CHAPTER – III

SELECTION AND DEVIATION

This chapter analyzes the six selected novels for their relationship to the parent epic. Each novel has a theme, drawn from the Mahabharata. We will examine how the epic theme has been adopted and adapted; that is what has been included or excluded and what has been modified. Looking at these and asking 'why' will shed light on the contextual motivation of these narratives.

R.C. Shah in the essay The Mahabharata as an Inspiration for Living Literary Tradition writes: “A living literary tradition presupposes the twin process of re-creation and re-interpretation in any coherent society” (Shah 1990, 246). There is always a visible effort of re-orientation towards the cultural past of the community. This effort is a vital ingredient of the struggle to face the present and shape the future, in a period of social transformation.

Many an epic has underwent such a transcreative process through the fertile imagination of the creative writer, and have become independent literary classics in their own right. This independent identity is achieved by the retellings because the writers adhere to the original, to a very great extent, and at the same time deviate from what is already in the text; to give a desired ‘twist in the tale’. This facilitates the author’s intention of creating an alienation effect, which in turn stimulates the reader to think beyond what has already been said. The Indian epics, especially the Mahabharata, contains in itself, multiple possibilities for re-creation and re-interpretation due to its varied levels of narrations, different narrators and various digressions which include stories, fables, philosophical treatises etc. Alf Hildebeitel, in Rethinking the Mahabharata studies why new interpretations spring out of old epics and observes, “Indian heroes and heroines’ epic lives
have other lives both behind and before them, and multiple possibilities for
different lives within the lives the epics give them" (Hiltebeitel 2001, 37).

Michael Bakhtin (1981) opines that outside his destiny, the tragic hero
is nothing. He is, therefore, "a function of the plot fate assigns him"
(M. Bakhtin 1981, 36). He cannot become the hero of another destiny or
another plot. Gray Morson, in Narrative and Freedom, analyzing Bakhtin’s
statement, writes, that: "the life led by a novelistic hero does not exhaust his
identity. He could have been different. We sense that, in potential, he has
more lives than one" (Morson 1994, 112). Modern Indian writers have
exploited the multiple possibilities for different lives of the Indian epic heroes
and heroines continually. This has led to an unfolding of new epic-based
plots in classical Indian drama and later fiction, in vernacular versions of the
epics and vernacular regional oral epics where the heroes and heroines of
the classical epics work out their "unfinished business" (Hiltebeitel 2001, 37)

Mahabharata re-tellings are at once a re-creation and re-interpretation
of the epic from a realistic perspective. It is a general trend exhibited by the
writers, to adopt a realistic form in terms of human experience and its
possibilities. For this purpose, the writers make necessary selections from
the episodes in the epic that help them to highlight and foreground the
characters and incidents of their choice and preference. Deviating from the
story line and incidents is a technique, which enables the writers to project
the characters in a realistic mode, in a frame comprehensible to the modern
sensibility. This is a sort of reading between the lines. The authors not only
try to evaluate the episodes narrated in the epic in the light of what has
actually happened as narrated in the epic, but also try to understand that
else might have happened. As M. T. Vasudevan Nair writes in his
‘Introduction’ to Second Turn, the re-tellers expand upon the "meaningful
gaps" left by Krishnadvaipayana Vyasa in the course of his narration. The
authors try to see what has been left unsaid, and expand on the "pregnant
silences" left by Vyasa himself in the epic Mahabharata. While presenting a
story before a modern reader, the writer has to steer clear of all kinds of "spiritualist traps" (Introduction, *Second Turn*, XII). This involves a demythification of the epic, where the writers bring down the characters from their epic heights and treat them as characters in a familiar setting. In retelling the episodes/incidents in the epic, the modern novelists select certain aspects of the epic, which they highlight in the novel. Some of the incidents are selected and retained in the modern narrative. The author may also add some incident to make the novel more acceptable and to suit the modern sensibility or to justify the actions of a character projected in the novel. In order to strengthen the logic of the modern narrative, the author may delete some of the incidents/episodes in the original narrative. Another mode of re-telling a work which already exists is by modifying the selected episode to suit the modern context. The author may also venture to give a new explanation or a new logical interpretation to the episodes borrowed by him from the epic. Thus, the authors of the retellings are involved in a contextual re-interpretation of the parent epic by a mode of selection and deviation.

The writers seek this mode of selection or deviation with the intention of making the epic situations acceptable in the present society. The changes in the social and moral values of a particular society at a particular point of time influence the interpretation of the epic. The changed customs, practices and thoughts also have its mark on the contextual interpretation of an ancient text. The experiences of an author/society and the literary theories of interpretation/criticism are the other factors, which contribute to the new interpretation of ancient works.

While analyzing the novels under study for their relationship to the epic, the English translations of the novels written originally in various vernaculars will be used for the sake of references and the translation of the epic by M.N. Dutt (verse translation in seven volumes) will be made use of for citing the epic references.
I

The novel *Yajnaseni*, by the Oriya writer Pratibha Ray is a partial retelling of the epic *Mahabharata*, where the author foregrounds the episodes where the character Draupadi appears. In the epic *Mahabharata*, Draupadi the royal spouse of the *Pandavas* initially appears in the *Swayamvara Parva* in *Adi Parva* (Chapters 187-198). She is continues to appear in *Vaivahika Parva* (Chapters 199-203) and *Rajyalambha Parva* (Chapters 209-214) in *Adi Parva*. The *Dyuta Parva* in *Sabha Parva* narrates the humiliation of Draupadi in the *Kaurava Sabha*. *Vana Parva* of the epic depicts Draupadi's life in the forest with her husbands where the incidence of *saugandhikaharanam*, *Draupadi-Satyabhamasamvada* and *Draupadiharana* by Jayadratha occur. In *Virata Parva*, Draupadi appears in the disguise of Sairandhri where her humiliation by Kicaka is narrated. The *Sauptika Parva* witnesses the massacre of Draupadi's sons and the lamentations of Draupadi. The *Mahaprastanika Parva* describes the fall of Draupadi during her heavenward journey. In *Swargarohana Parva*, Draupadi attains the heaven along with the Pandavas.

In the novel *Yajnaseni* : The *story of Draupadi*, Pratibha Ray chooses to narrate the story of Draupadi, or Krishnaa, as she calls her, without much deviations from the epic *Mahabharata*. She follows the framework of the story very closely and rarely ignores the divine interventions included in the *Mahabharata*. In Pratibha Ray's own words, "Re-interpreting the past for the benefit of the present for me is not attaching scientific reasons to incidents but inculcating human values through re-interpretation of the characters" (Rangra 1998, 186). Pratibha Ray mainly depends on *Vyasa-Mahabharata*, at the same time admits that the Oriya *Mahabharata* of Sarala Das has influenced her to some extent. She also introduces certain imaginary incidents and characters that merge into the core narrative. At
some places, the sequence of events of the *Vyasa Mahabharata* is not strictly followed.

The novel *Yajnaseni* is written in the form of an epistle addressed to Krishna by Draupadi. The whole life of Draupadi slowly unfolds through her thought stream. The incidents in her life, from birth to the denial of *swargarohana* (an incident introduced by the author) have been strung together sequentially. We see a young Krishnaa full of zeal for life who lives with the knowledge that she has been born into this world from the sacrificial altar built by the sages and ascetics for the benefit of her father Yajnasena. ".... My birth was not from my father’s seed but from the sacrificial altar built for the fulfilling a vow. From even before birth, I was destined to avenge my father’s insult. I was going to be the weapon for preserving dharma on this earth and destroying the wicked" (*Yagnaseni*, 8).

With this inner knowledge that the aim of her life was pre-ordained, young Krishnaa is seen waiting for her beloved hero *Yadava* Krishna, to whom she desires to offer herself as a wife. Her friend Nitambini is a character introduced by Pratibha Ray to lend authenticity to the narration of young Krishnaa’s life. Traversing through the maze of thoughts in Yajnaseni’s mind, the author is able to convey an impression of a deep spiritual influence of Krishna on Krishnaa. But dramatically, Draupadi’s attentions are diverted to Arjun (who is portrayed as a second self of Krishna), who is verbally introduced to Draupadi by Krishna himself, who discloses to her that Arjuna is destined to be her lord. From this point onwards, Draupadi’s dreams are centred on the dark-complexioned prince of Hastinapura, the alter ego of Krishna. She loses herself in the fantasies about Arjuna, who “has taken birth from a portion of Krishna” (*Yajnaseni*, 26). In Vyasa’s *Mahabharati*, Draupadi is introduced in the *Swayamvaraparva (Adi Parva)* where she appears before the assembled kings to garland the prince who successfully strings the very stiff bow specially made under Drupada’s orders, and shoots the mark through the
Pratibha Ray elaborately describes the arrangements made by Drupada for his daughter’s swayamvara, especially the arrangements made for target-shooting competition that would enable the victor to marry the princess. The author highlights Karna’s performance at the swayamvara the most. In a sub-plot at this juncture, Pratibha Ray deftly introduces the beginning of a love-hate relationship between Draupadi and Karna. In Vyasa’s Mahabharata, it is seen that Draupadi herself rejects Karna saying “I will not select a Suta for my lord” (I.189.23). But Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi thinks differently. She feels intense attraction for the handsome, radiant Karna, admiration for his deftness with the bow and sympathy for his fallen pride when the question of his lineage is brought up. She suffers deep sorrow and guilt when Karna is humiliated in the assembly. To develop this theme, Pratibha Ray does not make Draupadi mouth the rejection, but it is Drishtadyumna who belittles Karna in front of all the assembled guests announcing: “However great a hero Karna, the son of a charioteer Adhirath and Radha, might be, he cannot have the right to win my sister” (Yajnaseni, 42).

