CHAPTER – IV
MODULATION OF CHARACTER

This chapter analyses the epic characters fore-grounded in the six novels under study. The *Mahabharata* is a record of human beings with human weaknesses. Irawati Karve writes that the scope of the *Mahabharata* “is wide ranging in time, in space and in its cast of characters. Heroes and cowards, villains and good men, impulsive fools and wise men, ugly men and fair ones are all depicted in the course of its narrative. Almost no person is portrayed as all good or all bad” (Karve 1991, 80). This feature of the epic lends ample scope to the modern writers to explore the infinite possibilities of characterization foregrounding some characters and their peculiarities.

The epic *Mahabharata* projects its characters as action-oriented people bound by the social and moral norms of the times. The poet while depicting even the extraordinary characters brings forth the ordinariness in them before the reader. They are duty-conscious, god-fearing and respectful to elders and are bent on fulfilling their promises under any circumstances. Yet they commit mistakes. This is because each protagonist in the epic has a basic flaw of character.

The modern novelists evaluate the actions of the protagonists in the present modern context. This enables them to project them in a new light and explore and explain the reasons behind their actions. Their mistakes are justified and explained when the protagonists turn from action-heroes to human beings capable of thoughts and emotions. While the epic writers list out ‘what’ actions were performed by the writers, the modern writers explain ‘why’ they are forced to act in that manner.

**I**

*Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi*, is a Draupadi narrative of Pratibha Ray which brings to focus the feminine woes and worries of the *Pandava*
wife who is caught in the unusual situation of wedding five brothers simultaneously. Draupadi of *Mahabharata* is a lady of unusual beauty and intelligence and is arrogant and spirited. Even though she was a daughter of the powerful family of Drupadas and the symbol of unity and solidarity among the Pandavas, she was a woman who suffered great mental agony. Pratibha Ray gives her own interpretation to the image of the suffering Draupadi by bringing to focus the inner qualities that are inherent to the Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*.

In the novel *Yajnaseni*, the author describes the plight of an ordinary woman, who was forced to take five husbands simultaneously. She is not a princess who is bent upon wreaking revenge upon the Kauravas for having insulted her, nor is she a bloodthirsty woman who leaves her black tresses open, awaiting Duhsasana’s blood to anoint it with.

Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi is an ordinary woman caught in the trap of destiny. She is a person who is ready to sacrifice anything for the welfare of the family, the silent burden-bearer and the shock absorber of the Pandava family. All sufferings inflicted upon her are silently borne by her without any sourness. An ordinary Indian woman caught in the clutches of a patriarchal society, where men make the rules and woman silently accept them, Yajnaseni endures all the ignominy and humiliation with a subdued mind.

But what makes Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* strong is the fact that even though she suffers silently, she is well aware of her position in the family and questions the injustice thrust upon her by all around her, though silently. But this awareness does not make her a rebel who goes against the system; a high sense of moral obligation gives her the inner strength to follow the path of right action.

Draupadi is introduced in the novel as a young girl awaiting the fulfillment of her dreams in life through marriage with *Yadava* Krishna. Pratibha Ray consciously develops on the theme of the relationship of Draupadi with Krishna and Karna to purge the epic figure from the
allegations of her being a woman of loose morals. The author herself quotes the words of contemporary Indian people who say the "Krishnaka of the Mahabharata took five husbands, and still not being satisfied was attracted to Karna and Krishna..." (After Word, Yajnaseni, 401). The novel portrays a young 'Krishnaka' infinitely attracted to Sri Krishna whom she believed would be her lord from the time she heard her father saying: "O Krishna It is to you that I shall offer my Krishnaka. ... On giving Krishnaka into your hands my lost honour will return. It is for this that Krishnaka's birth has taken place" (Yajnaseni, 9). From this day onwards, a "heavenly, pure, stream of love" (Yajnaseni, 9) drenches her heart and she offers her life to Krishna. Here too, Pratibha Ray drives at the fact that Draupadi like any Indian woman, is a just a private property belonging to a man, where the man decides the fate of a woman. To King Drupad, his daughter was only an instrument to fulfill his revenge against Drona who captured him and insulted him. The very birth of Krishnaka, to him is to achieve his goal of defeating Drona in order to bring back his lost glory. Drupada believes that by offering his daughter in marriage to Sri Krishna, he would get a strong ally in the war against Drona.

Young Daupadi is psychologically influenced by the words of her father and is happy that she would become instrumental in bringing glory to her father. Krishna Dvaipayana Vysasa also confirms her impressions when he tells her that "Many incidents of your life are waiting for you – they will be your life's supreme study. Go, prepare yourself for them and prove your worth" (Yajnaseni, 15).

But Draupadi's dreams are shattered when Sri Krishna himself reveals that he is not destined to be her Lord. However, her disappointment gives was to a sense of elation when Krishna advises King Drupada to arrange a swayamvara for his daughter. He increases her self-esteem by his words: "the finest hero of Aryavart alone will be the most suitable match for Krishnaka. By offering her like a servant at the feet of someone, you are only
irritating her. Only he who will prove himself to be the best of all for Krishna, will take Krishna's hand in marriage” (Yajnaseni, 22). It is then, that Draupadi comes to know of Arjuna, whom Krishna considers as the most suitable bridegroom for Draupadi. Her mind rebels at the revelation. She thinks:

The garland I had been weaving since the morning to put round Krishna's neck would have to be put round Arjuna's. That too at Krishna's behest. Did I have no wish of my own, no desire, no craving simply because I was Yajnaseni - born of the sacrificial fire? My birth, life and death - all were dictated by someone else. (Yajnaseni, 24).

But she is well aware of the fact that she did not have the power to go beyond the wishes of her father King Drupada and Sri Krishna and surrenders herself to their will. “Weaving tears into the flower garland, I placed it not round Krishna's neck but on his feet” (Yajnaseni, 24). She finds solace in accepting Krishna as her spiritual guide and Arjuna as her lord. Like any ordinary young girl, she loses herself in fantasies about Arjuna and mentally prepares herself to accept him into her life.

Draupadi is presented as a sharp, witty, intelligent and educated young woman competent to stand upright in a male-dominated society. Her sense of morality and good education makes her aware of her duties towards her family and society. Even though the rebel in her questions the arrangement of the swayamvara arranged by her father, she mutely accepts them and is ready to be the 'object of survey' in the swayamvara mantapa. She silently questions the meaning of the word swayamvara where she actually does not have the authority of choosing her husband, as the word indicates. King Drupada, who had decided that none other than Arjuna should win her, had arranged a very tough test, which the suitors had to face in order to win the hand of the beautiful Draupadi. Suitors from many
kingdoms had arrived and they varied from young princes to old kings who aspired to win Draupadi, so that one more woman would adorn their inner harem. Draupadi, no ordinary princess of Aryavart, is not at all amused by the attention she receives at the mantap. She says: “I was profoundly ashamed to be the target of so many lustful eyes. I wanted to hide my face in the veil.... how painful it was for a woman to have her beauty displayed in an assembly hall” (Yajnaseni, 39).

