CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Concluding a process-based study is a difficult task and sort of contradicts the nature of the phenomenological approaches adopted in the research. To conclude something that is dynamic, evolving and growing is intimidating. However, the thesis has to be contained within the limits of the study undertaken and the research objectives that have been specified. The aim of the present study has been to examine the interrelations between self and well-being, utilizing the Rogerian framework mainly to accrue a theoretical base to Indian Psychology through the Mahābhārata, and to understand the implications of such understandings in the practice of counselling. To gain an understanding of these processes, the 'data' considered and analyzed were: a target set of characters, from the Mahābhārata, and their primary life incidents in the experiences of desire, conflict, and grief. The self is analyzed and understood in terms of self-processes, i.e. self-concept, self-complexity, and self-enhancement.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to understand the self from an experiential and psychophysical framework. The Indian idea of self is considered as encompassing bio-psycho-social and spiritual aspects, and as a lived experience and a transcendental goal. It is the self as a process that I seek to emphasize upon rather than a self as a fixed entity, a holistic process rather than of bounded notions. We possess a living self with which we interact with the world and acquire experiences. The interactive process constantly presents us with opportunities to transform as a result of the interactions. Where transformation takes place, fluidity and pliancy ensues and creates well-being. The Mahābhārata characters seek their well-being amidst complex interpersonal relations and often the well-being represented by them signifies the importance of self-enhancement, transformation and acceptance. In our

14 'Data' in this thesis refer to the material of the Mahābhārata characters and their primary experiential narratives.
own interactions and lived experiences, we traverse similar paths with our desires, conflicts, and grief. Questions do arise as to the location, time, and space of the characters and our own experiences. I do agree that our regular interactions and relations do not typify the enormity of the Mahābhārata war, yet I believe and think that our experiences are fundamental and universal and as contemporary as those of the characters of the epic in their times. Although I am considering the self as a process, as dynamic, changing, and evolving, the narrative of the self is eternal. The essential tendency of the self is that of self-enhancement. This core aspect is woven in with the nature of the self and enhancement is implicitly woven in with psychological well-being.

The complex and diverse psychological aspects of the human psyche are presented through experiential narratives, emotions, conflicts, crises, and varied ways of coping with them. The Mahābhārata posits varied multidimensional aspects of human nature and its essence lies in the quest for meaning and purpose and actions that allay weaknesses and strengthen the self. The narrative informs of the moving course of one’s own action and experience, through which a sense of self and world is created. It links the life of people and their individual psychosocial experiences to the reality of their world. As Ochs and Capps (1996) point out, the self is understood as, “a reflective awareness of being-in-the-world” (p. 21).

5.1 The Research Questions

The questions raised in the research to understand the self and well-being in the Mahābhārata cover broadly what the self and well-being are, their interrelations, and questions pertaining to the fundamental experiences of desire, conflict, and grief as portrayed by the characters of the Mahābhārata through their primary life incidents.

5.1.1 Self-processes and well-being

Traditionally, in psychology, the self has been studied through dimensions such as self-regard, self-esteem, self-perception, and others. Partialized dimensions in my view, do not present the whole picture and there is a tendency to assume the part as the whole self. In this research study, I view the self as a process, as dynamic and evolving. Even though I have sought broadly dimensions of self, i.e. self-concept,
self-complexity, and self-enhancement, I look at these as unfolding and emerging of the self, and not as fixed dimensions.

In fields like cognitive science, brain studies, and others, the self is being studied and researched widely through various perspectives, each with their own methods and methodologies. I am studying the self with a view of understanding the whole person which has a bearing in the field of counselling. In counselling and therapeutic interactions, the person is pivotal rather than a particular aspect of the person. Through the person's experiences in a particular dimension it is possible to “read” the person and a holistic narrative emerges. Experiential narratives inform of the dynamisms of the self and of how the self is a movement and a process. Self-concept, self-complexity, and self-enhancement, while they suggest themselves to be partial entities are being viewed as processes and movements of the whole self. The process nature is highlighted by Schechtman (2011) according to whom, the self is inherently a narrative entity and he further calls the narrative as the hermeneutical narrative because it conceives of selves as fundamentally self-interpreting beings and because its proponents are inspired by hermeneutics theory.

