where everything is in flux and the ideas like ‘knowledge’ and ‘brahmasatyā (universal truth)’ are in question, the role played by Sita could be the only way out to respond the reality. She is the one who can mix with the local girls, understand the bird’s pains, feel for Lakshmana’s separation pangs, help Valli to locate her lost lover and most importantly guide Rama to experience the divinity by creating compassion. Probably Sita’s promise is to console everyone’s mind through unending love and compassion so that everyone reaches his desired destination. Sita in Sita’s Promise is not at all a queen or a royal character, which is distanced from the commonalities. She is rather a humane character who stands for the basic human virtues which would guide human beings to reach and experience the divinity. She stands for the position which opposes the pursuit of dogmatic prescriptive knowledge to understand the world. She adds the emotional flavour in the living conditions and yet manages to reach to the highest point of the human life. Sita is representative of the point of view that demands a serious reconsideration of the knowledge-based attitude to look at the world and solve the problem related to the human existence. The adaptation in this way not only challenges the established positions and images of the mythological characters but formulate an alternative view to look at the reality. This is done through the imaginative way where the real and the fantastic come in a marvelous fusion. The re-imagination of the ancient characters in the changing locale is the most fruitful way to understand the contemporaneity in the light of the past.
Sita’s Promise is surely a postmodern adaptation as it seems to initiate the process of what the Feminist critics call ‘re-imaging’ of the earlier characters. The postmodernism calls for what Nietzscche describes as ‘revaluation of all values.’ Therefore the ancient, orthodox and established norms, practices, modes of cognition and personalities are put under the scanner. The reimagining project occupies central place in the feminist attempt to reconsider the older things in the new perspective. The religious and philosophical foundations of the Re-Imagining movement are thus postmodern in the spirit. There is no absolute truth nor can we know God, except by subjective experience. In the western context, the historic Christian understanding of God and revelation is basically dismissed and hence the use of imagination in religion is more than ever. The religious experience is refreshing where there is no sin, no guilt, no shame, no need for salvation, no call to holiness, no need for obedience, no summons to servanthood. The idea of God is much more manageable and less threatening if ‘He’ is humanised. The Re-Imagining feminists did not merely “re-imagine” God—they deconstructed Him! The adapted play exactly works on the same lines although it uses the Indian myth to do so. For the Indians, Rama stands for idealness, perfection and moral uprightness (being ekapatiivrata, a monogamous) whereas Sita is known for her chastity and sacrifice. These images of the mythical characters are so consolidated that it is difficult for an Indian mind to see, perceive or imagine Rama or Sita in any other way. Sita’s Promise has actualised this by projecting the doubtful angel in Rama’s personality and the comprehensive, understanding nature of Sita. This is what is refereed as humanization of God. Rama and Sita both are shown with a combination of virtues and follies, deleting the perfect idealness. They are more like the common human beings who feel, suffer and learn through experiences. In the traditional version of the epic, which is written by Valmiki, the focus is more on Rama than Sita. The central focus is on the events related to Rama than projecting the dimensions of Sita’s character. As a wife and indeed as a character in the Ramayana, Sita is strongly absent. Valmiki allows her very little space. She is hardly mentioned in Bala Kanda, even when Rama wins her in the swayamvar. She is subordinated to the characters like Vishwamitra, Janaka, Rama in Bala Kanda. In Ayodha Kanda, she figures in eleven sargs out of 119 and in Aranya Kanda, in fourteen sargs out of seventy-five. There is no reference to Sita in Kishkindha Kanda except in the lamentations of Rama. In Sundara Kanda she is a part of thirty-one sargs out of sixty-eight. In Yuddha Kanda, she is mentioned in five
sargs before she makes a brief appearance after the end of the Great War. Thus Sita appears in seventy-six sargs out of 645, having barely ten per cent of the Valmiki Ramayana. She does not get any scope to show her nature, personality and other dimensions as the focus of the story is the heroism of Rama. In the adaptation, however Sita occupies at the central position. She is the one who is involved in so many actions and arguments, dances and debates, jokes and journey. She is at the center around which the entire action of the play revolves and in this process different dimensions of her personality get revealed. Even at the end of the play, the native children insist her to stay back instead of going to Ayodhya. She promises to return to them in future. Thus Sita is much sought after person than Rama, which is completely unconventional. The play provides enough space for Sita to grow as a person rather than being in the shadow of Rama. The characters in myth are used to show the primacy of the human elements even in the divine characters. It is their struggles, battles, sufferings, pangs and ecstasies that make us feel at comfortable with these characters. *Sita’s Promise* is a modern and humanised adaption of the great epic, Ramayana, in which the focal point is not the great events or heroism but the delicate tendencies residing inside the nature of these lovable characters. It is quite difficult for an Indian mind to accept, even in the 21st century to see Rama as subordinate to Sita but such attempts are going to instil more faith and proximity in these characters. The postmodern adaption of the Ramayana story in the form of *Sita’s Promise* sets the tone for looking at the mythical characters from the more humane lens. This is a new age Ramayana that takes place not in Southern Sri Lanka but towards the northern region of the Arctic. By placing these great characters in completely imaginative environment, the adaption highlights the unknown, unimaginable in these legendary characters. Therefore this newly created Ramayana is helpful to understand Rama as Rama and Sita as Sita. The New Arctic Kanda (Kanda signifies a section of the epic) though a modern invention, proves to be immense interest as it focuses on the sensible rather than sensational.