Throughout the novel, Draupadi is conscious of the fact that all the people around her are using her for different purposes. To her father she is a means of achieving the goal of revenge; to her mother-in-law, Draupadi is a person who has to strive to keep her five sons together. To Krishna she is born to uphold dharma in Aryavart and to Pandavas, she is an object of their pleasure—a housewife, who should act as a mother, sister and wife simultaneously. Draupadi possesses a vast heart with enough space for accommodating all. Being married to all the five Pandavas at once was a very big burden for a young girl like her. She had to accommodate herself to the whims and fancies of each of her husbands. Yudhishthira aspired for an intelligent lady who would understand the ‘dharma-shastras’ and would be able to play dice with him, whenever necessary. Bhima demanded of her to become a good cook, always providing him good food and looking after his well-being. Even Arjuna, who had won her in the swayamvara and whom she loved the most, refused to understand her predicament and demanded undivided love from her. Nakula and Sahadeva claim motherly attention from her and at the same time impose the authority of a husband on her.

Draupadi, looking upon Sita (of Ramayana) as her model, silently bears all agony and hiding all her dejection, strives hard to fulfill her duties as a wife, daughter-in-law and Queen. It is worth mentioning here that though Draupadi accepts Sita as her model, she does not exhibit the moral courage to preserve her pride as a woman. In the Ramayana, Sita had
Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi is portrayed as an epitome of kindness, forgiveness and tolerance. There are several instances in the story to support this portrayal and Draupadi achieves a spiritual glory through this picturisation. The first such instance occurs during the *swayamvara* when she witnesses Karna being insulted by her brother Drishtadyumna and others on the question of his low birth in society. Draupadi agrees silently that Karna is the actual winner in the *swayamvara*, since he was the first to string the bow and aim at the target. But he was not allowed to shoot the target by her brother who demanded to know Karna’s identity before shooting the target. Seeing Karna’s dejected look Draupadi felt that she was responsible to some extent for the insult Karna suffered in this huge assembly. She thinks: “If the peculiar conditions of the *swayamvar* were the cause of the defeat suffered by so many kings and the insult to Karna, was I also not to blame? Because of me so many heroes had suffered” (*Yajnaseni*, 42). Till the end of her life, Draupadi carries this guilt in her mind. And this, according to the author, is the reason for the soft corner she feels for Karna. The author here implies that it is not the physical attraction Draupadi feels for Karna, but it is a sense of obligation born out of guilt that she feels for him. Further, Draupadi is forced to move in a close circle with Karna because Kunti insists on Draupadi serving him in person, for she had adopted Karna as her ‘*dharma*’ son. Draupadi thus remains justified in her relationship with Karna.

Draupadi also succeeds in maintaining a harmonious relationship with Kunti despite the latter’s extraordinary decision in distributing her to all her
five sons in her strategic motive of keeping the *Pandavas* united, to recapture their lost power and glory. Nevertheless she attempts to comprehend the intention behind Kunti's decision. She thinks:

> Even though she had had sons through different gods at her husband's request, Mother's own conscience must at times have been weighed down with a sense of sin, shame and hesitation... In case the mother was ashamed before her daughter-in-law and looked small, she had deliberately compelled the daughter-in-law to accept five husbands. *(Yajnaseni, 66).*

Even while such thoughts of doubt cross her mind, she brushes them aside and strives hard to fulfill the duties of a loving and dedicated daughter-in-law.

Draupadi's dedication towards life and all living beings around her is brought out by her kind-hearted nature towards all. Even while residing at the palace as the Queen of *Hastinapura* she makes it a point to cook the food by her own hands, not only for her husbands but for all dependants around her. She also ensures that all around her including animals are fed to their content before having food herself. She does not enjoy the privilege of being served by her servants on account of being a Queen. But this is a self-imposed sacrifice which she accepts happily and enjoys playing the role of a mother to all. This is reflected in her life in *Kamyaka* forest where she feeds all around her from the *akshyapatra* presented by the Sun God. Draupadi sticks to the routine of feeding her husbands, other human beings, animals, birds, insects and even worms around them before taking food herself. This arises from her sense of duty as a woman and mother who finds satisfaction in serving others and making them comfortable. Irawati Karve writes about Draupadi's life in the forest: "even in the forest, she could not escape the responsibility of being a daughter, a daughter-in-law..."
and wife of great kings. From morning to night she was busy...giving Draupadi even less solitude and leisure than she had in the palace” (Karve 1991, 88-89). Draupadi is projected in the novel as a woman who finds happiness in keeping not only her family happy but also everybody associated with her. She even goes to the extent of accepting non-Aryan foresters into their fold and befriending them.

Draupadi is seen to be a woman full of love and pity for all. This quality of hers is revealed when she pleads with Bhima to spare the life of Kirmira, who happens to stray into their territory. The differences between the high-case and low-caste are forgotten when Draupadi considers him as a human being, and begs to spare his life. Similar is the incident when she decides to breast-feed two Non-Aryan children Kambu and Jambu, who had lost their mother. The author, through this incident, projects her unstinted mother-hood.

While the Draupadi of the epic always seems to nurse revenge in her heart and yearns to settle the scores with Kauravas, the Draupadi in Pratibha Ray’s novel is an all-enduring woman waiting patiently for what destiny has in store for her. Yet, she resembles her epic version when occasionally she loses control of her curbed sorrow and complains to Krishna and her husbands about her ill-fate and even blames Yudhishthira for being responsible for the insult of her femininity. She openly finds fault with Yudhishthira’s intense affinity towards the game of dice and assesses that it is the root cause of all their misery. Nevertheless she gives him all her support, knowing that it is her wifely duty to do so. Similar is the portrayal of Draupadi after the Pandavas have gained victory over the erring Kauravas. Bhima, as promised by him, anoints Draupadi’s unbound hair with Duhsasana’s blood. But time had changed Draupadi’s attitude. She says: “At one time, I had imagined that Duhsasan’s blood would bring peace to my heart. Now it seemed that drinking blood only satisfied the beast” (Yejnaseni, 373). But now, a matured Draupadi feels that any person with
the slightest feeling of humanity cannot achieve peace by sporting with human blood. She realizes that as a woman, she cannot find peace through shedding human blood. She finds herself immersed in helplessness, disgust and profound sorrow and remorse. Life and war had made her wiser and she has matured enough to understand the hollowness of the word ‘revenge’.

The epic-character Draupadi is presented as a single-minded person, whose sole objective in life is to wreak vengeance on the Kauravas who caused her insult and the downfall of her husbands. She is rarely found to lament for her children who are left in the care of Subhadra in Dwarka. But Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi is depicted as a woman in whom the qualities of the head and heart find full expression. Being estranged from her children, she often thinks about them and adopts two Non-Aryan children Kambu and Jambu, whom she feeds with her own milk. Thus the pangs of motherhood are satisfied in Draupadi that also manifests as universal love in her. Pratibha Ray is able to project Draupadi as a symbol of universal motherhood who effuses love for all children equally. This inherent characteristic of Draupadi runs as an undercurrent throughout the novel.

Draupadi’s unflinching trust in Krishna culminates in her total acceptance of him as her supreme savior. Though her woman-hood had been put to test several times by various men, she seeks solace in Krishna who never fails her. During all these times she finds that her undaunted faith in Krishna proves to be a leading force that sustains and guides her. The moral courage, which she displays stems from this spiritual affinity she feels towards Krishna. Apart from protecting Draupadi’s virtue during vastrapaharana, Krishna remains in her subconscious as a protective force even during vanavasa.

Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi narrative also gives life to other sub-characters in the novel who hold the thread of the storyline. Apart from the Pandavas and Kunti, the other characters that are projected in the novel are
Krishna and Karna. Both of them are seen to influence Draupadi's thoughts and life to a certain extent. While Krishna is always a spiritual solace to Draupadi, Karna remains an unexplained sorrow in Draupadi's heart.

Krishna is portrayed with all the divinity attributed to him by the scriptures. He is a god who has infinite love for everybody around him. Being an Avatara of Vishnu, he is born into the world with the aim of establishing dharma. Draupadi herself is attributed with the same role of establishing dharma in Aryavarta. Hence the affinity between Krishna and Draupadi remains explained. He is not a mere garment-provider who saves Draupadi from shame in the 'Kaurava Sabha' but is her guide, friend and lord, who stays by her even in her dreams. Krishna is portrayed as one who is ready to sacrifice himself for the well being of his devotees. Pratibha Ray establishes this relating a simple incident of Krishna saving a young boy from the clutches of a tiger, by sending his Sudarsana Chakra. Seeing the cut on Krishna's bleeding finger, Draupadi enquires about the wound. Krishna replies:

It is the wound left by the Sudarshan Chakra. Sometimes it reminds me that without bloodying my own life I cannot save the world from bloodshed. Look, that innocent tribal boy would have just been dead. At the right moment, Sudarshan did its work. Killing the savage tiger, it is coming back. I released it too swiftly and it touched a finger. Blood spurted out. Anyhow, the child is safe. (Yajnaseni, 158).

We also see Krishna assisting Draupadi in all steps of her life – her marriage to five husbands, the general rules to be laid for a happy life with the Pandavas, the decision to follow the Pandavas into the forest during the Vanavasa and consoling her at the massacre of her children by Aswathama – are some such instances. Krishna appears as a spiritual force throughout the novel, a guiding spirit and a supporting friend of Draupadi.
Karna is the other character that is projected by the author. Karna is seen to regard Draupadi as a challenge to his manhood for having been insulted in the *swayamvara*. Till the end, he finds it impossible to forgive the circumstances in which he was belittled in front of everybody, and regards Draupadi as the root case for that. He openly admits his hatred for her and tells her: "I too was a slave of circumstances. But only till the day of that *swayamvar*. Then I vowed to become the master of the situation. Man controls circumstances by the force of his prowess and his effort. He can alter it. I want to show this to the world. It was because of you that I made this vow. Therefore, I salute you." (*Yajnaseni*, 185). He admits that the insult suffered at the *swayamvara mantapa* has altered his life, and from that day onwards, his life had become a journey to prove his prowess as a man. Karna’s basic flaw as seen in this novel, is his arrogance, which shuts him out from any positive changes in life. Due to this false pride of his, he was unable to accept Kunti as his mother and the Pandavas as his brothers. His mountainous ego had always stood in the path of his development, and has hindered his growth as a full-fledged man capable of love and forgiveness.

**Sum-up:**

Draupadi of *Yajnaseni* resembles her original in the epic as a committed woman, totally dedicated to the cause of strengthening the Pandava unity. Her steadfast faith in Krishna as her lord is the real strength behind her success in all the ordeals she undergoes. Ray reiterates this image of Draupadi in her Draupadi-narrative.

Yet Draupadi of *Yajnaseni* is different from her epic version. In the epic *Mahabharata* she is a strong-willed courageous woman who considers herself competent enough to stand at par with the *kshatriya* men of those times. She is courageous enough to speak aloud in the *Kaurava Sabha* as seen in the *Dyuta Parva*. She draws strength from the realization that she was instrumental for the Pandavas’ return to Hastinapura after the exile.

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She is the living spirit inculcating dynamism into the \emph{Pandavas’} quest for power and provides sustained unity among the brothers.

Pratibha Ray transforms this image of Draupadi into the image of a woman who suffers deep mental and physical agony, brushing aside her ego for the fulfillment of her family life and enduring all pain uncomplainingly. Unlike the Draupadi of the parent epic who clenched her fists and cursed, the Draupadli is a docile woman who seeks solace in weeping. She does not burn in anger or blame her husbands for her misfortune, not does she complain vehemently about her distress to Krishna or others. Instead, she bears her agony silently, placing all her distress at the feet of Sri Krishna. Pratibha Ray’s Draupadi is neither ambitious nor bloodthirsty and forgives all who have wronged her and condemns war as an unnecessary evil. She sacrifices worldly pleasures for the sake of the unfortunate and the undeveloped and even forsakes heaven to fulfill her duties on earth. Yajnaseni is a true representative of the modern women who thinks beyond her family.

Pratibha Ray dilutes the fiery spirit of the fire-born Yajnaseni by portraying her as a docile housewife. The Yajna fire that provides undaunted spirit to the epical Draupadi, lends only the fire of agony to her counterpart in the novel.

\section*{II}

M.T. Vasudevan Nair’s novel, \emph{Second Turn}, aims at establishing Bhima as the real hero of the epic. The strong, impulsive Bhima of the epic transforms into a loving, sensitive and dedicated man, eliciting the sympathy of the reader as he silently suffers the neglect of all around him. The author casts the character of Bhima in a realistic mould that appeals to modern sensibility.
Bhima is portrayed as a towering personality with profound commonsense, abundant strength and immense courage, who gives momentum to the events in the *Mahabharata*. He is the one who fights the 'rakshasas', rescues the Pandavas from every danger during their exiles and is the one who kills most of the Kauravas in the final Kurukshetra war. Bhima is adept in all forms of war, skilled in use of all weapons, and ready to face any situation. Above all, he is the most popular character among children, as popular as Hanuman in *Ramayana*, with his potbelly and gluttonous nature.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair establishes that Bhima is not only large-bellied, but also large-hearted, in the very first chapter itself. This is illustrated in the incident when Bhima decides against proceeding with the 'swargarohana' after the fall of Draupadi. Bhima had loved her so much that he does not have the heart to leave her alone on the foothills of the Himalayas.

Bhima of *Second Turn* is portrayed as a gentle, intelligent and sensitive person, who takes pride in his physical prowess. He has great confidence in his physical strength and he is the sole Pandava who has the courage to face any ordeal. The other Pandavas depended on him to protect them from dangers of all sorts. This is obvious from the words of Yudhishthira during their exile, when Kunti sends Bhima to handle Baka, the 'mythical' man-eater. Yudhishthira says: "We all sleep peacefully, safe in the shadow of Bhimasena’s strength. Don’t you know that Mother?" (Second Turn, 75). Similarly, it is Bhima who protects the Pandavas from the wicked forester Hidimba, saves the virtue of Draupadi when Kicaka tries to molest her, and fights duels single-handedly with several others like Jatasura and Kirmira.