This deviation in the characterization of Draupadi and Drishtadyumna’s rejection of Karna helps Pratibha Ray to project both Karna and Draupadi in a different light. Draupadi’s thoughts and words are justified, when she is portrayed as a woman with an open, sympathetic heart, an understanding person and a woman sans pride. Karna’s hatred for Draupadi is rendered baseless by this single deviation. Thus Pratibha Ray is able to develop the story line where Karna and Draupadi, caught in their own worlds of mutual misunderstanding, false ego and guilt, are unable to communicate with each other. Yet they are compelled to move in a close circle, meeting each other frequently where they are forced to direct barbed words at each other. This is made possible by introducing another imaginary
incident where Kunti, recognizing Karna as her own son, accepts him as her dharmaputra, so that she could express her love for him openly. She tells Draupadi "Karna is my son according to dharma, my dharma-putra. I have accepted him as such. Morally, you should consider Karna in the same light as the five Pandav brothers. But it is his misfortune that he is the adopted son of a charioteer" (Yajnaseni, 116).

Introducing certain incidents during the course of the novel further strengthens the Karna-Draupadi relationship. This is prominently felt when Karna throws a bouquet of blue roses at the feet of Draupadi, while she was being welcomed at Hastinapura as a royal bride. Draupadi happens to step on it inadvertently, and her foot is hurt, as a thorn pricks it. Karna promptly belittles her with his barbed words:

"Beg forgiveness from the royal bride. I did not pain her deliberately. I know that the pain of being deliberately tormented in public is like... However, physical pain is much lighter than the agony of the mind - considering this, may she pardon me" (Yajnaseni, 111).

Another episode that which is woven into the fabric of the story is the incident where Draupadi is saved from being drowned in the Yamuna, by Karna. Draupadi, lost in thoughts of Arjuna, who has gone on a twelve-year exile, carelessly swims in the torrential Yamuna, and is swept away by the current. Karna, who happens to be on the banks of the river, saves her from death. This action is however, reciprocated by Draupadi in another incident in the later part of the novel. During the time of Vanavasa in Dvaita forest, Karna was spotted by some shabar youths, lying unconscious, wounded, and bitten by a poisonous snake. Draupadi, forgets her animosity towards him; and revives him with the help of her super-human power to control birds and animals. "I hummed the chant for summoning the serpent. It was as though it were waiting for its summons. At my command, it sucked at the wound and slowly began removing the poison" (Yajnaseni, 326). However,
she ensures that Karna does not make out that it was she who had saved his life from danger.

Draupadi’s interaction with Karna does not end here. Disturbed by the imminent war Kunti goes to meet Karna on the banks of Ganga. Draupadi, unaware of Kunti’s intentions, follows her secretly. On the banks of Ganga, she witnesses the meeting between Kunti and Karna, and overhears Kunti’s secret. This is an episode that has been created by the fertile imagination of the author, to foreground Draupadi as a woman responsible to everybody in the family, a woman who well understood the secret agonies of all around her. The Kunti-Karna meeting is extended further to the day of his birthday where we see Kunti offering prayers for him and distributing *prasad* for his well-being. Here too, Draupadi is forced by Kunti to appeal to Karna to desist from war and establish peace in *Aryavarta*. Karna, however, declines her request and accuses her of persuading him towards suicide (heroes consider cowardice equivalent to suicide). This twist in the sequence also helps Pratibha Ray to establish another quality of Draupadi – a peace-loving person, who condemns war and yearns for equality among mankind.

In Vyasa’s *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is portrayed as a wife who exhibits the super human quality of loving all her husbands in an equal manner. The only incident, which stands contrary to this belief, occurs in the *Mahaprastanika Parva* when Draupadi falls down on the foothills of Himalayas. Yudhishthira then enlightens his brothers saying, “though we were all equal unto her she had great partiality for Dhananjaya. She obtains the fruit of that conduct today, O best of men.” (XVII.2.6). Pratibha Ray draws inspiration from this statement and develops a story line, which depicts a deep link between Arjuna and Draupadi. This is a relationship, which surpasses the boundaries of the physical into the realms of spirituality.

Arjuna is projected as a manifestation of Krishna himself, and this image helps in the development of a physical-spiritual relationship between
him and Draupadi. Even before the svayamvara, Krishna mentally prepares Draupadi to accept Arjuna as her lord. Pratibha Ray goes deep into the details of her love and spiritual surrender to Arjuna. At times, Arjun and Krishna seem to be one with each other, that Draupadi herself is confused about their identity. Krishna himself discloses to Draupadi through his words: “Except for me who else would keep roaming by your side in the form of Arjuna? ---Did you not know that sakha Arjun and I are the same?” (Yajnaseni, 308).

During the svayamvara, when Draupadi sees Arjuna disguised as a Brahmin, she is impressed by his handsome looks and readily accepts him as her husband. Later when she guesses his identity, she is overjoyed. But this is short lived when she is asked to marry all five brothers in the name of dharma. Arjuna also agrees to this proposition silently but could never forgive Draupadi for agreeing to this condition laid by Kunti and Yudhishtira.

Arjuna expresses his inner feeling of agony not in words, but in deeds. He directs barbed words against her, while Draupadi inwardly blames Arjuna for agreeing to share her with his brothers. It is during this juncture that Pratibha Ray introduces a character called Maya, whom Krishna presents to Draupadi as a wedding gift. From this point onwards, Maya becomes Draupadi’s companion, and remains with her in all her joys and sorrows, till the Mahaprapsthana. Maya’s intervention in Draupadi’s life is so deep that it is she, who along with Maharshi Narada lays down the rules for Draupadi’s systematic and happy married life with her five husbands. She advises, or rather directs Draupadi: “sakhi, paying the role of the wife of many husbands at one time is extremely painful and shameful. Therefore, adopt the role of being the wife of each Pandava by turn for a year at a time. A woman is mother, wife and sister. Discharge the duties of a mother and a sister all the time with all the Pandavas. But as a wife, stay with each Pandava a year at
a time. The five Pandava brothers are each of a different nature. In the course of a year you will get the opportunity for preparing yourself mentally and emotionally for moving in harmony with the nature of one" (Yajnaseni, 101-2). In Vyasa’s Mahabharata, (I.214.27-29) it is the Pandavas themselves who lay down rules for marital harmony with Draupadi. Kisari Mohan Ganguly’s prose translation of the epic describes the incident as follows:

The illustrious Pandavas, thus addressed by the great Rishi Narada, consulting with one another, established a rule among themselves in the presence of the celestial Rishi himself endued with immeasurable energy. And the rule they made was that when one of them would be sitting with Draupadi, any of the other four who would see that one thus must retire into the forest for twelve years, passing his days as a Brahmacarini. After the virtuous Pandavas had established rule amongst themselves, the great Muni Narada, gratified with them, went to the place he wished. (Ganguly Vol.I 1998, 416).

Another deviation Ray adopts in the novel is when Draupadi decides to live as a brahmacarini during Arjuna’s turn to live with her as he proceeds on a twelve-year exile, when she should have spent that period with Yudhishthira under a prior understanding. No such incident has been mentioned in the Mahabharata, except that the Pandava brothers and Draupadi were unwilling to let Arjuna go on exile (I.215.27-35). It has been clearly mentioned in the Mahabharata of Vyasa that Arjuna had married the Naga princess Ulupi (who bore him the son Iravan), and the princess of Manipura, Chitrangada (a son Babhruvahana was born from this union) during his exile (Chapters 216 & 217, Adi Parva). It is also mentioned that he had visited the Kingdom of Kalinga, among other places, during his wanderings. But Pratibha Ray specially mentions that he marries the
princess Arya of Kalinga, during this period. Pratibha Ray, who hails from Oriya seems to have been influenced by a popular legend of the region, and mentions this in her novel.

Pratibha Ray has introduced several emotional dialogues and scenes between Arjuna and Draupadi to word-paint the depth of their love for each other. Among these is the incident where Arjuna refuses to spend the night in Draupadi's chamber after coming back from his exile, even though it is his turn to be with her. Draupadi misunderstands this as Arjuna's preference for Subhadra, while Arjuna believes that Draupadi is consciously refusing to welcome him into her bed.