Our actions are primed for purpose and meaning and the behaviours are interpreted in the contexts of narratives. The characters of the Mahābhārata are placed in their narrative contexts through fundamental and universal experiences of desire, conflict, and grief. These narrative contexts and primary life incidents present diverse opportunities for multiple expressions of one's potentiality and as a consequence the self-processes unfurl giving us an array of the possibilities of psychological and emotional responses for each experience. Not only are various possibilities and potentials uncovered through the characters' experiences but the epic narrative as a whole also suggests a movement. For instance, the events in the epic themselves present a journey from the Rājasūya to the Mahāprasthāna – the coronation of Yudhiṣṭhira as the emperor to the final journey of the Pāṇḍava-s. The transition and journey is also a metaphor for the transition of the self – a processing, expanding, transforming self working through desires, conflicts, and grief.

Psychological well-being involves the presence of positive psychological resources. Meanings of self, being, and becoming, are tied in with the enhancement of self. Psychological well-being and self-enhancement are intertwined and involve a foray into newer or hidden regions of oneself and discover other possibilities which
may in turn be integrated into the existing self-concept. This leads to an expansion of the self and its perception, again opening new vistas for enhanced action.

5.1.2 Desire, conflict, grief

To be oneself, to develop one's character to the utmost, one must work through the inner conflicts, a movement in growth of the inner core and personality. This growing and movement through one's conflicts, desires and grief is one's personal development and enhancement. Ilham Dilman says that, “in the course of this kind of growth one sheds desires and attitudes, grows out of needs, acquires new capacities, interests and sentiments, and develops aptitudes and dispositions one already has” (Dilman, 2005, p.26).

The movement is a continuous one throughout our lives. When the fluidity and dynamicity solidifies the person becomes prejudiced, biased, mired in the negative emotions, stuck in conflicts, and unable to resolve these or transcend grief leading to unfulfilled states. One's innate tendency is that of self-enhancement and to freeze it results in an unhealthy attitude. To be in the psychological well-being state one must harness the growth tendency and inner potentials. To be one's self is to be congruent, genuine, authentic and unconditional. For, to be conditional is to limit oneself by artificial boundaries. The limiting is not of erecting physical structures but imposing psychological and spiritual barriers to one's expansion of potentials. Dilman's (2005) opinion is that these barriers lead to arrogance and it is this arrogance which is thought to be at the root of evil. Dilman goes on to say that only in humility can one face difficulties and meet adversities and overcome these successfully.

This above frame of thought is subsumed in the Bhagavad-Gītā where (BG, II.67) the chain of emotions from anger to pride is explicated as the downfall of a person. It is further demonstrated in the Mahābhārata (Vana Parvan, III.311-312) when Yudhiṣṭhira, in the episode of the Yakṣa Praśna is at his humblest while answering the Yakṣa's questions. It is Yudhiṣṭhira's humility which brings out clarity of thought, reflected in his answers to the series of questions. The questions themselves are fundamentally phenomenological in nature requiring one to reflect deeply inward to find the truth and the truth is a mirror of the focus on the self. The expansion itself is toward horizons where one approaches a state of self which then functions as a new base from which to move toward another horizon. The process is
not an unsteady hopping from one level to another but rather a process of becoming aware at every step, accepting, absorbing the new and assimilating. The assimilation expands one's conception so that newer potentials are grasped.

Coming to the experiences of desire and grief – the characters and their contexts provide varied responses in different intense situations. Desire is a movement and this movement is the crux of the self. Butler (1987, p.9) in her detailed study of Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit* writes that desire is an interrogative mode of being and that in satisfying a desire we answer the question of being; it is the fundamental modality of human existence and the endeavour to persist in one's being. It is that vital force through which a being moves forward to fulfill one's potential. The *Kāma-Gītā* in the Mahābhārata gives a phenomenological understanding of the nature of desire.

Grief presents varied ways of coping. The experiential narratives of the characters emphasize the process of 'becoming' and finding meaning and purpose in the journey of transcending the limited boundaries of existence. The knowledge one acquires while resolving personal crises and sorrows is an experience that increments the self.

The characters of the Mahābhārata find resonance with contemporary society. Desire, conflict, grief are experiential meshes through which practically all of us are sieved through. Some may pass through the fine net while others may lament their 'fate', yet others may have blocks while still others may exhibit a breakdown in the self. People also pass through several emotions like anger, denial, blame, guilt, a feeling of victimization. The sense of self during these heightened emotional states may be understood through the grasping of the subjective experience. The very core of knowledge and understanding about one's own desires, conflicts, griefs, is in the grasping of another's (the characters') experiences leading one to examine one's own experience in a different light.