Bhima himself was conscious of the fact that his brothers slept peacefully only in his assuring presence. Yet he lets himself to be called an 'idiot', and does not mind being considered a slow-witted person. This
veneer of idiocy, which he carried around himself, was only a means of disguising his super strength and keen intelligence.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair brings to light that right from childhood, Bhima was a person who was sidelined by everybody, in order to favour Arjuna who was more handsome than him. The incident where Yudhishthira, admonishes Bhima instead of appreciating him for killing a wild boar and thereby saving all the lives around him, is an example for this. Similar is the attitude of Dronacharya, who deliberately tries to curb Bhimasena’s aptitude for charioteering and archery. Bhima, who showed outstanding skill in these fields, could not pursue his training on those lines, because of his Guru who restricts him by saying: “For a kshatriya, the use of the mace is as important as riding a chariot or archery. It is the weapon of the brave ones. You may devote your mind to it after your general studies” (Second Turn, 43). Dronacharya’s attitude is evident from his action when he does not allow Bhima perform anything other than a duel using a mace.

But Bhima, unlike Karna, has the inner strength to withstand all these insults rendered to him. While Karna, in Mrityunjaya feels humiliated and angered on being belittled, Bhima of Second Turn, laughs it away. He does not develop an inferiority complex, nor does he feel like exhibiting his skills in a vengeful way. He simply sticks to the role attributed to him by others and performs his duty to the best of his ability, without malice. Thus Bhima exhibits his inner strength by not surrendering to the petty ways of the world. He has the positive attitude that changes all the negative situations to his advantage.

Bhima’s philosophy of life prompts him to rise to the occasion. He does not shy away from any situation, being conscious of his physical prowess. He is self-confident as well as intelligent, and his courage lends him the readiness to face any obstacle. This is illustrated during Draupadi-Swayamvara where he displays his understanding of the situation (82-87). He was quick enough to discern the secret of the unsteady bow, which threw
the contestants off their feet. He rightly guesses that molten metal had been poured indiscriminately into the bow to disturb its balance and mock the archers. When Yudhishthira decides against competing, Bhima could have tried his luck and he was confident that he could snap the bow as soon as he could lay his hands on it. But he backs out passing over the opportunity to Arjuna, whom he knew was enamored by the beauty of Draupadi. Thus Bhima proves to be intelligent, understanding and considerate in his actions. Moreover, the memories of Hidimbi were fresh in his mind. He does not think twice to protect his brother Arjuna and his new bride when the defeated kings attack them at the conclusion of the swayamvara. Forgetting that they were in the guise of Brahmins, Bhima fights the kings with the pillar he pulls out from the mantapa. This shows that Bhima was capable of rising to the opportunity to discharge his duties as an elder brother and a protector.

Much as he is misunderstood, Bhima is also a person who has been taken advantage of by his loved ones. His sensitive nature makes him love Draupadi without any inhibitions. But, to Draupadi, he was only a muscle man who would protect her from danger, and one who would run errands for her without any protest. The incident of the sugandhika flowers bears testimony to this (144-47). Draupadi, who was very keen on having the rare flowers in Kubera’s garden, simply throws them away when some other thing captures her attention. This pains Bhima very much, but he shows the mental strength to contain his emotions, and laughs away his agony. Again, in a few days, he goes on another mission for Draupadi, knowing that it might be just another of her whims and fancies, which she would soon lay aside. But this knowledge does not deter him from the path of duty, and he embarks upon the mission, without paying heed to the ‘return’ or ‘rewards’ awaiting him. He is a duty-conscious person who performs his tasks without expecting any reward.
M.T. Vasudevan Nair projects Bhima as an understanding and loving person, who yearns for love himself. He sympathizes with the young, innocent Draupadi, who, as a bride, was compelled to accept all the five Pandavas for her husbands. He even argues with Yudhishthira when he puts forward the suggestion of making Draupadi a common wife. Even though he enjoys only a 'second turn' in his marital life with Draupadi, he is the only one who loves her without any bounds. He is ready to sacrifice anything for her. It is Bhima who saves her from the innumerable dangers faced by Draupadi, disregarding his own safety. A prominent example is the instance of Kicaka vadha. While Yudhisthira and Arjuna do not extend a helping hand to Draupadi fearing that their identity would be revealed, Bhima handles the situation courageously and intelligently, thereby finishing Kicaka and protecting the honour of Draupadi(173-75). His deft handling of the situation also guards the secret of their real identity. Again, it is the courageous Bhima who tries to voice his protest against the Kaurava Sabha and his elder brother Yudhisthira, when Draupadi was put to shame after the defeat in the game of dice (125-128).

Bhima, though a valorous and action-oriented warrior, does not indulge in wanton killing and reveals his large-heartedness acting only according to logic. This is illustrated in the incident where he spares Kirmira, against the wishes of everyone else, when he comes to know that he is only a savage forester who is spoiling for a fight. Bhima feels that there is no logic in killing Kirmira or any of his clan, who would not be a further threat to their peace. Similarly, a loving father in Bhima is revealed in his attitude towards Ghatotkacha. M.T. Vasudevan Nair points out that the other Pandavas had an aversion towards Ghatotkacha, because he belonged to a forest tribe, a low caste. Their tendency to weigh Abhimanyu and Ghatotkacha on two different scales pains Bhima a lot, and he notices that while the death of Abhimanyu is mourned by all, Ghatotkacha's death goes un-bemoaned. Bhima realizes that his first-born was only a useful warrior to
the Pandavas. He sheds a silent tear for his departed son, but does not waste his time mourning for him. He is again ready to face the enemies in the battlefield.

Whatever be the happenings in his life, Bhima remains dedicated to his duties and does not vent his anger by shunning them. The author includes an instance when Bhimasena fights a mad-elephant to give vent to his anger and another, when he invites a maid to his bed, again to take out the bitterness off his mind. He is seen to be a man of few words, unlike Arjuna. This is obvious when he narrates without embellishments, the incidents of Hidimba vadha and Baka vadha to Draupadi, who seems to be a glutton for details.

Bhima, again, is not a person who cares for any philosophical dictums. He is a dominated by his heart and feels sad at the death of near and dear ones. He silently ridicules Krishna's philosophy on death and rebirth, which says that that the soul merely changed bodies like people changed worn-out clothes. He scoffs at the philosophy when Abhimanyu and Ghatotkacha die.

Finally, after the war when a disillusioned Yudhisthira asks him to succeed the throne, Bhima mentally decides to accept the offer, not because he was keen on it, but because he considered it his duty to help and obey his brother. So he does not feel disappointed when Kunti and Draupadi dissuade him from taking such a decision. He is a man who firmly believes in doing one's duty without thinking of the reward.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair once again highlights the nature of Bhima as a duty-conscious man in the final chapter of the novel. Here we see a Bhima who prefers to come back to earth to complete his duties. The heaven without hunger and sweat, where flowers don't fade, does not tempt him anymore. He realizes that heaven is a place for those who have conquered their passions. He has the self-realization that he has "not sublimated worldly desires" (Second Turn, 249). He discovers that his passion for Draupadi is still alive, and that he would never have peace of mind, unless
he wreaks vengeance on Aswathama, who caused the destruction of the Kuru clan. He does not feel any sorrow in relinquishing heaven, and descends down the mountains with renewed vigour.