Draupadi's relationship with Krishna becomes the main motive force in the novel. All through the novel, Draupadi's deep spiritual attachment to Krishna is portrayed minutely. It is Krishna who gives her the inner strength to accept all the five Pandavas as her husbands and serve them without partiality or preference for any one over the other. It is this guiding force, which helps her to move forward in her misery-ridden-life. The all-encompassing love for Krishna whom she looks upon as a saviour, makes her openhearted that she advocates for the unity of the Aryan and Non-Aryan race in Aryavart. This story-line helps Pratibha Ray to bring in the theme of Aryan - Non-Aryan Integration, and Draupadi is seen working for the education and upliftment of the backward foresters. She even breast-feeds two orphaned forest-dwelling children Kambu and Jambu (Yajneseni, 270), so as to save their lives, as well as to give vent to her motherly feelings.

Pratibha Ray further develops this theme by making Draupadi request Bhima to spare the life of Kirmira (Yajneseni, 265). Vyasa's Mahabharata depicts Kirmira as a heartless Rakshasa who is killed by Bhima without second thoughts in Kirmira-Vadha Parva. But Pratibha Ray's Kirmira is very human, respectful to Draupadi and even addresses her as 'mother'. We also see a Draupadi who feeds all animals, insects and worms in the forest, before having food herself. Thus through the deviation in the story line,
Pratibha Ray is able to effectively present the theme of National Integration in India.

Pratibha Ray also projects Draupadi as a human being who wants to spend her life serving mankind. Even though a queen herself, she rejects all luxuries and vows that she will never wear any jewelry. To highlight this attitude of Draupadi, Pratibha Ray retells the episode of Bhima going in search of *saugandhika* lotus, which is fancied by Draupadi. In *Vana Parva*, it is seen that Bhima gets into trouble with the soldiers of Kubera, for plucking the flower without permission. Yudhishtira admonishes Bhima and saves him from the dilemma. Nothing is further mentioned about this in *Vanaparva*. But Pratibha Ray further stretches the storyline where Kubera meets Draupadi and presents her with innumerous golden lotuses. But Draupadi, who realizes the futility of accumulating wealth, rejects his offer and even goes to the extent of renouncing all jewellery and riches for the cause of human welfare. She even speaks about *Aryan* - *Non-Aryan* integration and says: "Consequently, it would be possible to establish integration between *Aryans* and the *Non-Aryans*, *sages* and hermits. Exchange of ideas, participating in festivals, marriages and celebrations of one another would be possible. In this manner, among them bonds of friendship and even of marriage could be forged" (*Yajnaseni*, 298-99). As the first step of integration, Draupadi suggests that roads should be built linking the forests of *Kamyaka, Dvaita, Naimisha* and the city of *Hastinapura*.

Pratibha Ray does not try the technique of demythification like M.T. Vasudevan Nair but only visualizes and analyses the events through the eyes of the transformed Draupadi of her novel. The author retains all episodes of divine intervention like the scene in which Draupadi is able to protect herself with the help of Krishna, when Duhsasana tries to disrobe her. She even borrows a popular legend to explain why Krishna helps her in that situation. She narrates an incident in which Draupadi dresses Krishna's wounded finger.
with a strip torn off her sari's 'anchal'. In return of that piece of cloth, Krishna provides Draupadi with incessant flow of cloth to cover her nakedness before the *Kaurava Sabha*. Krishna tells Draupadi:

"I did not do anything at all out of the way for you. Whatever you have done, it was the debt that I repaid and am free now. In nursing me on the day of the ceremonial entrance to the new palace, you had torn the auspicious sari received from your husband to bondage my finger. In the shape of cloth it was that which I returned. By offering thread to get cloth in return – that is 'faith' (Yajnaseni, 250). The incident of Draupadi being helped by Krishna is probably a reiteration of a folklore, and runs in a close parallel to another popular legend in South India, which narrates the story in which Krishna had been provided with a piece of cloth torn from her sari (*muntani*), by Draupadi, when he had lost his loincloth while bathing in a river (see, Hildebeitel 1988, 227).

Finally, in the novel, Draupadi is seen requesting to Krishna for a rebirth on earth instead of attaining *swarga* (397). She discloses her wish to serve her motherland by serving the less fortunate, and condemns war and destructive weapons. Pratibha Ray deviates from the narration in the epic original, and adds this twist to the story to project an image of Draupadi who is aware of the current world affairs and has an inclination for social service.

**Sum up**

Pratibha Ray does not try to deviate much from Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, but when she does so, it is only to highlight the character of Draupadi, as she herself sees her. The author also borrows ideas from the oral traditions of the epic, to introduce incidents, which would foreground and justify the actions of her heroine. She presents the situations in Draupadi's life, offering new explanations and introduces new ones to bring out the inner agony of the woman in Draupadi.
M.T. Vasudevan Nair, chooses to narrate the story of Bhima through his novel *Second Turn*. Bhima the second Pandava is prominent in the epic for his super-human strength and for his image as the sole vanquisher of the Kauravas. He appears in all the parvas where the other Pandavas are mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. The exploits of Bhima in the epic are weighed at par with the heroic deeds of Hanuman in the *Ramayana*.

Bhima in *Second Turn* is a flesh-and-blood human being capable of expressing sorrow, anger, cynicism and philosophy. Unlike the epic heroes who are action-oriented, obedient and scarcely deviating from the path of righteousness, the modern Pandavas are capable of emotions, are strategists who know how to move their pawns and have all the weaknesses of normal human beings, and thus cater to the modern sensibility.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair follows the technique of demythification to firmly root his heroes in the 20th century mind. V.C. Harris in his 'Introduction' to the novel writes that *Second Turn* "is not only the tragic story of Bhima, the second-born; it is also a subtle narrativisation of the of the belated artist's bid to renegotiate a textural terrain that is always, already mapped and charted. And this renegotiation, so far as Second Turn is concerned, involves sighting a fresh narrative within the nooks and crannies, the crevices, or the dark, silent spaces that the *Mahabharata* keeps hidden in its textual folds" (Introduction, *Second Turn*, X).

The novel begins describing the events in the Mausalaparva of *Mahabharata*, where the Yadava clan is destroyed and Sri Krishna meets with his end. The valorous Arjuna, unable to save the honour of Yadava women, weeps to himself in utter helplessness. After the annihilation of the Yadavas, the Pandavas embark on the Mahaprapstana, moving towards the Himalayas. Draupadi, unable to ascend, falls down, with only Bhimasena showing sympathetic love for her, and proves to be the only husband who loved
Draupadi sincerely. The author thereby paints Bhima larger than his epic original.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair after describing the Mahapratishhana of the Pandavas, changes the narrative to the first person, where the life of Bhima from his childhood to Mahapratishana slowly unfurls before the reader. In order to present Bhima as a human being with all his strengths and weaknesses, the author chooses to break the prevalent myths which are woven into the story of the Mahabharata. We see a Bhima, who laughs at the myths attached to himself, dismissing them as false stories fabricated by sutas and palace maids. Such an instance is seen when he is amazed to hear the maids regarding him as a wonder kid, who “at birth had slipped, fallen on hard rocks, smashing them to pieces and rolled off unhurt” (Second Turn, 15). The fact remains that nothing extraordinary had ever happened, other than child Bhima had fallen out of his mother’s arms but had escaped unhurt.

The author ventures to convey to the readers Bhima’s extraordinary valour, outstanding courage, and above all his gullible nature, which is often regarded by others as idiocy. To this effect the author has described many incidents, which have not been included in the Mahabharata. We come across the incident in which Bhima kills a dangerous wild boar during a hunting expedition, saving the lives of all around him. But Yudhishthira, instead of appreciating him, admonishes him, highlighting this as a thoughtless action.

The process of demythification continues, where Bhima becomes an ordinary mortal and all the incidents in his life become comprehensible to contemporary mind. The incident at Pramanakoti (which occurs in the Sambhava Parva, Adi Parva of the epic) is one of such a kind, where Duryodhana openly questions the paternity of Pandavas, and throws an intoxicated Bhima into the river, after tying up his hands and feet. The original epic narrates the events where the unconscious Bhima is bitten by
snakes in the river and the effect of the poison is nullified by the vegetable poison in the his body (I.128.56-57). Bhima who regains consciousness finds himself in the nagaloka where the nagaś feed him the ambrosia that gives him the strength of ten thousand elephants, and returns home jubilantly.

