CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Much of the research in psychology is empirical relying on quantitative measures. In the process, observable psychological aspects have gained salience whereas subtle, intangible, and yet foundational core characteristics of self and consciousness remain elusive in our understanding. Conventional methods are not adequate to gain a grasp of the intuitive concepts and hence we need to go out of the disciplinary boundaries of psychology and adopt different approaches to gain understanding of these processes. The qualitative approach, and specifically phenomenological-hermeneutics, is fairly new in psychology. I view the present endeavour as that of taking a cultural text beyond the established systematic academic frameworks in the discipline of psychology, to make it more relevant in the study of the self. In psychological research, the concept of self has been partialized into structured domains, but in this research, I attempt to present the self as cohesive, congruent and holistic through the study of characters in the Mahābhārata broadly using principles of the framework of phenomenological-hermeneutics.

In this research, I attempt to negotiate a psychological issue in a literary text while using a philosophical approach. As I begin to review the literature of a vast subject, I face a number of confounding questions – How to do a literature survey of a topic that covers various disciplines? Where to begin? How to deal with the many frameworks? As I see it, the study stands at a prominent juncture anchoring itself in psychology and at the same time spanning the disciplines of philosophy and literature. Research has been done individually and independently in these disciplines and although it is a daunting task, I make an attempt here to bring them all together under a single canopy. The following literature review looks at the key areas pertinent to the study on self and well-being through the Mahābhārata.

In the current review process, the relevance of psychological well-being for the research will be made clear. Another aspect in view is that of Indian psychology:
the evolution of the field and its present status. Psychological thought as it emerges from what are considered esoteric philosophical texts, forms the core of Indian psychology. Through the use of a relatively new methodological approach and through a text that forms the cultural and mythological imagination of the people, I hope that this study will contribute to psychology and especially Indian psychology and lays forward a new significance for the concept and experience of the self.

In this chapter I strive to survey the literature and aim to bring out a comprehensive picture of the pertinent research in the key areas of well-being, the self, Indian psychology, and the Mahābhārata.

2.1 Well-being

Well-being is an ancient yet contemporary subject of study and research. Well-being is used to describe what is ultimately good for the human also indicating a sort of flourishing. This flourishing (*eudaimonia*) interrelated with excellence (*arête*) forms a psychological basis for happiness. The concept of eudaimonia by Aristotle forms the basis of happiness in Western theories and the notion of good life (well-being, or quality of life) defined in terms of what has final value for a person. Enhancing and strengthening one's capacity to become more human, more just, and more generous and thereby happier, is more comprehensive, enduring, satisfying, and gives us peace and tranquility which contributes to the well-being of a person. Eudaimonia and human flourishing find place in the present context of human psychological, emotional, and spiritual progress. In the present study, I give an overview of the psychological studies on well-being. I mainly attempt to distinguish psychological well-being from subjective well-being which has also been termed as happiness and primarily studies positive and negative affect.

Psychological studies have primarily focused on the negative aspects of human life and experiences (Drew & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1998). The burgeoning field of Positive Psychology reexamines the ancient idea of a good life and a meaningful life shifting the focus from negative factors and illness to a study of positive emotions, values, character and virtues, and positive influences such as social support, strong families, democracy and other social factors. Seligman (2002) in his book *Authentic Happiness* emphasizes on the positive nature of being which influences the overall sense of well-
being for the individuals. He also talks about the challenges encountered by people and the qualities that are brought out from within during these situations which contribute to a meaningful and purposeful life and well-being.

The principle idea of positive psychological thought is the focus on healthy adaptive functioning (Ryff, 2003) and purpose and meaning and its relationship with well-being. Although empirical in its structure, Positive Psychology operates on the fundamental premises of the Humanistic movement led by Rogers, Allport, Maslow and others beginning with William James's humanistic tendencies. In the aftermath of the world wars, there arose a need to assess the wellness of individuals and philosophical, psychological and sociological movements like phenomenology, existentialism, symbolic interactionism and cognitive psychologies (Keyes, 2006) focused on the importance of personal meanings and concerns in life. Subjective views on well-being formed the concept of quality of life and this later became the basis on which several other studies came about such as subjective well-being, social well-being, economic well-being, psychological well-being and others.

Subjective well-being considers only two aspects, i.e. positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. To put it more simply, it is the relation between positive affect or emotion and life satisfaction and the same for negative emotion as well (Diener et al., 1998; Vittersø, 2004; Keyes, 2006; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Busseri et al., 2007). In the present research, the focus is on psychological well-being which emphasizes on potentials, abilities, and positive psychological resources. The process of psychological well-being is where potentials and resources come into awareness which may be actualized to move beyond the current spheres of experiences bringing about transformation.

Ryff (1995) in her article on psychological well-being (PWB) emphasizes basic values and ideals of human experience and focusses on the presence of the positive for mental health. She bases her work on the literature of developmental psychology, clinical formulations, and mental health literature. Humanistic theories of Maslow whose key concern is self-actualization, Rogers' teleological purpose of a fully functioning person, and Allport's idea of maturity form a bedrock from which Ryff has culled six dimensions - self acceptance, environmental mastery, personal

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5 Self-actualization is the highest level in the hierarchy of needs as suggested by Maslow
growth, quality relations with others, purpose in life, and autonomy - as indicative of psychological well-being. In other studies Ryff and Singer (2002)[cf. Ryff & Singer, 2002] explain what it means to be psychologically well, the factors promoting such well-being, the substrates of psychological well-being and their impact on physical health and how these are integrative for health and well-being. Singer, Ryff and others (1998) also present different process for studying mental health by linking life histories of various identified groups of people. The authors also study the biological correlates – neuroendocrine, immune, cardiovascular, REM sleep – which show better correlation with those demonstrating higher psychological well-being (Ryff, Singer, & Love, 2004). They position themselves at a biopsychological nexus – a salubrious joining of the mind and body (Ryff & Singer, 2000). This yoking or holistic approach is an intrinsic concept of the Indian tradition of Yoga and Ayurveda.