The other prominent characters in Second Turn are Kunti, Draupadi and Sri Krishna, though the other Pandavas – Yudhisthira and Arjuna figure large in the novel. Kunti and Draupadi are portrayed as women of substance who have a definite say in the lives of their men. Kunti is seen to be a woman with sharp intelligence and vision, and she manipulates many a situation and guides her sons through difficulties. It is Kunti who guesses the death trap laid by the Kauravas in Varanavata. And she is resourceful enough to advise them on how to escape. All her actions have some intention behind them, and she is a woman who is bent upon making her son Yudhisthira the emperor of Hastinapura. She vehemently inspires Yudhishtihra into action with her advice and narration of the story of the Vidula. Her strength of character is revealed when she silently bears the agony of her own son Karna fighting Arjuna in the war. She does not reveal the true identity of Karna to any of the Pandavas, before the end of the war.

Draupadi, as pictured by M.T. Vasudevan Nair is a woman who knows how to get things done her way. She is very intelligent, and guesses the true identity of the Pandavas at the swayamvara. She is portrayed as a bloodthirsty woman, who is turned on by bloody fights and gory killings. She finds happiness in listening to word-to-word renditions of fights in which her husbands are involved. She even admonishes Bhima for having spared Kirmira, by not killing him.

Draupadi is also portrayed as an ambitious woman, who aspires to be the Queen of Hastinapura at any cost. She does not seem broken by the death of her children and looks forward to glorious days ahead as the Queen. She even requests Bhima to step back from his decision to accept the throne, because it would destroy her ambition. Thus, M.T. Vasudevan Nair portrays that the women of Kuru vamsa as not mere wombs to receive
seeds, but great manipulators, who knew the means of making their dreams come true.

Sri Krishna is portrayed as a Rajah of a small kingdom, who is also a maternal cousin of the Pandavas. Krishna holds a respectful relationship with Bhima, and is a bosom friend of Arjuna. He is also characterized as a great manipulator, who uses his friendship with the Pandavas to kill his enemy Jarasandha. He is a strategist who lays down the rules for a ‘dharma-yudha’, but at the same time prompts Arjuna to kill Karna, when he is without a weapon. He is an action-oriented person who does not have time for emotions. He increases the courage of the Pandavas, especially Arjuna, by his philosophical renderings. In fact, Krishna is the guiding spirit of the Pandavas, without whom their victory would have been impossible. M.T. Vasudevan Nair presents Krishna without his divine aura, as an ordinary human being, a loyal friend of the Pandavas.

The character of Yudhishthira and Arjuna are also different from the portrayal in the epic Mahabharata. Yudhishthira is portrayed as a coward who needs to be reminded often, of his responsibility as an elder brother and king. The game of dice is the only thing that interests him, and he would joyfully spend any amount of time playing the dice. It is this weakness of his that leads the Pandavas to danger. But at the end of the novel, a different face of Yudhishthira, as an intelligent strategist, is revealed when he sends Arjuna to rescue Duryodhana from the captivity of Chitrasena. Similarly his revelation that he had engaged spies to collect information for him during vanavasa, also astounds everybody. But still he needs the prompting of Kunti and Krishna to take a decision about the Kurukshetra war.

Though not figuring prominently in the modern narrative, the portrayal of Guru Drona also holds the interest of the reader. The author directs scathing criticism against him, depicting him as a person who is manipulative, over-ambitious and avaricious. Drona, though born a Brahmin,
lives the life of a *kshatriya* and aspires for wealth and social position forgetting his *sva-dharma* as a *Brahmin*. His devious nature is highlighted in incidence where he shows partiality towards some of his students, especially to his own son, Aswathama. The author also hints that Dronacharya was instrumental in maiming Ekalavya, the *nishada* boy who displayed promising skill in archery surpassing that of Arjuna’s (*Second Turn*, 41). Bhima himself suffers due to this attitude of Drona when he tries to compartmentalize the skills of his students. The Drona-Drupada enmity, the author writes, was born out of Drona’s avarice for power and pelf. Arjuna, his pet student, himself mouths these words: “...Drona became intolerably greedy. Whatever he received did not satisfy Drona” (*Second Turn*, 80). Drona does not possess forgiveness, serenity and self-control – the Brahmin virtues described in the Gita. Instead, he is bent upon gaining wealth and power by following *para-dharma*.

Arjuna, as a warrior with great self-confidence, holds himself in high esteem and projects himself with undue importance. Though he is not an expert as Karna, his rival, he does not like to accept the reality. He believes himself to be exceptionally attractive and vain, because he considers himself the apt bridegroom for Uttara, who is young enough to be his daughter. Yet he is a person dedicated to the cause of the family, like Bhimasena.

**Sum-up:**

Bhima’s character as depicted in the novel does not deviate much from the portrait of the epic hero. The author in his novel plants his hero firmly into reality, and explores the different angles of the thus demythified character. Bhima of *Second Turn* is the Bhima of *Mahabharata* sans the divine aura. Bhima in the novel is no more a demigod, but only a strong human being, bound by duty towards the welfare of his kith and kin. Unlike Draupadi of *Yajnaseni*, he does not spread his benevolence outside his family. He is a man totally dedicated towards to the cause of his family.
Thus M.T. Vasudevan Nair proves successful in his attempt to pick out the epic character individually and place him in a position, where his character establishes an instant rapport with the modern sensibilities.

### III

Shivaji Sawant in his novel *Mrityunjaya: The Death Conqueror* deifies Karna-- Kunti’s first born. Karna, the arrogant man who gives support to the evil Duryodhana Karna who suffers repeated humiliation and defeat in the epic emerges victorious at a spiritual level in the modern narrative. Sawant’s Karna is able to break the fetters of his adverse circumstances with his strength of character, thereby glorifying his life.

In *Mrityunjaya*, Shivaji Sawant casts the character of Karna in the mould of a tragic hero. Sawant projects Karna as a normal human being, with all strengths and weaknesses natural to a man. The Karna in *Mrityunjaya* is loving, dedicated, simple-hearted, sensitive and courageous. But has his weaknesses too. He is egoistic and arrogant, and suffers from an acute sense of inferiority complex, which is projected throughout the epic. This inferiority complex, which stems from the identity crisis he faces, is the tragic flaw of his character.

Karna, in his childhood is portrayed as a simple, loving child who is loved and adored by his parents and brother. But something makes him stand apart from the children of Champanagari, who are his playmates. As he grows up, he slowly discovers that it is his ‘skin-armour and flesh-earrings’ that make him stand apart. Young Karna spends his innocent days happily, enjoying the hero-worship of the boys— for he naturally elicited admiration due to his extraordinarily handsome appearance attributed by his *kavaca- kundala*. His attitude towards the village boys complemented his appearance, for he always played a protective role towards them. Shivaji Sawant describes how Karna overpowers an enraged bull with his
extraordinary courage and physical prowess. This incident adds to his courage and self-esteem and establishes him as the hero of Champanagari.