But M. T. Vasudevan Nair is not satisfied with this explanation, which does not cater to modern logical mind. In Second Turn Bhima reaches the land of Nagas, who were not serpents but "small men with small eyes and yellow skins" (Second Turn, 35) who receive him with concern. Bhima receives not only their hospitality, but also learns certain laws of the forest from them, which helps him later in his life while confronting enemies. The foremost of the forest-law that influenced Bhima was taught by the nagaś: "Don't show mercy to enemies. The enemy strengthens with mercy, and when confronted again, becomes invincible. ...Don't ever give a second chance to men" (Second Turn, 37). Bhima also accepts their advice to rely on one's own strength, than in divine arms.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair strips the characters of all super-human and supra-human qualities and portrays them as down-to-earth people. Hidimbi, Bhima's forest wife, in the epic is described as a Rakshasi, with sharp nails and teeth, capable of assuming any form of her choice. But the Hidimbi in the novel, is just a large-limbed, agile forest girl, who has a loving feminine mind and is ready to serve to her husband and in-laws with all devotion. Hidimba, her brother is not a cannibal, neither a sorcerer, but just an ill-tempered, cruel forester who does not tolerate anybody entering his territory unlike in the epic. The combats described in the epic, which glorify Bhimasena's valour and physical prowess are described as mere scuffs or small fights that were easily won. Hidimba, Bhima says, was strong, and well versed in hand-fight. But Baka-vadha, which is much praised by singing minstrels, is stripped of all exaggerations and is presented as a small fight between the two, which ended very quickly. M.T. Vasudevan Nair also finds
a logical reason for the human hunt launched by Baka. Here, Baka is not a cannibal, who feeds on human beings, but is just an agent who had undertaken to provide Vetraka with enough men for the human sacrifice (Purushamedha) performed by the ruler of Vetrakeeya. Similar is the episode of Kirmira-vadha, where in the original, Bhimasena kills the forester Kirmira with a fatal blow. But M. T. Vasudevan Nair does not find any logic in killing an ill-tempered forester for no valid reason. Bhima lets off Kirmira after defeating him in a hand-fight, much to the dismay of all around him, especially Draupadi and Yudhistira.

Several other incidents also undergo changes as the story is narrated. Wherever Gods and Sages intervene to provide solutions to problems, it is simple logic and intelligence that helps the Pandavas in the novel. Similarly, the rules for a happy married life of the Pandavas with Draupadi is not laid by the Maharshi Narada, but by Kunti and Yudhishtira, who seem to know how to make the appropriate move. The story of Arjuna’s exile (for the crime of breaking into the marital bliss of Yudhishtira) is regarded by retellers/interpreters including Pratibha Ray, as a self-torture imposed by Arjuna to retaliate against the decision to share Draupadi as common wife. The author opines that Arjuna must have thought the exile as an opportunity to explore greener pastures and much more pleasurable and practical, than sitting idle, while Yudhishtira was enjoying the company of Draupadi.

The most prominent demythification is the depiction of Krishna in the novel. Krishna who is projected as the incarnation of Maha Vishnu, turns out to be a vassal king, a friend and relative of the Pandavas, a strategist who helps them in their times of need. The scene of Draupadi vastrapaharana is also depicted in such a manner, that there is no divine intervention of Krishna to provide her with unending cloth to cover herself(128). It is Dhritarashtra who saves the situation by intervening following vehement protest by Draupadi. The episode of the killing of Jarasandha is also
expressed as an ordinary combat, where Bhima and Arjuna are not disguised as Brahmins, contrary to what has been said in the epic.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair says that he has filled in the 'meaningful gaps' left by Vyasa in the epic. He finds answers to questions like 'Why did Bhima not kill Karna even though he had an opportunity to do so?' The answer given by the author is that Bhimasena was shocked to hear some sensational news revealed to him at the time of the battle. Naturally, it must be the revelation of Karna’s true identity that renders him weak of body and mind. In the novel, we see Visoka his charioteer disclosing to Bhima that Karna is none other than Kunti’s first born and that he had witnessed the meeting between them(214). This shattering truth makes him retreat from the battlefield, silently bearing the insults showered by Karna. Similarly, the instance after the war, where Yudhishthira, depressed by the agonies of war, decides to go on Vanaprastha, and asks Bhima to become the King of Hastinapura. But later on, nothing is mentioned about this suggestion, and Yudhishthira himself is anointed the king. The author searches for an answer and guesses what might have actually happened to change the decision. He holds Draupadi responsible for this state of affairs as it is she who expresses her displeasure on the decision to anoint Bhima the King (240). Bhima understands that Draupadi is crestfallen because she had waited for thirteen long years to become the Queen of Hastinapura. If Yudhishthira retires into the forest, it is natural that Draupadi should follow him. Kunti too, along with Vidura, demands Bhima’s withdrawal from the scene, so that Yudhishtira would become the king. Bhima accepts the situation gracefully saying “Me, King? The blockhead to be the King of Hastinapur? Incredible” (Second Turn, 241).

By breaking every myth, M.T.Vasudevan Nair tries to create a new world, where Bhima is the action-hero of the epic. Bhima, seemingly dimwitted, is actually a person much misunderstood by all. He is always a silent sufferer among the Pandavas, who loves Draupadi, without any selfish
motive, even while knowing that she was taking advantage of the situation. This is seen in the incident where Bhima humiliates himself while going in search of Saugandhika-flower for his beloved wife Draupadi occurring in the Vana Parva of the epic. The author makes a deviation from the original by giving a new twist to the events described in the Mahaprasthanika Parva. In the novel, Bhima relinquishes heaven and returns to earth after the fall of Draupadi to fulfill his duties as well as to enjoy earthly pleasures. M.T.Vasudevan Nair thus makes Bhima a modern man who prefers earth to heaven.

**Sum up**

M.T.Vasudevan Nair, through demythification, not only makes the story of Bhima contemporary and logical, but also succeeds in arousing love and sympathy for the second-born, who has to wait for a second turn in everything, including marital bliss with Draupadi. The author claims to give voice to the 'pregnant silences' in the epic to understand it in a better way. By doing so, he succeeds in giving newer explanations to the actions of the protagonists and also ensures the sympathetic understanding of the reader, in favour of his hero Bhima.

**III**

**Miltyunjaya** is a Karna narrative by Shivaji Sawant, who projects Karna as a 'tragic hero', who suffers for no sin of his. Karna, the 'flesh-earringed' and 'skin-armoured' son of virginal Kunti by the Sun God Surya, is the tragic hero in Sawant's novel, who suffers much, but bears it in a noble manner. In the epic Karna is a prominent character in the episode of Vasanta Purnima competition of Sambhava Parva in the Adi Parva though earlier, his tutelage under Drona is described in the same Parva. Later on, Karna figures in the Swayamvara Parva and Dyuta Parva in Adi Parva. Karna also finds mention in Goshayatra Parva and Kundalapaharana Parva occurring in
Vana Parva and also during the episode of Goharana in Virata Parva and Kamopenivada Parva in Udyoga Parva. The whole of Karna Parva is dedicated to the heroic deeds of Karna. Though Karna is regarded with sympathy in popular Indian imagination, he never rises to the pedestal of a 'hero' to the readers of Mahabharata. But Shivaji Sawant, retells the story of Karna, projecting him from the points of view of different people who move close to him.

As the Mahabharata has several narrators like Vishampayana, Ugrasravas, Markandeya and Vyasa himself among others, Shivaji Sawant also has several narrators who see Karna through their eyes. The novel, originally written in Marathi, has been divided into 9 sections and the chief narrators are Kunti, Duryodhana, Vrishali, Shona, Sri Krishna and Karna himself. The novel begins by highlighting the childhood reminiscences of Karna, as the loving son of Radha and the charioteer Adhiratha. The author describes the life of Karna as a young child, in the loving care of his parents and his younger brother Shona, who worships the ground he walks. He had always been a source of awe with his resplendent 'flesh-ear-rings' and 'skin-armour', to all around him. Karna is described to have had an aptitude for archery at a very young age.

Though Shivaji Sawant closely follows Vyasa in tracing the life history of Karna, he makes many additions to the incidents in the epic, when he goes into the details of Karna's life. Such additions and expansions are necessary for the author to foreground Karna, because Karna is not a much-discussed character in the epic. He is said to have been a 'shisya' among the numerous boys and princes, being trained under Guru Drona and Kripa. Nothing much is discussed about his aptitude of archery or about his performance as an archer at this stage. But Shivaji Sawant delves deep into the details of his childhood and his education under Guru Kripa.

Young Karna always feels the bite of neglect among other ordinary boys who aspire to learn archery in the Gurukula. He seems to have an
intuitive knowledge that his is not an ordinary birth, and is always attracted to the resplendent image of the Sun God. His first meeting with Duryodhana and Arjuna are narrated in detail by the author. His love for archery is so intense that he is seen practicing even during the night, while all the others are resting. To support this, Shivaji Sawant introduces the incident in which Arjuna shoots the bird’s eye, perched on a high branch of an ‘ashoka’ tree. This is a very popular episode occurring in the Sambhava Parva in which Guru Drona tests the skill of his students through a competition (Adi Parva, Ch.138) All the boys except Arjuna are unable to shoot the bird’s eye due to lack of concentration. Arjuna performs well and is applauded by all for his skill in archery. This incident is further extended to establish how Karna was more skillful than Arjuna in archery. What he performs is far surpassing Arjuna’s skill. Karna too, tries to perform the feat in the dead of the night. This incident is described by Karna himself in the novel as follows: “My body, mind, sight, breath – the two tips of the two arrows and the two eyes of the bird became one. ... The first arrow had to be released a fraction of a second before its twin. The first struck – the bird spun – the second hit, and the clumsily-tied bird fell on the ground with a thud” (Mrityunjaya, 63). But unfortunately nobody was there to witness his performance except his brother Shona. Sawant further goes on to establish that Karna is the only student of Drona who excelled in all forms of warfare – be it archery, chariot maneuvering or mace wielding.