Based on Ryff's research on psychological well-being, other researchers have keenly examined several aspects such as sleep (Hamilton, et al., 2007), quality of life (Ring, et al., 2007), social well-being (Keyes, 1998) and spirituality (Fiorito & Ryan, 2007). Programs have been formulated on well-being (Colby, 1987) and therapeutic approaches laid down (Fava, et al., 1988).

The key aspects of Ryff and Singer's body of work are determined by Keough & Markus (1998) as the meaning-making functions of the self. Well-being is tied to one's experience of “being” well and these are potentially linked to not any particular set of outcomes of health or other physical aspects, but to the lived experiences. As discussed in the earlier chapter, experiential contexts bring to fore the dialogics of self and culture. Worldviews and cultural contexts have a bearing on psychological functioning while at the same time there is a universal quality of meaningful connections with others. Meaning-making, engagement, purpose, acceptance, and other positive possibilities are inherently potential in all humans with only the values attached to the different goals varying. Keough & Markus also comment that the resources of the self have a restorative and protective value and also suggest that individuals with more resources of their self-concept may experience greater well-being than those with fewer resources. This idea finds reflection in the lived experiences of the Mahābhārata characters especially with reference to Arjuna's character where he has access to a vast number of cultural resources such as painting and performative arts, in addition to the skills in wielding weapons. The access to
various skill bases supports, sustains, and enhances the self concept and performs a protective function in adverse situations by restoring an integrated sense of self. Meaning and purpose enhance the self promoting psychological well-being intrinsic in the self.

Other scholars such as Haybron (2008) research mainly on the nature of well-being and human flourishing and noted that authentic happiness has intrinsic value as an aspect of self-fulfillment – the facts about what fulfills us, also defines us, our selves. To be happy is to be satisfied wholly – it is a state of one's being – a psychic flourishing. The propensity for happiness is a part of 'who' we are and is distinct from what or which we are. However, psychological well-being which is the focus of the present research has not been explored in detail by Haybron.

Thoits (1992) studies identity structures and psychological well-being where she conceptualizes identities as self-conceptions in terms of individuals' roles and surmises that since identities define “who I am” they should be sources of existential meaning and purpose in life. Hawkins (2008) brings out the weaknesses of subjective well-being in that individuals may not be accurate in their perceptions of satisfaction either overvaluing or undermining it. Instead, the scholar focuses on horizons or perspectives and experiencing. Fineman (2006) focuses on the emotional maturity of individuals stressing that one is emotionally mature when she is capable of sustaining an integrated and textured experience of herself and other, meaning thereby that psychological experiences are varied in their compatibility with our selves and to be able to retain a positive mental picture of a person who frustrates and thwarts our needs is resilient to chaotic existence and is more gathered.

The aspects of well-being discussed above can be taken further to understand the relation between self and well-being. Ryff's digress from subjective well-being (which is mainly a balance of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction), streams out into characteristics that have bearing on narratives and thereby an understanding of human nature and fundamental and universal experiences of desire and conflict, and grief. However, although studies have been conducted results obtained, and correlations surmised between subjective and psychological well-being along with various other factors, almost all of these are empirical in nature. They also focus more on affected categories of people such as those of physical and psychological deprivations and other disorders. While empirical measures provide
large scale results across a time span, they miss the subtleties and nuances of human psychological behaviour. Neither have the research studies focused on Eastern cultures to provide a global view of the process of self and well-being.

Psychological well-being defies circumscriptions and goes beyond specified parameters to encompass the inherent potential within our human nature. We harness this potential, to accrue awareness of various states of being, to understand, accept and integrate these states such that we are ever emerging. Frankl (1992, p. 126) observed that a “will to meaning” is a vital force in well-being. To live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in the suffering. Each person must find the purpose of life for oneself and accept the responsibility that it prescribes. One survives the worst conditions of life effectively with the knowledge that there is meaning in one’s life.

A degree of tension between what one has achieved and one still ought to accomplish (what one is and what one should become) is indispensable to well-being. The potential meaning when kindled paves the way to actualizing the inner latent abilities. The integration of the self and its positive perceptions and the experiencing of the ‘present’ moment contribute to the sense of well being. The interpretations and meanings assigned to different experiences propel the individual forward in the quest for a purpose to life. The concept of psychological well-being could be further enriched with the Indian concepts of puruṣārtha and triguṇa and actions based on them, to gain an understanding and deeper insight into the self.

2.2 The concept and study of the self

The study of the self dominates a large and important part of psychology although understanding reached is far from complete or sufficient. Starting with William James in the West, the study of the self turned the focus inward and holistic. While the self has been defined, studied, and dealt with in various capacities by several scholars such as Freud, Jung, Mead, and others, they do not form the current body of my work. The most relevant aspects in the present research come from Rogers' phenomenological and person-centred theories.