But this self-esteem and confidence are soon put to test during the competition among Drona's pupils on the day of Vasanta Purnima. Unfortunately for Karna, his reigning deity and father, the Sun God, refuses to inspire him on that particular day. All the enthusiasm Karna feels for the competition is curbed by Shona's words that reveal the unprecedented lack of radiance of his flesh-ear-rings. He is affected psychologically, and his confidence drains out of him. His mind questions: "Why are my flesh-ear-rings darkened today? Why is the sky overcast today? What great doom is this omen of? What poison-seed is being planted today? What is going to happen to Karna? Why was I given these flesh-ear-rings?" (Mrityunjaya, 83). Finally he decides upon Shona's request that he will not compete unless and until the Sun God grants him darshan. This attitude of Karna reveals that he greatly depended on the influence of the Sun God in his life. He was prompted to action only in the presence of the mental and psychological support offered by the figure of the resplendent Sun God. Without this cushion, Karna was unable to project his valour. Later on, when he takes part in the competition, he finds it difficult to contain his emotions when he is badly insulted on the question of his lineage. The mixed feelings of hurt and anger pass through his mind, and his head whirls at the injustice. Shivaji Sawant writes: "My head whirled. I wanted to fling my crown in the dust of Hastinapura. Stuffing my ear-ring lobes in my ears and pressing my ears with my palms, I helplessly raised by head...What shall I do? They're hurting me, hitting me from all sides. Where can I hide?" (Mrityunjaya, 101).

At this moment of insult and hurt, Karna seeks solace in the fact that Duryodhana had accepted him as his bosom friend and had given him the authority of a Raja, by anointing him the 'Raja of Anga'. This incident
ensures Karna's loyalty towards Duryodhana and in many an instance, he reveals his eagerness to stay by Duryodhana, for good or for bad.

Shivaji Sawant projects Karna as a duty-conscious, loving son and husband. His love for his foster-mother is infinite and because of his unstained devotion to her, he rejects the request of Kunti to join the Pandava side. He weighs the advantages offered to him on his joining the Pandavas, against what he actually has now. Krishna and Kunti tempt him with the position and glory due to the eldest in Kuru clan. But even the thought that Duryodhana would accept him as his elder brother, and give him the throne of Hastinapura without any hesitation does not evoke desire in him to accept the proposition. To him, being the loyal friend of Duryodhana, and helping him in the war for power was the highest repayment he could ever give back to Duryodhana. The second temptation offered to him is the position of Draupadi's husband, being the first and foremost Pandava. But this is no temptation at all, for Karna is a loyal husband to Vrishali and even the beauteous Draupadi is no temptation to him to neglect his loving wife. By this incident, Shivaji Sawant establishes that Karna is a duty-conscious, loving friend, son and husband.

Even though Karna suffers from an acute inferiority complex, he tries to overcome this with the help of confidence steeped in the deep belief that his deity Sun God will always support him in every step in life. Whenever the Sun hides behind the clouds and refuses to show his countenance to the praying Karna, or when the Sun appears less resplendent, Karna feels the bite of insecurity. But even during such times, he tries to rise to the occasion with a conscious effort. There are occasions when Karna faces challenges even when he feels that he does not have the divine assistance of the Sun God. Such are the instances when he displays his skill at the competition conducted on Vasanta Purnima, to showcase the expertise of Drona's pupils(79-102). The second is the incident of Draupadi swayamvara. Even while knowing that Draupadi would reject him on account of his low
birth, he decides to try his hand, not for himself, but for his loyal friend Duryodhana. Duryodhana, who was keen on winning the hand of Draupadi, was sure that he would not be able to fulfill the conditions of the competition held during the swayamvara. Duryodhana, who knew the Karna would do anything to make his friend happy, requests him to win Draupadi for him (Duryodhana)(238). Karna agrees to it, though well aware of the consequences he would face, for not being born as a kshatriya. He brooks the insult by Draupadi and Drishtadyumna, for the sake of his friend, and even fights a duel with Arjuna disguised as a Brahmin, who wins the hand of Draupadi. He retreats from the duel not on being defeated by Arjun, but hearing the news that his son Sudamana was killed trying to defend his father (258). The third instance is the final battle with Arjuna, in the battlefield. Knowing that the world would condemn him for fighting his brothers, he still decides to fight the third Pandava. He wanted to avenge the death of his son Sudamana, and also win the throne for Duryodhana. In doing so, he did not have any qualms in laying down his life as sacrifice.

Karna’s attitude towards women had always been one of respect. He had respectful love for his mother Radha, and was not ready to desert her for gaining the throne of Hastinapura. His wife Vrishali was the only love in his life. Even Draupadi, with her unsurpassed beauty fails to kindle love or lust in his mind, since his mind was already filled with the love and devotion of the simple Vrishali. His marriage to Supriya was one that was lovingly imposed upon him by Duryodhana. This was because, Duryodhana’s bride Bhanumati had insisted that the ‘Anga Raja’ Karna should wed her ‘sakhi’ Supriya. Karna, out of his loyalty towards Duryodhana had to agree to the condition.

His high sense of morality is revealed when he feels at heart the need to protect the dignity of Draupadi when Duhsasana insults her in the Kaurava Sabha. His embittered mind had wanted to repay the insult Draupadi had directed towards him during her swayamvara. The memory of his
humiliation, together with the fact that Draupadi did not seek his help to save her honour makes him utter cruel words against her in the Kaurava Sabha. He thinks: "If even the most ordinary female of Hastinapura sought my help in distress, I would at any time and under any condition grant her this same promise. And here was Draupadi herself. I was ready to save her even at the risk of my life" (Mrityunjaya, 359). But Karna's ego was injured because Draupadi, while requesting many others for help, does not pay heed to him. Anger over-takes and he settles scores with her by calling her 'unchaste' and stamping her as an adulteress. But when she is actually stripped by Duhsasana, Karna is over-whelmed with the desire to cover her body with his own shawl. He visualizes his own wife Vrishali in the place of Draupadi and suffers great mental agony at having insulted her. "Seeing Vrishali in place of Draupadi, I immediately opened my eyes. Even before my wide eyes I saw Draupadi one instant and Vrishali the other. Draupadi! Vrishali! Stripped Draupadi! Ah, stripped Vrishali! Vrishali! Ah, she should be covered up" (Mrityunjaya, 366). This brings out the inner conflict suffered by Karna. He is torn between revenge and moral duty. While the moralist in him advises him to protect Draupadi's honour, the anger in him seeks to insult Draupadi, so that she may also suffer humiliation like him. Such a thought of Karna to save Draupadi's honour is not discussed in the epic.

While Shivaji Sawant tries to justify Karna's action by giving a new interpretation to the events, Irawati Karve argues that Karna proves his meanness in intruding into the family affairs of the Kauravas by instigating them to degrade Draupadi. Karve directs criticism against the character of Karna in the following manner: "To be rash was kshatriya characteristic, but the unwritten rule that one must never be small-minded was broken often by Karna. This failure was due to the peculiar turn his life had taken. He had acquired the skills of the kshatriyas but he could not master their value frame" (Karve 1991, 142). She adds that Karna had forgotten all human considerations while advising the Kauravas to denude Draupadi and the
Pandavas. She attributes Karna's failure in life to his inferiority complex and uncontrolled anger.