Many imaginary incidents have been woven into the thread of the story to prove the physical prowess and mental strength of Karna. Among these are the incidents of child Karna fighting a bull, which runs amok. His physical strength enables him to overpower the bull, while his natural armour protects him from the horns of the bull. The second incident is when he brings a cheetah alive from the forest, to be sacrificed at the yajna performed by Guru Drona. But the Guru’s reaction is not what Karna expects it to be. He merely creases his forehead and says, “Why has this
A cheetah been brought here? *Arre, a yajna* is performed for peace of mind. It is forbidden to sacrifice a cheetah at a yajna. Set him free (Mrityunjaya, 74)

The next incident, which is highlighted, is the performance of Drona's students on the day of Vasant Purnima. (Chapters 138-39, *Adi Parva*) This too, is a very popular episode from Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, where the Pandava and Kaurava princes, especially Arjuna win the admiration and applause of all assembled there. This incident is very crucial since it is at this time that Karna is insulted by all, especially Bhima, addressing him as *Sutaputra*, asks him to hold a whip instead of bow and arrow. Duryodhana retaliates by anointing Karna as the *Raja* of Anga, and this marks the start of a deep and everlasting friendship between the duo.

Shivaji Sawant does not stop here. He goes further to describe how Karna uses the *'Sabda bhedi Bana'* and wins the praise of Bhishma who is the only other person apart from Arjuna, in Hastinapura who can shoot in this manner(94). This incident too is narrated in a very dramatic manner where a blind folded Karna misses his target, which is a barking dog, only to find later that his arrow had pierced a small chirping bird atop a tree, whose chirping sound had preceded the barking of the dog. The episode, as in the *Vyasa Mahabharata* ends with Kunti fainting, as she recognizes Karna as the son born to her during her maiden days.

As incident after incident unfurls, Shivaji Sawant portrays a glorious image of Karna, who is an epitome of love, kindness and dignity. All actions of Karna, which are condemned and questioned by the Indian mind, are explained logically and Karna stands justified, eliciting both sympathy and admiration simultaneously. Sawant also describes the *svayamvara* episode to the minutest of details. We see Sawant deviating from the depiction in the original epic, when Karna himself expresses his doubt openly whether a *kshatriya* girl would ever come forward to accept a *Suta* for her husband. Shivaji Sawant portrays Karna's reluctance to go to Draupadi's *svayamvara*,

91
on account of already having a wife. But Duryodhana persuades him saying “Karna, you have to win Draupadi by performing that feat. If she refuses to accept you as husband, leave it to me to decide what should be done. Win her - not for yourself, but for me” (Mrityunjaya, 238). This deviation in the story enables Sawant to portray Karna’s devotion for Duryodhana, which makes him ready to go to any extent for the happiness of his friend. Besides revealing Karna’s loyalty, Sawant also gets an explanation for the question why Karna, who is a very devoted husband to Vrishali, should contemplate winning the hand of Draupadi. Shivaji Sawant thus establishes Karna not only as a friend who is loyal to the core, but also as a husband who would not even dream of taking a second wife. In return of this favour, Karna requests to make his native village Champanagari, the capital of the Kingdom of Anga. Thus, Karna’s quality as a patriot, and his selfless love is brought out through the episode.

The scene of svayamvara is extended further to bring out a strong, yet silent link between Krishna and Karna. Duryodhana, who waits for his turn to perform the bride-winning feat often, sees Karna sitting with his eyes staring fixedly at Sri Krishna’s toe. After every King was defeated, Krishna quietly raises his right toe. This appears to have been some secret signal for Karna, for he gets up instantly and strides towards the svayamvara pavilion. But he is cruelly insulted by Draupadi, who rejects him because of his lowborn status. Karna, badly hurt and humiliated, misses the target. “The hand that had pulled the bowstring taut started trembling uncontrollably... The bowstring began quivering. The arrow that was pointing at the fish target slipped out aimlessly. Speeding towards the seat of Sri Krishna, it flipped downwards and pierced his right toe” (Mrityunjaya, 252). Thus this incident not only highlights the humiliation suffered by Karna but also reveals the subtle understanding between Krishna and Karna.

Shivaji Sawant introduces some other incidents to highlight Karna’s high sense of morality. While narrating the incident in the Dyuta Parva,
Sawant does not deny that Kama spoke against Draupadi, describing her as a harlot, but makes up for this, by expressing his wish to protect her with his shawl, while she was being disrobed by Duhsasana: "...she would be covered up." Picking up my shawl, I rose again from my seat" (Mrityunjaya, 366). But before Karna could offer her his shawl, someone else had done it. It was none other than the all-pervading Krishna. From this incident Sawant tries to convey the message that spiritual power is attained by a person, only through right actions. Krishna had attained it long back. But Karna had destroyed all his accumulated 'punya' by uttering harsh words against the chaste Draupadi.

Shivaji Sawant, through his portrayal of Karna, tries to establish that Karna is a much mis-understood character. Each action of Karna is analyzed psychologically, and Sawant explains the reason behind Karna's actions. As episode after episode unfolds, Karna's valour is established. But there are some situations in the Mahabharata where Karna has been blamed for acting with cowardice. One of the oft-criticized actions of Karna is his fleeing from the attack of Gandharvas, in Dvaita Vana deserting all his companions, including Duryodhana (Ghoshayatra Parva, occurring in Vana Parva). But Sawant sees that whole incident in a different light. Though Karna fought the gandharva Chitrasena with all ferociousness and vigour, he was compelled to flee the scene leaving behind Duryodhana, for two reasons. The first was that he had to protect the innumerous maids who had accompanied the king's retinue. Secondly he knew that the gandharva was going to capture him alive in order to insult him. The thought crossed his mind. "Wasn't it correct to retreat if one did not have sufficient forces? Supposing Chitrasena had captured me? Who then would have retaliated against Arjuna for killing my son Sudamana? ----- I passed myself through a sharp analysis. It was essential that I remain alive in order to slash Arjuna's throat" (Mrityunjaya, 423).
Shivaji Sawant also narrates certain incidents not included in the \textit{Mahabharata} to establish Karna’s as a ‘\textit{Dana Vira}'. Karna had early in life resolved not to refuse anybody anything they approached him for. According to Sawant, Karna himself having been denied of his rights and deprived of opportunities, though pre-eminently qualified, altruism of unqualified charity arose from this denial and led him to this resolution. Once, while Karna was engaged in giving away charity, two old, decrepit men approached him, fully drenched in the downpour. The request of the blue-skinned old man was very strange, for he asked only for a bundle of faggots to warm himself. Karna, finding it impossible to get dry faggots in the rain, pulled down two horizontal sandalwood beams from the roof of his palace, chopped them into firewood pieces and gave it away to the needy old men. Sawant hints that the duo was none other than Krishna and Yudhishthira.

Karna’s charity of his \textit{kavaca-kundala}, the incident which occurs in the \textit{Vana Parva} of the \textit{Mahabharata} is also narrated with the minutest of details in the novel. Even though pre-warned through a dream, Karna decides to donate his flesh-ear-rings and skin-armour to Indra in the guise of a Brahmin. He slices off his ‘flesh-ear-rings’ and slides the sharp blade of the sword across his mouth to peel off his ‘skin-armour’, revealing his flesh. Karna, as the ‘hero of charities’ is fully portrayed through the final incident in the battlefield. Karna, who is fatally wounded by Arjuna’s \textit{anjalika} is awaiting death in the battlefield. At this moment, a Brahmin approaches him begging for charity, for performing the last rites of his dead son. Karna responds by knocking out the gold teeth in his mouth with the help of a stone and giving it to the Brahmin as \textit{dana} (689-90). Thus Karna is glorified. Sawant relies heavily on the oral rendition of the Karna-story to draw a glorified picture of his hero.