In this section, I will give a quick outline of how self has been viewed and defined by William James and by Freud and other theorists and I will touch upon the idea of self and narrative. Then, I will go through Rogers' definition of self and will
present the relevance of Rogers' framework of the self in this research study, whose primary focus is on the growth-oriented, purposive nature of the self. In Rogers' consideration, as well as in that of other Humanistic theories, self-enhancement is a primary aspect. The aspect of self-enhancement imbues within it meaning and purpose emphasizing the inner resources of the person which is also related to psychological well-being and these are also aspects that I am considering in the current study.

James (1890) defines self as the “sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account.” James places all the above factors in the same genre and claims that the dwindling of any of these causes despondency while the increment of any causes triumph. Here, he sets the stage for the idea that the self-investments are tied to the rise and ebb of one’s emotional states and one’s well-being.

One of the primary movements in psychology, psychoanalysis, relies on the understanding of the causes of fear, death and anxiety and attempts to resolve these. Freud believed his psychoanalytic theory is geared toward constructive personality change (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). Hall and Lindzey (1985) describe various theories of personality including Erikson's psychosocial theory which encapsulates self and self-identity – the identity crises and their resolution moves forward the individual throughout life. By resolving various crises at different stages, the person matures and the self develops through this resolution and reconstruction, an indication of transformation and change.

The self is the central archetype and phenomenon in Jungian thought. It is the archetype of wholeness, of totally integrated and individuated personality. The wholeness is already present, it is innate and it is not to be constructed from outside. Its goal is to help the individual develop a unique personality in totality (Mueller, 1978).

Both Jung’s and James’ ideas of self and consciousness paved the way for later Humanistic-Existentialistic forces that came to influence Psychology and which focused on the individual trying to become all that s/he can be. James’ idea of self and consciousness provided an alternative epistemology to reduction positivism (Taylor,
2010). As Taylor (2010) notes, Humanistic psychology built upon Jamesean ideas and emphasized psychology as a person-centred science the movement both extends to the personal experience as a lived reality out in the world in human relationships, as well as inward in exploring the inner states of consciousness. The phenomenological approaches emerged from these early theories and subjective experiences became the focus of understanding human nature and behaviour.

### 2.2.1 Humanistic conceptions of the self

Progressive inclusion of the term ‘self” began with the humanistic theorists beginning with Allport who referred to the unity, consistency, and integration of personality traits, representing the positive, creative, growth-seeking, and forward-moving quality of human nature, a unifying philosophy of life and a personalized conscience (cf. Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). The Humanistic thinkers view the self as whole and wholly conscious. It is presumed to be fully integrated and cognitive. The question of meaning and value is placed at the acme of humanistic concern (Pile, 1993).

Rogers (1951, p.200) advances the positive nature in his theory which was constructed mainly on the premises of the essential goodness of human beings. Rogers develops his theory on the basis of phenomenology and defined the self as “an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the ‘I’ or ‘me’ and the perceptions of relationships of the ‘I’ or ‘me’ to others and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. It is a gestalt which is available to awareness though not necessarily in awareness. It is a fluid and changing gestalt, a process, but at any given moment it is a specific entity.” Rogers speaks of the nature of existence and awareness. The self is the primary and the basis of all experiences, thus being accorded an ontological status.

Rogers also hones in on the aspect of congruence; congruence between the phenomenal field and the external world or reality, i.e. the subjective experience and the objective world, as well as the congruence between the experiencing (real) self and the ideal self. Rogers (1942, p. 216) theorizes that the individual’s insight tends to develop gradually and proceeds in general from less to more significant understanding. It involves the new perception of relationship previously unrecognized, a willingness to accept all aspects of the self and a choice of goals.
Following these new perceptions of self and this new choice of goals, comes self-initiated action which moves toward achieving the new goals. They create new confidence and independence in the client. Greve and Wentura (2003) research self-concept stabilization through assimilation and processing of self-relevant information which possibly involves an awareness of strengths and weaknesses. They also find that self-enhancement and consistency facilitate the stabilization and immunization of self-concept. The necessity of stabilizing the self concept without losing sight of reality – deficiencies and positives – simultaneously heightens the acceptance of those skills that are currently perceived as sufficiently positive or well-developed.

2.2.2 Narratives, self, and transformation

Narrative activity seeks to bridge a self that acted in the past, one that is in the present and an anticipated self projected to feel and act in an as yet unrealized moment. This potentiality creates the opportunity to actualize ourselves through the act of narrating. Different narratives may evoke different partial selves – giving rise to a multitude of selves – each contributing itself to the larger picture and altering one’s sense of being-in-the-world. Sarbin (1986) considers the narrative as an “organizing principle for human action” (p. 9). The experiences of human beings guide the narratives and reading these narratives discloses the nuances of human nature and the self. The experiences of loss, strife, wishes, hope are woven into the narrative. Coherence is built into the narrative which renders the experience meaningful and communicates this meaning to others.

Narratives veer away from traditional and accustomed paradigms in psychology, tending toward more humanistic approaches, and emerging as post-positivist frameworks. Brockmeier and Harré (2001) surmise that, “it is the intimate merging of these frameworks of interpretation that serves to understand and create the meanings we fins in our forms of life” and they continue to suggest that it is “through narrative that we make sense of the wider, more differentiated, and more complex text and contexts of our experience” (p. 40). The scope of narratives then includes interpretive horizons and perspectives, constructing ourselves and our worlds as part of each other, lending meaning to experiences, and in the process organizing the ideas we have about our 'selves' and identities.