Karna's sense of duty is fore-grounded throughout the novel through various incidents. One such instance is when Karna flees the scene, in the battle with the gandharva Chitrasena. This incident is depicted in the epic in the Virata Parva (Chapters 25-69) to bring out the cowardice in the so-called great warrior and also to illustrate how Karna had failed the test of friendship. But Shivaji Sawant gives a different coloring to Karna's actions when Karna himself says: "Supposing Chitrasena had captured me? Who then would have retaliated against Arjuna for killing my son Sudamana? Who was my enemy – Arjuna or Chitrasena? 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 thus attributes a purpose to Karna's flight, which stems from his sense of duty to Duryodhana, to whom his life is indebted. It is this sense of duty, which again holds him back from joining the Pandava camp, despite the requests of Krishna, Kunti and Bhishma. Even while knowing that the revelation that he is the eldest Pandava will call off the war, he does not do so, because he wanted to win the war for his dearest friend Duryodhana, whom he wanted to be the emperor of Hastinapura.

The greatest and the often-lauded quality of Karna is his 'dana-shilata' (charity). Karna as the highest symbol of charity is portrayed here in various incidents. The incident of the giving away of his natural 'kavaca-kundala' has been recorded in the epic Mahabharata. Shivaji Sawant relates this incident in his novel with great importance. He draws the pictures of a Karna, who, though forewarned by Surya, extracts his natural armour and ear-rings from his body, inflicting great pain upon himself. Even while knowing that he would be rendered powerless with the parting of his kavacha-kundala, he donates them to Indra in disguise as a Brahmin, to keep his word that he would not deny charity to anybody. This is a much
discussed incident in the local variations of the epic, rendered orally, and the interpreters criticize that this act of Karna is due to his uncontrollable wish to acquire fame. But Shivaji Sawant shows this as the charity of a great-minded man, who was ready to risk his life, rather than his word. But this act certainly contradicts Karna's act in fleeing from the attack of Gandharva Chitrasena, in the Kamyaka forest. While his duty towards Duryodhana, and revenge towards Arjuna prompts him to escape seeking safety (in order to remain alive so as to kill Arjuna), he seems to overlook the fact that the loss of his 'kavacha-kundala' would pave way to his defeat in the war, thereby marring Duryodhana's dreams. The highest act of charity comes at the final stage of Karna's life, when he breaks his gold teeth to give charity to a begging Brahmin, who needs money to perform the funeral rites of his dead son. Shivaji Sawant glorifies Karna saying: "Many in this world have given gifts. But... but only the first-born Pandava knew how to give, while at the very door of death, a gift so heart-shaking, so total, so incomparable" (Mrityunjaya. 691).

The other characters projected in the novel are Kunti, Vrishali, Shona, Draupadi and Sri Krishna. Kunti, the virgin mother of Karna, is a much-misunderstood character by all, especially by Karna himself. Shivaji Sawant takes a sympathetic stand while depicting Kunti's character. He succeeds in bringing out all her inner agony, both at childbirth and after recognizing Karna as her lost son.

Kunti's sorrow-filled life is portrayed in the novel. Kunti, like her son Karna, is also a victim of abandonment, though in a different way. Her character deserves sympathy when she is given away by her father Shurasena to his friend Kuntibhoja, and later when she begets a son from the Sun God in her maiden days. Her marriage to the impotent Pandu is equally piteous, and even more so is her plight when she undergoes niyoga to beget children for her infertile husband. Kunti is a woman suffering for
the sake of the society and family who is unable to take a decision about her own life due to social and personal obligations.

Kunti’s intense love for Karna is brought out powerfully in the imagery employed by Sawant at two places in the novel. The first such picture is illustrated when Kunti harnesses five horses instead of six to her chariot and the missing one being symbolic of her lost son. The second is reflected in the portrait Karna finds at the palace of Yudhishtira, depicting an abandoned infant afloat a river with a young maiden; her face buried in her palms sitting on its bank, indicative of Kunti’s sorrow at the abandonment of Karna. The guilt suffered by Kunti is reflected in her actions when she tries to move in a close circle with Karna. She assiduously sends him gifts on auspicious occasions and showers her love on his wife and children. But she never gathers the moral courage to accept him openly as her first-born.

Sawant portrays Kunti’s attempt to draw Karna to the Pandava side that is often stamped as selfishness by critics, only as a mother’s last attempt to avoid bloodshed between siblings and as a desperate move to save her son Karna from imminent death. Sawant’s Kunti is not a selfish woman but a selfless mother whose love remains unexpressed due to fear of society. Karna, from the time of his birth, has only been a source of everlasting sorrow for his mother Kunti and he continues to be so, even after his death.

Vrishali, Karna’s wife is portrayed as the epitome of innocence and love in the novel. She is a simple village girl, the sister of the charioteer Satyasena. She falls in love with Karna, and adores the very earth he walks on, not just in words, but in deeds too. She proves to be a true Indian woman, ready to play to perfection the roles of a wife, a daughter-in-law, a sister and a mother. When she comes to know that Kunti is Karna’s real mother, her reaction is like any other normal woman. She fears whether Karna would desert her to become the emperor of Hastinapura and accept
Draupadi as his Chief Queen. She remains faithful to him till the end, providing him the loving support of a wife, and becomes a sati on his death.

**Sum-up**

In the epic *Mahabharata* Karna is the strongest supporter of Duryodhana, who stands apart from others for the two qualities he exhibits—the first being loyalty and the second being charity. Karna’s character deserves sympathy because of the strange play of fate that denies him his rightful place. Irawati Karve analyses Karna’s life and writes: ”Karna has no definite position in society. He struggled all his life to gain what he thought was his rightful status and his bitterness lay in not having got it” (Karve 1991, 139). Karna’s sense of defeat was born out of his inability to know his real parentage; and when the answer was given to him, it was too late. He suffered greatly due to his vainglorious nature, surging ambition and is not prepared to spend his life as a mere suta. Even his association with Duryodhana and his subsequent anointment as the Anga-raja, fails to elevate his social rank.

Karna is thus a classic example of the cruel play of destiny. Shivaji Sawant develops the Karna narrative making use of the unique situation in Karna’s life that Karna was born a kshatriya, lived and fought like a kshatriya, but was never accepted as a kshatriya by people around him. The author seeks sympathy for Karna, justifying his actions and seeking new explanations to the mistakes committed by him. The author recreates the character of Karna, by picking him out of the epic and attributing human qualities to him. Sawant’s Karnâ is not different from the epic original, but gathers love, admiration and sympathy from the reader for the simplicity of nature, truthfulness of character and courage exhibited by him. Sawant projects him as a man in search of his roots, striving unsuccessfully to establish his identity.
The novel *And Now Let Me Sleep* is the retelling of the situation in *Sauptika Parva* and *Stri Parva* of the epic Mahabharata, where the women lament the death of their near and dear ones at the end of the war. P.K. Balakrishnan word-paints the troubled minds of Draupadi, Yudhishthira and Kunti at the horror perpetrated by 'Kurukshetra' war.

Karna, the central character in the novel is glorified by the author and is delineated as a person who is the victim of fate and rejection. The tragedy of his life lies in the fact that he was unwanted, even by his mother Kunti. He gains love, respect and sympathy only after his true identity is revealed to the Pandavas and Draupadi after his death, who view Karna's actions posthumously, whereby he attains glory in their memories.