In the second section of the book, the focus shifts to Kunti, who unhappily remembers her past life. Here too, Sawant intervenes to include
certain incidents, which are not mentioned in the *Mahabharata*. She painfully remembers how her father Shurasena, the King of Mathura, gave her away to Kuntibhoja. Entrusted with the duty to serve Sage Durvasa, young Kunti struggles to keep the sage contented, and receives his blessings. The boon, which is given to Kunti by the Sage, proves to be a curse to her, as, spurred on by curiosity, she invokes the mantra and eventually conceives from the Sun God. Distressed, Kunti even contemplates suicide, and drinks poison. But she is saved by her dasi, and she finally gives birth to Karna, born with a natural mail and flesh-ear-rings. Kunti, from fear of shame is forced to abandon the child in the river Ashwa. The spies employed by her dasi bring in the news that her son has been taken into the loving care of a charoteer in Champanagari, on the banks of the river.

Very soon Kuntibhoja arranges for Kunti's *svayamvara*, where she accepts Pandu of Hastinapura as her lord. But misfortune does not leave Kunti. Firstly, it comes in the shape of a co-wife, when Pandu weds the beautiful Princess of Madradesa. Soon after this, Pandu is inflicted with a curse of impotency, darkening the happy days of both his wives. Shivaji Sawant closely follows the incidents narrated in the *Sambhava Parva*, where he narrates the birth of Pandavas from various Gods, followed by Pandu's untimely death.

The deviation in the story line comes after Kunti sees Karna in the arena on the day of *Vasanta Purnima*. From this day onwards, she makes it a point to keep herself informed about the happenings in Karna's life. The author, to show her motherly love towards her firstborn, also describes her happiness when Karna weds Vrishali. She expresses her love for him by sending him special gifts on the occasion of his wedding – a lizard-skin finger protector for the groom and a blue sari with golden embroidery for the bride. Similar is the incident when Kunti presents a small gift for Karna's first born. Kunti's love for Karna is symbolized through the imagery of her chariot,
which has only five horses, harnessed to it, instead of six. Karna also sees a painting adorning the walls of the palace of Indraprastha, which “depicted a large river on a blue background. A tottering old maid had descended to the bank, and, stooping, was sliding a wicker basket inside the frothing waters. Near the bank was a young girl, covering her face with her hands and sobbing” (Mrityunjaya, 311).

Sum up

Shivaji Sawant focuses on analyzing the actions of Karna from a psychological point of view where Karna’s actions always remain justified. The myths and divine interventions in the story are retained as they provide authenticity to the events as occurring in the age of Mahabharata itself. Sawant also introduces some incidents to highlight the qualities of his hero, and also to bring out the intensity of the tragedy suffered by him. Though the author makes modifications and deviations to the incidents, he adheres close to the Karna-narrative of the epic original.

IV

P.K.Balakrishnan’s novel And Now Let Me Sleep foregrounds the dismal situation narrated in the Sauptika Parva and Stri Parva of the epic Mahabharata. The Sauptika Parva narrates the account of the massacre in the Pandava camp by Ashvathama and others and the lament of Draupadi over the death of her sons. The Stri Parva mainly relates the lamentation of the women, especially Gandhari, and the obsequies performed for the deceased warriors. The protagonists in the novel, who are also the survivors of the victorious side, suffer greatly, overwhelmed with guilt and sorrow. The time of narration is fixed after Karna’s death, where Karna’s life is being posthumously analyzed by the Pandavas, in the light of the revelation of Karna’s true identity (XI.27.7-12).
The author chooses to narrate the story of Karna through the thought-stream of Draupadi, in his novel. We see an unhappy Draupadi who, after the war, prays to God to give her peace of mind and sound sleep. “Hail Oh Lord! bless me with sound sleep sans any scare or nightmare” (*And Now Let Me Sleep*, 1). But she is cruelly roused from her sleep by loud lamentations, for Aswathama had massacred the sleeping sons of Draupadi, along with Drishtadyumna and many others, to avenge the death of his father and other near ones. This incident is a reiteration of the massacre in the Pandava camp in the eighth chapter of the *Saundika Parva*.

In the novel, the incidents are reiterated in the reminiscences of Draupadi, who is not the glorious Queen of a victorious King, but a wreck of a person, who loses her sons, her peace of mind and sleep. Life holds no meaning for her and she feels thoroughly exhausted and drained of all emotions. She finds that life has been unfair to her. “Fate created a single wife for all the sons of a mother by different husbands. Draupadi, destiny was composing a humorous story by your life and that of Kunti” (*And Now Let Me Sleep*, 174).

The author adheres to the narration in the original epic as far as the main incidents are concerned. Yet, by bringing in imaginary incidents he tries to give a new interpretation to the epic situations. The incidents in the novel, are brought forth to the reader through the four narrators, namely, Yudhishthira, Draupadi, Narada and Sanjaya either as the reminiscences of Yudhishthira and Draupadi, or through the narrations of the all-knowing Sage Narada and Sanjaya, who is blessed with divine eye to see the war for the benefit of Dhritarashtra. While Yudhishthira, Draupadi and Sage Narada remember and narrate Karna’s past life, Sanjaya describes Karna’s valour in the battlefield to Yudhishthira and Draupadi as he had done to Dhritarashtra.

The general atmosphere of the novel is one of deep depression, sorrow and guilt. The novel begins on the day the *Pandavas* gain victory over the *Kauravas*. On the very same night when Draupadi thanks the
Almighty for protecting her husbands, children, father and brother, Aswathama massacres her sleeping sons in the Pandava camp, and sets fire to the tents. Only the Pandavas, who had occupied a different tent, survive. While the narration continues with the lamentations of the Pandavas, a jubilant Aswathama, carries the news to Duryodhana (as in Chapter 9 of Saúptika Parva), who dies a peaceful death, his revenge satiated. The theme of the novel unfolds as Kunti reveals the true identity of Karna to her sons. Yudhishthira, stricken with grief and guilt, tries to analyze his actions in the changed perspective (the epic narrates Yudhishthira’s grief in (XI.27.14-25). In the novel, the guilt-ridden Yudhishthira recalls to his mind the insults suffered by Karna in the arena where young Pandavas and Kauravas, as students of Guru Drona and Guru Kripa, display their skills on the day of Vaisant Purnima. The narration follows the same sequence as in the epic (Adi Parva, chapters 136-139) and the incidents in which he is insulted by Kripa and Bhima questioning his lineage are brought to focus. Karna’s honour is preserved when Duryodhana offers him patronage and anoints him as the Raja of Anga.

The author retains the incident where Karna is insulted during Draupadi Swayamvara and the incident is reiterated in the conscience of Draupadi, highlighting the guilt and sorrow experienced by her for having rejected Karna. But the narrations by Narada and Sanjaya are objective narrations of the incidents from the epic. It is Narada who furnishes the details of Parasurama’s curse on Karna, the Brahmin’s curse and Karna’s charity of kavaca-kundala to Indra.

Narada presents the incidents without modifying the events narrated in the parent epic, but he resorts to interpret Karna’s actions with philosophical justifications. And through these philosophical musings, Narada tries to help Yudhishthira overcome his sense of guilt. For instance, Narada, consoles Yudhishthira on Karna’s incurring the curse of Parasurama attributing it to the play of fate saying:
You see the strange turn of events. Fate that bestowed on him wonderful powers has along with it bored holes of self-destruction with the same hand. Destiny in organizing the yearning and ability to perform great deed on the one hand and paves the way for self-immolation at the other – utterly incomprehensible conducts of fate. You are vainly lamenting over the disappearance of Karna considering it as a fratricide committed by you (And Now..., 50).

Similarly, while relating the incident of the giving away of kavaca-kundala to Indra, Narada explains to Yudhishthira that it is Karna’s pride that had led to his downfall. Inspite of God Surya’s warning, Karna gives away the kavaca-kundala to Indra, believing that he was invincible even without the divine embellishments. Narada mouths Karna’s words to Surya: “Karna, the disciple of Parasurama, is an archer capable of defeating Arjuna by his own strength as well as by his exemplary training. You can go with the firm conviction that Karna holding the bow is invincible” (And Now..., 55).

Sanjaya in the novel consents to narrate the scenes in the battlefield involving the duels between Karna and the Pandavas, to Yudhishthira and Draupadi, reiterating what he had earlier said to Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya reveals Karna’s exchange with Kunti and Bhishma, who uncover the secret of his true identity to him. Sanjaya is also made to narrate in detail, the incidents in which the Pandavas (except Arjuna) are deliberately spared by Karna, who refrains from killing them, to preserve his word to Kunti. Yudhishthira and Draupadi see through the eye of Sanjaya, Karna’s insult and constant harangue by Salya while serving him as his charioteer and Krishna’s instigating Arjuna to kill the defenseless Karna.

The author here focuses prominently on Karna’s heroics and in bringing out the uniqueness of Karna, foregrounds certains events and incidents in the epic, which have been already discussed. The episode of
Sanjaya narrating the events in the battle, foregrounding Karna, is an imaginary innovation of the author. P.K. Balakrishnan chooses Sanjaya for this role to add authenticity to the narration of the events, since it is known from the epic that Sanjaya was blessed with a ‘divine eye’ to witness all the events in the battlefield. Sanjaya who had described the events to Dhritarashtra in the original epic, also narrates the incidents to Yudhishthira and Draupadi in the re-telling.