The self is not linear – it moves back and forth bringing the past and possibly
the future into the present. It is considered fluid and flexible. Ochs and Capps (1996) discuss the relation between narrative and self and state that each narrative that is created also creates a part of the self, and the narratives and selves increment. Ochs and Capps (1996) also opine that mythic tales are positioned in local places linking those present at the narration to a moral past. Thus, there is a continuity of the self, of events and emotions, of universes. Though the self is studied in multiple, partial entities, the continuous and coherent self is the cornerstone of human cognition and well-being.

Studies such as those by Tennant (2005) talk about the transforming selves, which have implications on personal change, happiness and well-being. Self-enhancement is more powerful than preserving the self-same views that people hold (Kwang & Swann, 2010). Other studies show that different aspects of self and esteem influence one’s personal meanings, emotions, remediation, mental health and well-being (Sosik, 2000; Harber, 2005; Ziegler-Hill & Showers, 2007; Updegraff, et al., 2010). Olim (1968) considers the self as able to adapt to changing conditions, as one to be moving toward a greater realization of human potential and constantly transcending oneself in order to enlarge and expand and connect with larger humanity.

The self is a process which unfolds through experiences which leads to change, autonomy, authenticity and moving toward the ideal self. Research, especially related to the Humanistic tenets depicts that the essential nature of human is to constantly dynamically transcend and reach beyond the current levels of awareness in order to be happy and well. The ideal self is not a static entity or position that one is striving to reach and then feels arrived at. As we undergo various experiences, we rid ourselves of those aspects which hamper us, such as prejudices/biases, negative emotions, and hence advance toward an increment in knowing ourselves reaching a new horizon. The horizon is a perspective we build according to our experiences and this horizon signifies that there are possibilities to shift through understanding and transformation. Advancement is progress toward a horizon, and each horizon may be considered an ideal self which in turn becomes the ground for more self-discovery.

The self is a unique and dynamic process and refers to the experience of one's own being. The qualities of altruism, empathy, compassion, non-cruelty and non-violence enhance the self toward congruence and authentic nature. The self is also tied to the concept and process of well-being. Well-being is an intuitive concept and subtle
in its tangibility. Meaning, growth, openness, self-actualization, enhancement are constitutive of well-being and these are “grasped” in the process of knowing the self and enhancing toward a congruent and authentic state.

The Indian viewpoints on self and self-enhancement subsume the humanistic tenets to a large degree – ideas on self and well-being in the Upaniṣad-s and the Bhagavad-Gītā. The ideas on self in the Upaniṣad and the Bhagavad-Gītā are dispersed throughout the Mahābhārata. The Bhagavad-Gītā, in the words of Sw. Bodhananda, “is an exhaustive phenomenological study of consciousness leading to a consummate understanding of the experiencing subject, experienced subject and the ontological basis of both” (Menon, 2007, p. xiii). Experiential understanding of self is the defining and central aspect of the Bhagavad-Gītā and the Upaniṣad-s. The core and essence is the way of 'being' and this ontological essence is what one seeks. The contexts for analysis are the lived experiences of desires, conflicts, crises and grief. The self, its possibilities, are presented in the midst of psychological, emotional and spiritual crises raising the scope for one to go beyond one's limited parameters.

2.2.3 The self from Indian psychological viewpoints

(i) The Upaniṣad-s

The spiritual and transcendent perspectives of the Indian traditions approach the concept of self and consciousness from a bio-psycho-socio and spiritual aspects. The Upaniṣad-s deeply emphasize that knowing oneself is moving toward the core of our being. Various scholars have studied the texts in detail and have commented on the essence and meaning of the Upaniṣad-s. Bhattacharya (1999) says that the Upaniṣadic texts equate reality with self-consciousness. Human beings look for it by means of truthfulness and austerity, by being aware of the self and realizing the self as existing within. Knowing the self is being in tune with oneself, a congruence that we develop. This kind of knowledge of oneself is not experienced in the same degree as when one focuses on external or objective aspects. Black (2007, p.4) considers the Upaniṣad-s as marking the beginning of a reasoned enquiry into a number of philosophical questions concerning the nature of being, the nature of self, the foundation of life. We value self-knowledge to the greatest degree, more than a mere knowing of texts and textual knowledge.
According to Chāndogya Upaniṣad, personal crisis results in śoka or sorrow and anxiety, and crossing the river of sorrow² happens when one accrues knowledge of the self. Through knowing the self, one attempts to know the universal reality. Maitra (1961) says that reality is not a mere existent but a value, and the ultimate reality is the highest value. To know it is to be one with it.

Grinshpon (2003, p.31) analyses that ātma-vidyā, or knowledge of the self, contrasts with objective knowledge or mantra-vidyā. Grinshpon, citing examples of diverse characters, further speaks of crises as contexts for discovery and understanding also speaks of hope as greater than memory, mind, intelligence, meditation, the five elements, and speech (p. 31). Hope draws forth our positive potential, it is a key element to raising courage and strength to recognize and draw upon our resources and actualize our potentials and is especially crucial in coping and transcending our crises and grief experiences. To give in to grief is to succumb to the negative energies and sink into pathological states. Hope builds resilience, an important capacity to go beyond the grief situation. Āśā or hope, Grinshpon says, is second only to prāṇa or the life force, and draws attention to the positive nature of the human psyche.