The Mahābhārata characters lend themselves as 'texts' to be read, interacted, and engaged with for varied understandings and interpretation, and to understand different forces of cultural historicity, the self and its ramifications. We may apprehend the characters through our own horizons and grasp various frames of understandings and experiences. The shared understanding that occurs between the character/counsellee and reader/researcher/counsellor is assimilated by the counsellor.
to become one's own experience. Thus, meaning and being become the same.

The narratives of the characters serve to vivify the self-transformation process of the researcher or the interpreter, through grasping. Redescribing the world in our own experience of self reveals new modes of being and new capacities for knowledge and action. The interpretations and understandings that come forth also serve to strengthen another self and resultantly a shared understanding may emerge, leading to greater awareness of one's identity and beingness.

Our narratives are written and read and assimilated into one's identity and self-understanding. As we pass through various temporal pockets, newer dimensions come to fore, and create opportunities for further reflections. Past experiences can be re-described and narrated, when heretofore unrealized connections are suddenly seen between characters, actors, agents of action, situations, circumstances, motives, objects of desire, goals and others such that greater understanding of the self is established. This understanding augments our awareness leading to enhancement and well-being.

Well-being is intrinsic to the self and each process mutually expands the other. The purpose of the research has also been to see how these understandings of self and well-being are implicated in the field of counselling. In a therapeutic context, it is important to not simply address the presenting symptoms but also go deeper toward an understanding of the self.

In the Rogerian framework, desire, conflict, and pain and suffering arise when persons do not move toward actualizing their potentials. Being trapped in one's own negative attitudes diminishes the person. "Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided" (Rogers, 1980, p. 115-117). In the Mahābhārata, self-protection, and freedom from violence and hatred are emphasized and violence is not merely against another but violence against oneself too (Badrinath, 2007a). We are connected to each other and are an integral part of the whole. Thus, the actions of oneself and others affect each other. The self is implicitly tied with the other and well-being is intrinsic to the self.
5.2 Areas of interest and future scope

In the present research, I have attempted to understand the concept and experience of self, psychological well-being, and their interrelations through the narrative experiential contexts of characters of the Mahābhārata using the broad principles of phenomenological approaches. In my view, the areas generating interest are as follows.

The study is primarily theoretical and conceptual. Theoretical research does not fall into the regular reliability-validity mode of empirical inquiry. Results obtained cannot be categorized as “results” in the conventional sense. In the present study I have used characters from a literary text to understand psychological issues. The study is thus a theoretical one using qualitative approaches, namely phenomenological-hermeneutics and partly the Mahābhārata itself. However, the study is not merely theoretical but also conceptual. Theoretical studies generate ideas which can be followed through and applied to the practical realms. They also broaden our viewpoints and lead to a widening of research and understanding. The conceptual aspects focus on the dynamic and flexible aspects of the self-processes, expanding and enriching the scope of viewing the self, self-enhancement, and consequently psychological well-being.

Secondly, the study falls under the domain of Indian Psychology. It is as yet being established in the discipline of psychology. While on one hand, the study of psychological aspects in Indian thought is exciting and refreshing, on the other, I am also aware that it is yet to be accepted fully into the mainstream field. The scope of Indian Psychology is thus very exciting and the wisdom that we can mine through the deep foundations of this sphere, can enhance our perspectives of human nature, the potentials, and the possibilities.

Thirdly, the primary use of qualitative approaches is an important foray. Results are alternative “understandings” of the material studied. Although the validity of the approaches has been established, they run counter to the mainstream methodological sensibilities of the discipline of psychology. In the present study too, interpretations are according to the phenomenological principles, and the understandings gained are subjective. Yet again, these alternative perspectives and understandings are the ones that present vastness to help us understand deeper and
farther. In tune with the phenomenological approaches, the understandings take us to different horizons.

Fourthly, the projections I have made extend to the counselling field. Counselling itself has vast scope and to attempt and be able to bridge psychological understandings from a literary text into the presenting field is a challenging stream to ford. The very challenge also issues the scope of the concepts discussed through the study.

Going by established and conventional methods, the above points may be considered as issues of concern. However, I consider them as fresh perspectives to study and understand the psychological aspects of ourselves. At least one challenge is to be able to actualize psychological understandings from a literary text into the presenting field of counselling. While concerns are present in the academic as well as in the practical field, I also see future openings and a possible “way of the Mahābhārata” at least in the area of counselling.