*Sum up:*

The author selects and retains most of the epic-situations involving Karna, and does not touch upon the incidents in which Karna is not involved. The incidents, which are retained, are given a philosophical dimension through the soliloquies of Draupadi and the interpretations of Narada. The author highlights the agony of Draupadi who had to suffer being caught in an unusual situation of polyandry while at the same time spotlighting Karna as a warrior firm in his convictions, yet as one devoid of mental poise as a result of Kunti’s revelation regarding his true identity, on the eve of the war. In the novel, Yudhishthira suffers deep guilt on knowing that he had killed his brother Karna. The lamentations of the women who had lost their sons and husbands on the battlefield is also described by the author.

V

The novel ‘Yayati’ by V.S.Khandekar is a retelling of the Yayatopakhyaṇa an episode narrated in the Sambhava Parva (Adi Parva, chapters 76-85) of the epic. It is an account of a virtuous king, the ancestor of the kuru race, who had two wives Devayani and Sharmishta. V.S.Khandekar, the author of the novel, transforms the epic narrative by developing the epic incident into a love story with a moral.

The story in the epic is as follows: Yayati, wedded to Devayani, the daughter of Asura Guru Shukra, was a just ruler. Sharmishta was a
childhood friend of Devayani, and daughter of the Asura king. Once it so happened that both the girls, accompanied by other friends went to the river for water sporting. A strong wind scattered their dresses, left ashore, and unfortunately Sharmishta wore Devayani's dress unknowingly thinking it to be her own. This led to a quarrel between the two and Sharmishta arrogantly insulted Devayani and pushed her into a well. "The wicked Sharmishta thought her to be dead and went home" (I.78.13). Yayati, who happens to pass by, rescued Devayani, and later married her, as wished by her. Sharmista is made Devayani's maidservant on her demand, to which she meekly agreed in order to save her family and kingdom from Shukracharya's wrath (I.80.20). Sharmishta followed Devayani to her husband's palace, and in due course requested the king to bless her with motherhood, so that she may not incur sin (I.82.13). The king did so, feeling a sense of moral obligation, and begot three sons by Sharmishta. Devayani, coming to know of this complained to her father, who in a fit of wrath, cursed Yayati with decrepitude. However, he endowed Yayati the ability to exchange his decrepitude with anybody who would lend him his youth. Yayati, who is the father of five sons, requested each son to lend him his youth. Puru, the youngest son of Sharmishta agreed to do so, while all the others backed away. The king, young again, enjoyed life to the full, and after a one thousand years, returned Puru his youth, and retired into the forest, along with his wives. By this time, the king had realized the futility of enjoying carnal pleasures.

The subplot of the story, is the love story of Kacha and Devayani. Kacha, the son of Devaguru Brihaspathi, approaches Shukra with a secret mission of acquiring the knowledge of Sanjivani. Shukra accepts him as disciple and Kacha spends some years there. He also befriends Devayani (as advised by the Gods in I.76.15-16), whom he believes, would help him in his mission. But young Devayani falls in love with him, and desires to marry him. Meanwhile, the Asuras, who detest Kacha, kill him, burn his body, and mix
the ashes in the wine given to Shukracharya. Devayani insists on reviving Kacha, and the Guru is compelled to impart the knowledge of Sanjivani to Kacha, in order to save himself. Kacha returns to Devaloka, ignoring Devayani's love. Devayani, angered, curses him that his knowledge will not be of use to him (I.77-16). Kacha, in turn, curses her that she will not get a hignborn for a husband (I.77.18-19). The story of Yayati marrying Devayani follows.

V.S.Khandekar expands the story in the epic into the life story of three lovers, Yayati, Devayani and Sharmishta. The author, in the introduction to the novel, writes that he was intrigued by the words of Sage Kanva (in Kalidasa's Shākuntalam), who blesses his foster daughter Shakuntala saying, 'May you be as dear to your husband as Sharmishta was to Yayati'. This is a deviation from the words of the mythological Yayati, who, when cursed with decrepitude, reveals to Sage Shukra that he had not enjoyed enough marital bliss with Devayani. V.S.Khandekar, following the thoughts of Kalidasa, argues that the difference in temperaments of Devayani and Sharmishta must have attracted Yayati more to the latter.

The story is narrated in different sections (as in Shivaji Savant's Mrityunjaya), in the first person narrative of Yayati, Devayani, Sharmishta and Kacha. Yayati's reminiscences go back to his childhood, where we come across a simple, innocent child, with a spiritual bent of mind. But his parents, who want him to become a great emperor and warrior, curb this inclination. They did not want Yayati to follow the footsteps of his older brother Yati, who had turned an ascetic at a very young age. Yayati, unlike Yati, grows up enjoying all worldly pleasures.

V.S.Khandekar introduces several new episodes in the story in order to weave a full-length novel, from a small episode in the epic. While in the epic, the characters are mere action-oriented caricatures of the protagonists; they develop into human beings capable of thoughts and emotions, in the novel. The novel depicts the "sex life of Yayati, Devayani as the householder,

Young Yayati is portrayed as a pleasure-loving, emotional person, who contains an unlimited zest for life. His love for horse riding and other adventures lead him through many experiences in life. Yayati, on his recuperation from an accident, in which he is badly injured, finds himself physically attracted to Alaka, the maid who waits upon him. But the love he feels for her greatly confuses him, because he had always regarded her as a sister, having been breast-fed by her mother Kalika, during infancy. This incident newly introduced by the author, injects the idea of physical pleasure in the character of Yayati who indulges in a physical relationship with a maid when his father Nahusha was on his deathbed thereby signifying the spiritual fall of Yayati.

The episode of the quarrel between Devayani and Sharmishta is also projected in a different light. Devayani, embittered in love, picks up a quarrel with Sharmishta, who had unknowingly worn Devayani’s sari, handed over to her by her maid. The incident of Sharmishta’s wearing of Devyani’s garments and the incident where she inadvertently pushes Devayani into an unused well are portrayed in a manner justifying her actions, in the novel. Sharmishta tries to explain the situation saying: “Mother told me last night that she would give me the sari which was presented to her by Indrani on the cessation of war” (Yayati, 89). Yayati’s saving of Devayani from the well, as he happens to pass by, her persuasion to accept her hand in marriage and Sharmishta’s acceptance of her slavery to Devayani are the incidents borrowed and retained from the epic without change.

In the episode in the Mahabharata, Sharmishta lives in a secluded place, away from the sight of the king and others, but like any other royal, as seen in I.82.2: “At the request of Devayani, Sharmishta is established in a
separate house in the Asoka grove”. But in the novel, Sharmishta is made to attend to all the needs of Devayani, and is seen as the maid who waits outside the chamber of the Royal couple.

Again, in the epic, it is Sharmishta who requests the king to bless her with motherhood so that her season would not go wasted, and she would not incur the sin of being barren. She is seen approaching the king with the request “O, king, my season hath arrived. See that it goeth not in vain”("Sambhava Parva", I.82.13). King Yayati, then reminds her that sage Shukra had commanded him never to summon Vrishaparvan’s daughter to bed. Sharmishta then convinces him that it is not sinful to lie on certain occasions. She further argues that the husband of one’s friend is as good as one’s own husband (I.82.21-23). The king thus was persuaded into accepting her for protecting her virtue, by granting her motherhood. This kind of logic being unacceptable to modern sensibility, the author deviates from the original rendition and we see that it is Yayati who persuades Sharmishta to accept him as a lover. In the novel, Yayati himself approaches Sharmishta in the guise of a sage, pretends to forecast her affair with Yayati, the King. This was with an intention to read her mind, as well as to entice her into a relationship with him ("Yayati", 154-56). Devayani suspects the paternity of Sharmishta’s son and tries to put an end to her by confining her in a cellar. But Yayati with the help of his friend Madhav, rescues Sharmishta and her son Puroo, arranges their escape to a far-off land where they live till Puroo comes of age. The author also describes how Yayati changes into a drunkard and a womanizer on losing Sharmishta and her son Puroo. These incidents are also born out of the imagination of the author.

The author alters the denouement of the novel where both Yayati and Puroo are able to retain their youth. While in the epic, Yayati exchanges his decrepitude with the youth of Puroo and returns it only after an elapse of 1000 years, on realizing the futility of pursuing carnal pleasure ("Adi Parva,"
chapters 84-85). But in the novel, the intervention of Kacha helps Yayati retain his youth; while Puroo regains his youth.

While in the epic, Yati receives just mention and Kacha is seen only in the Kacha-Devayani sub-plot. They are not seen to have any interaction with Yayati. But in the novel, the author is able to bring in a spiritual angle to the story through the intermittent visits of Kacha and Yati. While Kacha is portrayed as a ascetic-friend of Yayati, Yati appears often to remind Yayati of the transience of human life. Kacha greatly influences both Yayati and Devayani. While Yayati is purged of his sins, Devayani transforms herself into a dedicated and loving wife.