The Upaniṣad-s and other texts establish the self as the core of our being. The centrality of the self is dominant and any attempt to understand the psychological processes involves knowing the self in a holistic and coherent manner. The Upaniṣad-s also focus deeply on the purpose of human beings and consider self-enhancement as a fundamental and innate tendency of human beings. For self-enhancement it is essential to reflect and introspect upon oneself. Self-reflection goes deeply upon that understanding human beings begins with understanding the self through self-reflection and inquiry. The ensuing knowledge of the self enhances oneself. Sw. Chinmayananda in his commentaries on the Upaniṣad-s also talks about well-being (śām) and that the invocation to and the blessings of the different “instruments” such as prāṇa, eyesight, wise speech, healthy limbs may accomplish intellectual movements assuring us of overall well-being (Sw. Chinmayananda, Taittiriya Upanishad, 1962, p.1).

(ii) The Bhagavad-Gītā.

Of the most profound significance and in guiding us toward knowing and
being is the Bhagavad-Gītā. The Gītā, is central and crucial in the Mahābhārata and a means to understand the self. Abhinavagupta, commenting on the Gītā (IV. 36 - 40), considers knowledge as the purest and that other things are pure only when in contact with knowledge (Marjanovic, 2004, p. 129). When one knows, one is. Easwaran (2007) reads the Gītā not as an external dialogue but an internal one, “between the ordinary human personality, full of questions about the meaning of life, and our deepest Self which is divine” (p. 21). He asserts that the Gītā urges renunciation of selfishness in thought, word, and action (p. 51). It is through “renunciation” that one frees one's mind of “clutter” and moves toward openness and acceptance, an openness which leads to cultivation of empathy for others and a discovery and understanding of oneself. It is a question of discovering the self by looking inward.

The Bhagavad-Gītā is a process of self-discovery. Chapter II. 17 (Sw. Sivananda, 1969)

\[
\text{avinaśi tu tad-viddhī yena sarvaṁ idaṁ tatam |} \\
\text{vināśam avyayasyāsya na kaścit kartum arhati ||}
\]

A rough translation of the above śloka being, “The self pervades all and is imperishable. It always exists and is immutable.”

The Gītā (II. 15) propounds:

\[
yāṁ hi na vyathayantyete puruṣam puruṣarṣabha| \\
sama-duḥkha-sukhaṁ dhīraṁ so 'mṛtatvāya kalpate ||
\]

Sw. Sivananda (1969) translates and comments on this verse as, “that firm man (who has various qualities such as endurance, who has overcome egoism, arrogance, anger, covetousness and has abandoned these characteristics), to whom pleasure and pain are the same is fit for attaining immortality.” He further comments that the power of endurance, a virtue, and a condition of right knowledge when coupled with discrimination and dispassion, becomes a means to the attainment of immortality or knowledge of the self. Sri Aurobindo also explains that whoever is subject to grief and sorrow, a slave to the sensations and emotions, occupied by the touches of things transient, cannot become fit for immortality (Maheshwar (Ed.), 1978, p. 26).

The Upaniṣad-s and the Bhagavad-Gītā emphasize the human positive potentials and enhancement of self. The oneness of the self and universal reality guides us toward the core of our very being. Knowing and being merge and one does
not know the self through learning or accruing facts but only by ‘being’ it. Overcoming one’s crisis is an objective which moves one toward gaining knowledge of the self. There is transformation in knowledge and transformation in turn leads to greater understanding, moving closer to the truth, the core of our being.

Ganeri (2007) in his book, “The concealed art of the soul” ponders deeply on the concept of truth in the Upaniṣad-s, the Mahābhārata, and certain Buddhist texts. He talks of the nature of truth and how it must be uncovered and discovered, and in the analysis considers that it is the self and the truth about the self that is concealed. Ganeri speaks of the self as an activity and that the errors of the self have to do with the way we draw boundaries around minds. He reflects that creative investigation through texts stimulates fundamental inquiry which in turn provides us with new conceptual frameworks and paradigms. He considers the self standing in need of discovery. The self is in the “cave” and he draws an analogy with dharma in the Mahābhārata which is also hidden, concealed secret.

Chakrabarti (2014) analyzes aspects of truth in the context of speech and the dialogics of the self. We internalize the process of seeking truth in a dialogue or narrative and in the process subject ourselves to a self-search. As Chakrabarti (2014) argues, “free critical conversation is expected to deepen into a kind of 'moral care of the self' by curbing our philautia (egoistic self-love), making us review our own actions and desires as an external parrhesiastes would do” (p.281). In this study, regarding the self, the analogy with truth and the intrinsic phenomenological nature point to the process nature of the self. The discovery is through an understanding gained by personal experiential investigation. The narratives in the Mahābhārata encourage one to rework the tales which involves uncovering what is there and this perhaps is the hidden purpose of the epic. The importance of Ganeri’s book lies in the reflective analysis of the nature of the self in the Upaniṣad-s and the Mahābhārata. The Mahābhārata in its entirety can be said to a movement of knowing the self.

2.3 Indian Psychology

Psychology as viewed in Indian texts is intrinsically connected with philosophy, religion, culture, social settings and others. The very nature and approach to living the human life is psychological in its foundations. Although psychology’s
subject is human nature and therefore universal, we are forced to talk in terms of Western psychology, Eastern Psychology, Indian Psychology and others. These truncations have come about because the systems of thought, especially psychology as it developed in Europe and America has chosen to leave out certain important aspects of human nature and instead has focused so far on empirical and observable aspects. For instance, Behaviourism focuses entirely on observable behaviour and discards all subjective experiences as unobservable. Mental phenomena have been sidelined or else, not recognized as valid aspects of human nature. Other models have declined to admit subjective experiences and different states of awareness.

The discipline of psychology that India adopted from across the continents was based on Eurocentric and Anglo-American theories (Paranjpe, 2002a, p. vii). Gradually, emphasis began to be laid on the quantitative method to understand aspects of human behaviour. The experimental research method became a primary method in establishing and understanding of human nature and behaviour. Paranjpe (2002b) also notes that influenced by Comtean positivism, presentism, and scientism, psychologists in India today have developed amnesia for the long history of the exchange of ideas between India and Europe. Paranjpe states that the richness and diversity of Indian philosophical thought was unfortunately obscured under the esoteric and mystical labels and philosophers and spiritual teachers who discoursed on the psychology of the universal human nature rooted in ancient Indian thought were relegated to the realm of the abstract and the obscure.

As Kiran Kumar (2011) notes, cross-cultural psychology has slowly gained popularity in the past few decades, which draws attention to the different ways of knowing. Kiran Kumar (2008, pp. 19-52) elaborately traces the psycho-historical development and cites scholarly sources to establish the foundation of Indian Psychology. As yet another scholar points out (Tripathi, 2010), in the Indian context and Eastern thought traditions, knowledge focuses on the person and not merely information to be used as product. For knowledge to be considered as knowledge, it is necessary to be discovered by the seeker who absorbs and assimilates it, and in the process changing as well.

Assumptions in Indian Psychology lay emphasis on processes of the self, such as self-reflection and self-awareness. These assumptions form the basis of progress in studies on the systematized thoughts that have evolved in the literature, psychology
and philosophy of Indian tradition. Though various issues have been approached in philosophy, the psychological wealth of Indian thought and knowledge systems has not been systematized as a discipline. It has been latent and not brought to the fore till recent date.

Indian Psychology is a holistic, inclusive and coherent system for understanding human nature with universal relevance. It is open to multiple interpretations, thus increasing our abilities to understand the diversity of human nature. The alternative ways expand the scope of the field of psychology itself, and attempt to make the field relevant, appropriate and contemporary. Paranjpe (2013) notes that traditional Indian approaches to psychology, “are congruent with the phenomenologists and existentialists in their focus on subjectivity, but differ in terms of their emphasis on the extraordinary or 'higher' states of consciousness” (p. 1075). The process of understanding humans and human nature can be seen in multifaceted dimensions and understood through different lenses, and developing psychological models gives us a wider comprehension. Drawing inputs from varied traditions of thought, culture, societies, linguistic contexts, and several other areas, provides insights into perspectives of human nature.

Psychology was not an independent discipline in ancient Indian thought, yet the thinkers were deeply interested in psychological issues and inquiry began with the nature of the self. The deep interest in the self led to the study of various psychological processes such as perception, emotion, desires, motivation, etc. (Kuppuswamy, 1993). Rao (2008) elaborates on the value of listening (śravaṇa), reflection (manana), and contemplation (nididhyāsana) in arriving at the core of one’s being. He also writes that most of Indian philosophy presents a psychology which is grounded in the experiences of life (physical, mental and spiritual), and exploring infinite possibilities of one’s self.

Indian Psychology, without undermining the cognitive framework, also considers experience and subjective understanding as complementary sources of knowledge. The process leading to this goal involves understanding the nature of the ‘person,’ the antecedents and consequences of behaviour, and also means of transforming the individual toward achievement and happiness. The person, rather than the process, is pivotal (Rao, 2008). William James also resonates with the idea of the person being more important in his psychological principles. Taylor (2010)
elaborates on James' spearheading ideas in the study of psychology where he enunciates the person as the central focus of psychology and sets the stage for the development of consciousness and a person-centred science.

As an academic discipline, Indian Psychology started gaining ground with the foundational works of Jadunath Sinha whose seminal work on Indian Psychology elaborates on the aspects of self, emotion, perception, the will and other crucial aspects to understand the nature of being and beings. He analyzes the self as the knower, the enjoyer, and the active agent. He notes that the self is devoid of guna-s whereas the body, which is mortal, comprises the pure, the energetic and the inertial forces (sattva, rajas, and tamas). Other views have also been elaborated regarding the self processes.

Paranjpe (2002b) notes that concepts in the Western perspectives are not totally removed from those presented in the Indian viewpoints. The term persona is similar to Sanskrit puruṣa. The person is considered as one who knows, acts, and feels - jñātā, kartā, and bhoktā. These consider the self as the cognizer, the agent and the enjoyer-sufferer – parallel to the processes of cognition, conation, and affection as postulated by psychologists. Paranjpe points out that the views of the Indian Upaniṣad-s and psychologists like Rogers and Allport are remarkably similar in nature despite the difference in time, space and location. He also emphasizes on the importance of studying ancient thought and drawing insights of contemporary relevance, and communicating these insights to an international community. Misra, et al. (1999) hold that there is very little indigenous conceptual terminology in the field of psychology today and they consider this a big lacuna. Sw.Akhilananda (1948) in his book on Hindu Psychology discerns that the primary difference between Western and Hindu thought is in the outlook. Bennet (1953) says that in Hindu thought, the ideal is to unfold the inner possibilities and not on how much a man can possess.