Sum Up

By introducing several imaginary incidents, Khandekar is able to weave a moral story out of the incident of King Yayati in the epic. The author uses the epic sub-narrative as a medium to drive in the moral turpitude of modern man, which can be rectified only by spiritual awakening. Yayati in the epic, who symbolizes the Indian philosophy of attaining nirvana after fulfilling the four purusharthas in the worldly life, is transformed into a modern man who is reluctant to give up worldly pleasures. The newly added incidents change the epic story into a love story with a happy ending that also strives at driving in a moral.

VI

Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel is a political satire, which is cast in the mould of the epic Mahabharata. The author subverts the epic story borrowing only the bare framework of the narrative and some epic situations and characters to narrate the story of the tug of war for power in Post-Independence India.

Shashi Tharoor parodies the general structure, dramatis personae and the events in the epic to ironically present the pre- and post-independence
scenario of Indian politics. The author takes many liberties with the epic to link the characters of the epic with leaders in Indian politics, thereby generating humour from the situation.

The novel resembles the epic for the following selections done by the author. To begin with, the title of the novel is a literal translation of the word *Mahabharata* in which 'Maha' is great and 'Bharata' is India. Therefore the meaning of the title could be deciphered as the story of great India. The author also follows the pattern of dividing the novel into eighteen sections, resembling the eighteen *parvas* of the epic. The story is narrated by V.V., short for Ved Vyas, who is none other than Krishna Dvaipayana or Veda Vyasa, the mythical author of the epic. By reiterating the unusual situation of the author appearing as a character in the work, Shashi Tharoor establishes a close link between the epic and his novel.

Tharoor also follows the general story of the power struggle between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas*, and also lines up most of the epic characters in his novel. We come across Ved Vyas, son of the virgin fishergirl Satyavathi, and Ganga Datta (better known as Gangaji), the son of King Shantanu and Satyavathi. Innumerous other characters of the epic are also present in the novels. The author also brings in some crucial events in the epic narrative into the novel. The game of dice, *Jarasandha vadha, Draupadi svayamvara* etc are used in the novel, suitably distorted, to accommodate the story of the power struggle of the modern times into the epic framework.

The incident of Ganga Datta acquiring the name Bhishma, through his self-sacrifice and undeterred decision is included in the novel. It is also seen that Dhritarashtra, the blind, Pandu the pale and Vidura the wise are born to the widows of Vichitravirya by V.V. Dhritarashtra marries Gandhari, who dutifully blindfolds herself, and Pandu marries the intelligent Kunti and the seductive Madri. Vidur, who enters into the Indian Civil Service of the British Government of India, marries Devaki, a convent educated daughter of a small Raja. The author presents the situations and characters differently in
order to cater to the irony and sense of humour demanded by the situations. Thus we come across a Kunti, who has given birth to Karna, as an outcome of her involvement with a certain Hyperion Helios, a foreign visitor at her father's palace. Helios, being the Greek counter part of God Surya of Indian mythology, a reader who is acquainted with mythologies can easily establish the link between the two. Karna who is born with kavaca-kundala in the epic transforms into Mohammed Ali in the novel, who is born with an extra ordinary golden skin, glowing like the sun and a birthmark resembling the bright half moon on his fore head. Karna, who is abandoned by Kunti is adopted by a Muslim chauffeur. The incident of the giving away of the kavaca-kundala to lord Indra is also presented in the novel in a distorted manner, garbed in humour verging on vulgarity. Karna in the novel circumcises himself in order to follow the custom of his father, who is a Muslim. Indra Deva, the chauffeur's master, Tharoor writes, appreciated this act. From this day onwards, he was renamed Karna, the Hacker-Off, thus acquiring the name Mohammed Ali Karna.

We also come across a Pandu, who begets sons by instigating his wives to conceive from other men to produce progeny. Thus, Yudhishthir, the son of Dharma, the youngest Indian judge of the High Court, Bhim, the son of major Vayu and Arjun the son of Devendra Yogi a revered Brahmin are born. Madri, the second wife, accepts a pair of identical, inseparable twins, Ashwin and Ashvin and gives birth to Nakul and Sahdev. Gandhari, who is the mother of the hundred sons in the epic gives birth to an only daughter in the novel. Thus Priya Duryodhani, who is equal to a thousand sons, is born to Dhritarastra and Gandhari.

The epic situations are subverted to project the image of Indian political leader in to the epic framework. Thus Gangaji, who resembles Gandhiji, embarks on social work and politics, and becomes a satyagrahi who goes on hunger strike against the British Raj. The landmark events in India's freedom struggle are reiterated in the novel. We see a Gangaji openly
defying the laws when he “wrenched free the first indigo plant and sowed a symbolic fistful of grain in its stead. ... A nation was rising, with a small balding, semi clad saint at its head” (The Great Indian Novel, 51). The massacre in the Bibigah Gardens resembles the Jallianwala Bagh incident and the issue of the British imposing tax on the mango cash crop echoes the salt satyagraha and the subsequent Dandi march by Gandhiji. Thus, Mahaguru Gangaji who is introduced to the readers is none other than Mahatma Gandhi himself.

Dhritarashtra, who write letters to his daughter during his imprisonment, is also seen to have an affair with lady Drewpad, the wife of Viscount Drewpad, the British Viceroy to India. While Dhritarashtra, who is educated in Eton is modelled on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru; Priya Duryodhani is the very image of Indira Gandhi. Viscount and Lady Drewpad are Lord and Lady Mount baton respectively, and the daughter born to Dhritarashtra and Lady Drewpad, Draupadi Mokrasi symbolize the democracy introduced in India, on gaining independence.

Jayapraksh Drona, though born a Brahmin, is saffron clad sadhu, the teacher of the Pandavas. Tharooor also parodies the incident of the shooting of the bird’s eye by Arjuna when Drona says “Imagine you are all members of an elite group of hardened revolutionaries. Your target is that man. You each have your favourite weapon at hand – gun, grenade, rock, bow and arrow, it doesn’t matter. Your mission is to get him” (The Great Indian Novel, 196). Ekalavya is presented as the son of a maidservant, who is a free loader – a person who does not pay for what he gets.

The world war, and the India independence struggle also find their place in the novel. Mohammed Ali Karna, instrumental for partition of India, the father of the newborn country of Karnistan, is modelled on Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. He meets with his death, when the wheel of his official car gets embedded in the mud. Karna, trying to pull the wheel
out of the mud, shakes an angry fist at the son, keels over and dies. This incident also is a parody of the end of Karna in the epic.

Draupadi Mokrasi, or democracy, who is married to the Pandavas, discloses that she had prayed to the Shiva, Jehovah, Virgin Mary, Allah and the Arch Bishop of Canterbury for good marital prospects. Thus her marriage to the five brothers stands explained. Thus the game of dice, symbolic of political strategies against the opposition and the Draupadi vastrapaharana, symbolic of the insult of the democracy, are used by Tharoor to draw a link between Indian politics and the epic. Jarasandha vadha by Bhima is representative of the bifurcation of west and east Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh. Priya Duryodhani performing a Rajasuya sacrifice sends Bhima to overpower Karnistan’s Jarasandha Khan, whom Bhima wrenches apart and flings in two directions.

**Sum up**

Shashi Tharoor, thus subverting the incidents in the epic is able to draw the picture of the political struggle in India. The epic narrative is completely violated, the sequences of events changed and incidents modified to suit the modern political scenario. The author, thus, is able to fit the story of political power struggle into the framework of the epic Mahabharata, thereby producing an alienation effect in the minds of the readers. The author is not actually retelling the story, but is rather borrowing the epic narrative, which is familiar to the Indian readers, to accommodate yet another familiar story of power struggle into the framework.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, it could be concluded that the above-discussed retellings of the Mahabharata closely resemble the epic, at the same time, have a unique identity of their own. Their proximity to the epic is evident in the selections
and retaining of some material from the epic. The main characters and the main story line are borrowed by the authors without many changes.

Yet, the writers eliminate a structural element present in the *Mahabharata* -- the fantastic. The events in the *Mahabharata* that involve the supernatural transport the reader to a world of fantasy. The modern writers do away with the fantasy, separating myth from reality. Whenever the myths of terrible curses and divine miracles are retained, they are interpreted with new explanations, which are acceptable to the modern rationale. Further, they sometimes obliterate certain situations in their attempt at rationalization.

Writers like M.T. Vasudevan Nair and Shashi Tharoor completely eliminate the fantastic element and try to comprehend the characters and events placing them in a modern context. The other writers Pratibha Ray, Shivaji Sawant, P.K. Balakrishnan and V.S. Khandekar retain the element of the fantastic and include the mythical aspect, accepting it and at the same time justifying the situations or the actions of the characters thoroughly to the readers. Thus, all the writers are able to attribute individuality to the epic retellings, which they place before the modern reader.