Dalal and Misra (2010) characterize Indian Psychology as having evolved through rigorous observation, experimentation and reflection, training under Gurus, continuous contemplation and sharing of personal accounts of inner experiences. They observe that the Upaniṣad-s focus on the subjective more than the objective, and on the inner journey rather than the external. They establish that this psychology has evolved as a cultural discourse on world-views and epistemologies and offers alternatives to the logico-positivistic model of Western psychology as it is known
Menon (2005) deviates from the well-trodden idea of psychology as a “science of human behaviour” and states that Indian Psychology takes the route of “human possibility and progress.” The terms “behaviour” and “possibility and progress” themselves lay emphasis on the purpose of the psychological discipline. While one outlook deals with the outer expressions, the other works with the inner potentials of human endeavour, being inclusive and not separating the individual from the context. What follows is that the experience of self and the experiencing self become the locus of our being. 'Beingness' is also the focus of study and understanding to gain a deeper perspective into the nature of self. The Guru-śiṣya traditions have been closely examined by Paranjpe (2012) to lay forth the centrality of psychotherapeutic aspects too. The presence of the Guru, according to Paranjpe, facilitates the psychotherapeutic process and the 'person' as it were, and infuses strength into the relationship. Subjective experiential approaches have been intrinsic to Indian Psychology. A very important source of psychological experiential knowledge in this area is the epic Mahābhārata.

2.4 Review of literature in the Mahābhārata

Studies in the Mahābhārata have dealt with variations of renderings of the epic and with reflections on the historical and literary aspects. In the present times, early research on the Mahābhārata has focused mainly on the translation of the epic, such as bringing out the critical edition, the theme of the Mahābhārata, the meaning of the epic and its various interpretations. Studies have also focused on motifs such as revenge, moral dilemma of politics, the architecture of the epic, birth of the Pāṇḍava-s. Particular Parvan-s have also been studied, for instance the Strī and Śānti Parvan-s by James Fitzgerald and Kevin McGrath. Other scholars have attempted to present the characters of the epic through the lens of psychoanalysis as well as in symbolic contexts such as the volumes written by Dutt which depict the characters in the light of natural elements and their significances.

The Mahābhārata has been studied, translated, written, and rewritten in many formats and perspectives (Buck, 1973; Chakravarty, 2009; Dange, 2002; Ganguli, 2008; Karve, 1931; Sukhtankar, 1957; Sutton, 2000) and several others. Sukhtankar
(1957) wrote 'On the meaning of the Mahābhārata' situating the epic and its greatness in understanding human nature. Buck and Sutton have translated the work and presented the storyline.

Although there are many translations, commentaries and contemporary works on the Mahābhārata, this study is based primarily on foundational texts by Kisari Mohan Ganguli (2008) and translations of the Sanskrit śloka-s by The Geeta Press. Ganguli's monumental work is considered to be the first attempt to translate from the original Sanskrit Mahābhārata as composed by Vyāsa, into English. A vital reason for choosing Ganguli's work is that he translates the verses into descriptive prose and presents the text as is rather than as an interpretation of the author. This vastly facilitates in drawing out the characters and their key life incidents and using these for analysis and interpretation in the present study.

Lal (1987) speaking on the significance of the Mahābhārata, says that the epic has infinite possibilities for the expansion of our imagination and feelings and offers signposts and markers guiding us through our life path. Lal emphasizes dharma as the most salient point that the epic conveys to us and that it is dharma that carves truth, happiness and life for us. Getting sidetracked from this path can only lead to conflict and a 'Kurukṣetra' – an epic war and a catastrophic battlefield. Hiltebeitel (2001) who has done extensive research on the epic and several aspects such as the cult of Draupadī, the ritual of battle, Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata, and on dharma posits that “the characters in the epic do indeed possess as complex a psychology as one could wish” (Hiltebeitel, 1990).

Matilal (1989) who has written on the moral dilemmas in the Mahābhārata and on the nature of ethics in the Indian epics, defines them in terms of obligation and evaluation principles. Matilal considers that acting on one course precludes others bringing out conflicts, and claims that dilemmas can only be resolved or dissolved but not solved. The import from the epic is achieved through the narrative itself and sometimes the medium itself is the message. The individual exercises practical wisdom and also learns from the experiences he passes through during his life. Matilal discusses the dilemma from Arjuna's point of view, in the Bhagavad-Gītā, where the warrior had to resolve only through a pragmatic concern by the situation.

Krishan (1989) elaborates on the role and meaning of puruṣārtha-s in the
Mahābhārata and concludes that the epic repeatedly reiterates the importance of *dharma* in the conduct of every action of the individual – a person attains happiness when there is no clash between *dharma* and *artha* or *dharma* and *kāma* or *kāma* and *artha*. Thus, a smooth flow of human effort signifies order.

Bowles (2007) studies the role of *Āpaddharma*, *dharma* in various times of crisis, and considers the king's conduct through diverse situations to preserve social cohesion. The idea of *dharma* is thus extended in different directions thereby legitimizing different actions at different standpoints. The Mahābhārata surprises us at every turn and concept - with no loose standards, yet not being dictatorial. It primes and prepares the individual to act with personal choice thus bringing out latent potentials and transforming the individual thereby.

Brodbeck & Black (2007), Sharma (2007), Chakravarti (2006), Rukmani (2005), and Agarwal (2002) have done research on gender, ethics, *dharma*, values, desire, the specific duties of the king, duties of the subjects, and the various modes of human functioning.

While the above works offer various interpretations of the epic, scholars such as Irawati Karve have analysed various characters of the Mahābhārata. Karve (1931) in her work *Yugānta* presents alternative and insightful perspectives especially of the women characters. Kunṭī, Gāndhārī and Draupadī are depicted by Karve (1931) with sensitivity and depth of emotions which produces in the reader, an engagement with her own emotional consciousness. These emotional connections link the reader with the characters opening possibilities for deeper understanding of one's own self. Sharma (2006) and McGrath (2009) focus on the women characters of the epic. These authors have sensitively portrayed characterizations of Gāndhārī, presenting her in various contexts and relationships - with truth, with the king, her progeny, and her relationship with the forces of truth throughout the epic. Although these various aspects have been studied in detail, interlinks between self, well-being, psychological well-being have not been established.

Further research has been undertaken in the areas of ethics, *dharma*, human action and many more aspects. Dhand (2008) details the aspects of *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* *dharma* highlighting aspects of action. The *pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* *dharma*-s are crucial for emotional well-being. It is through *nivṛtti* that one acquires *tapas*, the energy and
self-discipline that is essential for such an accruement. Hill (2001) explores the ideas of fate, predestination and human action. Aspects of self, fate, free will, *puruṣārtha*-s of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*, food, desire, and other experiences have been analyzed by Badrinath (2007a) who has written on the nature of the human condition focusing on the psychological import of behaviour and experience. Badrinath's in-depth analysis into various aspects of the human condition and all the *puruṣārtha*-s bring out their interrelations with self indicating the crucial bearing of being in right relation with one's self for happiness.

Internet groups pertaining to study of the Mahābhārata are constantly in the process of studying the subtleties of the epic and trying to establish the interpretations on various phenomena. Foremost among these scholars are Pradip Bhattacharya, Satya Chaitanya, Indrajit Bandyopadhyay who have postulated, debated, and examined characters, their unique situations and experiences drawing widely from various sources of the epic. Several translations and renderings circulate as also works of fiction based on the Mahābhārata. Some fiction works are the ‘*The Great Indian Novel*’ by Shashi Tharoor, ‘*The Palace of Illusions*’ by Chitra Divakaruni, ‘*Yajnaseni*’ by Pratibha Ray. Almost all Indian languages have regional variations of the Mahābhārata. The famous work in Kannada is *Karṇāṭa-bhārata-kathā-mañjarī*, more famously known as *Kumāravyāsa-bhārata* of Kumāravyāsa. A modern version is *Parva* by S L Bhyrappa. However, here, I have referred only to the famous Telugu works, apart from the Sanskrit original.

A prominent vernacular rendering in Telugu is the ‘*Āndhra Mahābhāratamu*’ by Nannayya, Tikkanna, and Yerrapragada known as *Kavitraya* (consortium of three poets) was composed over three centuries and several works in contemporary literature based on this vernacular include (a) commentaries in prose and (b) speeches on characters and situations. Of particular importance and relevance is a work titled ‘*Mahābhāratam – Mānava-svabhāva-citraṇa*’ by Dr. A.V. Subbayya (1977) which depicts each character in their respective situations in detail especially with regard to the cardinal qualities they exhibit while coping with crises. Contemporary scholars such as Mallapragada Srimannarayana Murthy, Garikipati Narasimha Rao and others, in lectures and academic presentations have elaborated on the entire ‘Śrīmad-Āndhra-Mahābhāratamu’ and the psychological aspects of the characters in their situations. These lectures and depictions present different readings and perspectives of analysis.
suggesting inherent and intrinsic phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to understand the epics and interpretations.

In the diverse research on the Mahābhārata however, the interrelation of self and psychological well-being and its implication for counselling or therapeutic purposes has not been examined sufficiently deeply. Studying the Mahābhārata and the complex psychology of human nature will present alternative perspectives to counselling and research on well-being. Qualitative and narrative approaches bring out qualities of humans that probably are difficult to describe in purely quantitative and objective measures. This research study also aims to expand the scope of Indian Psychology.

The discussion of self in the Mahābhārata takes a deeply psychological context. It is a living experience that the Mahābhārata presents in various complexities, and brings out endless combinations of responses and reactions to these experiences through the characters. It is in these responses and reactions that the various nuances of human potentials and positive resources are exhibited. The Mahābhārata characters seek their well-being in the midst of complex interpersonal relations. Hence, often, the well-being represented by them signifies the importance of self-transformation and acceptance.

### 2.5 Orienting toward qualitative inquiry

We all possess a living self with which we relate to an interactive world and accumulate experiences. In this process our well-being is constantly questioned, and challenged. The integration of the self and its positive perceptions and experiences contribute to a continued sense of well-being. The value of attributing meaning to something beyond and larger than the individual is elevating. Meaning plays a vital role in discovering the hidden human potential. One does not know the self through learning or accruing facts but only through experiences. The objective is to overcome one’s crises and move toward knowing the self, leading to transformation which in turn, leads to a deeper understanding of oneself. The transformations may be studied more closely and deeply utilizing the qualitative approaches to research. Resnick, et al. (2001) view humans as conscious beings with a rich subjective inner experience are composed of more than thoughts and point out that it is challenging to find a
methodology and approach that is adequate to describe the full range of experience that constitutes being human.

A qualitative inquiry not only deepens the understanding of the others but affords a greater understanding of ourselves. Why is the understanding of the self so important? As a counsellor, I feel that my whole being is presented to the counsellee and not merely my words or gestures that have impact on the process. I am part of the whole and the whole is part of me. In a qualitative inquiry, the researcher’s part in shaping the research process is as important as the participant’s. The respondent or participant can be understood through the interpretations given by the researcher and for this interpretation, the researcher’s deep involvement becomes imperative. Consequently, the self-structure becomes primary in moving forth toward the goal of better understanding of the psychological world of oneself and the other. In qualitative inquiry the researcher is the instrument generating the data.

In the next chapter on Methodology and Approach I will describe the qualitative phenomenological-hermeneutic approach as well as state the research objectives and the target set of characters from the Mahābhārata selected for the study on self and well-being.