The author depicts the character of Karna through incidents, which occur in the parent epic. In the novel, we see a Karna who is struggling hard to preserve his glory. Unlike the Karna of Shivaji Sawant, he does not suffer from any identity crisis, dejection or inferiority complex. The Karna of P.K. Balakrishnan is action-oriented and dedicated though vainglorious. His self-confidence is obvious in his challenge to Arjuna in the arena where the skills of the young students of Drona were being showcased. Karna arrogantly strides to the dias and speaks out in an authoritative voice: "Arjuna, you who boast of performing the impossible will now see that I can easily show all the skills you exhibited. Why are you so haughty?" (*And Now...*, 26). He impresses the assemblage with his resplendent appearance proud gait and resounding voice. He is quick to accept Duryodhana's patronage and responds in the following manner: "Oh! Suyodhana, I am blessed merely by your civility. I have not come here in search of kingly pleasures. I came here only to fight the duel with Arjuna. I crave your alliance for it" (*And Now...*, 26). These words reveal Karna's ambitious nature, and he does not waste his chance in establishing a relation with
Duryodhana. Karna, here proves that he is not prepared to live his life as a mere *suta*. He also reveals his anger and hatred when *Guru* Kripa questions him on his lineage. He courageously faces the insults showered on him, and gracefully accepts the princely status conferred upon him by Duryodhana. Karna's exhibition of his skills adds an edge to the conflict between the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* and gives a new meaning to the events that follow.

Karna, proves his undaunted courage and single-minded devotion to his *Guru* during his days as a student under Sage Parasurama. His ambition and aspiration for the knowledge of the divine weapons prompts him to approach the *Guru* in the guise of a *Brahmin* boy. Having incurred the curse of the *Guru* for hiding his true identity, Karna is humble enough to beg for kindness from the *Guru*, which results in the partial revoking of the curse. Analyzing the incident in which Indra takes away Karna's *kavaca-kundala*, the author establishes that Karna is courageous and more heroic than Arjuna. Karna is seen saying to Lord *Surya*: "If Arjuna cannot protect his life without begging to get divine armour and ornaments, that ignominy is Arjuna's. That infame goes to him and his father who resorts to begging to save his son's life" (*And Now...*, 54). Karna wants to prove that he is fearless, and does not want to violate his vow of charity to *Brahmins*. He refuses to listen to the warning of *Surya*, because of his undaunted self-confidence.

Incidentally, it is worth mentioning here that Bhasa's *Karnabharam*, a dramatic rendering of Karna's dilemma, depicts the *kavaca-kundala* as a burden inherited by him at birth. Karna in the play is not only a *dana-vira* who gives away his *kavaca-kundala* to Indra, the father of his arch-enemy, but also *yudda-vira*, who has the mettle to overcome even the strongest of enemies. In the play, the revelation by Kunti, just before his entry into the battlefield, results in the losing of his self-confidence, leading to his death.
Bhasa proves beyond doubt that Karna lived only for fulfilling his duty as a warrior.

Karna, in his encounter with Bhishma proves beyond doubt that the first and foremost consideration in his life was his loyalty towards Duryodhana. His very words to Kunti, who reveals that she is his natural mother, testifies to this attitude of Karna: "The life that Suyodhana offered me - the glory he bestowed on me. Can Karna ever ignore this indebtedness? Now Suyodhana is making preparations for war relying on my strength disregarding learned counsels. This may be actually death. But from this plight, only an ungrateful coward can escape. How can the brave Karna make a retreat?" (And Now..., 105). Even while knowing that Kunti is being opportunistic, he consents to spare all the Pandavas except Arjuna by saying: "Mother, let not your mission become entirely futile. I can make one promise. Even if I get opportunity, I will never kill Yudhisthira, Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva. I wish you five sons for ever. If Arjuna dies, five sons including Karna. If Karna dies, five sons including Arjuna. You will have five sons to attend you for ever" (And Now..., 106). Even during this meeting with Kunti, Karna does not reveal his mental turmoil and wishes Yudhisthira good luck in the ensuing war. In the war, Karna abides by his words, and spares his brothers whom he had an opportunity to kill.

Irawati Karve in Yuganta analyses Karna’s action and launches severe criticism on his much-professed sense of loyalty towards Duryodhana. She accuses Karna of being carried away by a false notion of his own greatness. As a result of this ego, Karna gives away his kavaca-kundala which were his greatest strength. Karve opines that had he remembered his loyalty to Duryodhana, he would never have parted with them. The other occasion when he forgets his duty to Duryodhana and as the commander of the Kaurava army is when he spares Yudhishtira and his three brothers, to keep his word to Kunti. These two follies by Karna are entirely against the philosophy of his life and reveal his unsteadiness of character. But
P.K. Balakrishnan glories these two acts as exemplary examples of Karna's dana-shilata.

Draupadi, whose train of thought links the incidents in the story, is the character who is psychologically analyzed in the novel. Apart from helping the continuity of the sequence of narration, she is instrumental in conveying the general atmosphere of the novel – dejection and a sense of loss. She is seen suffering intensely from the very onset of the novel. Draupadi, who speaks about her past sufferings – both physical and mental, begs God to give her sound sleep, which she has not had for years. But that very night, she is cruelly woken up by the lamentations in the Pandava camp, as Aswathama sets fire to the tents in which the exhausted war heroes were sleeping. The realization that she has lost her sons and brothers is too much for her to bear; but the revelations that Karna is the real son of Kunti, proves to be more shocking than anything else.

Draupadi, suffering from an intense sense of guilt and disillusionment, realises the futility of war, and tries to make an assessment of her life. The author brings out the musings of a psychologically disturbed Draupadi: "She visualized her ruined dreams as ghosts standing in rows in front of her. Staring, frighteningly, they laughed at her.... Now all her desires eclipsed. Even the corpse of her wishes, loves and hates vanished. Her heart is now a vacuum" (And Now..., 58). The author thus presents a Draupadi, who is mentally tired, exhausted, devoid of any desires, witnessing the futile victory of the Pandavas.

Draupadi realizes that her urge for revenge has brought about nothing but destruction to the world. But she also remembers with a sense of loss that the war was not fought over her insult, but to preserve the Kshatriya-dharma of Yudhishthira. These thoughts of Draupadi are reflected in her musings: “Yudhishthira found only one reason for the all-devastating war... he wanted to win for himself the country that was his by right. In his mind.... The wrongs committed towards Draupadi were not the immediate
provocation” (*And Now...*, 60). She also realizes with grief that her husband Yudhishthira is grieved more over the death of his brother, Karna, than by the death of Draupadi’s sons.

The author projects Draupadi as an all-enduring person, who bears all the sorrows and discomforts that come her way, without any misgivings. She is a woman who had considered her duty towards her husbands as foremost in her life. She had toiled in the forest for many years, negating her womanhood, curtailing her emotions and desires. She had endured every sorrow for the sake of her husbands, including the insult by Duhsasana. The author writes: “She viewed all duties within the confines of a wife’s responsibilities. So she negated even her womanhood. She experienced mental gratification in simply nursing her husbands” (*And Now...*, 71). Draupadi is also projected as a woman who could not fulfill her duty towards her sons in trying to preserve the marital balance with her five husbands. Draupadi makes a comparison of her maternal love with that of Kunti’s and realizes that Kunti is a mother who had lived for her sons. But Draupadi had forgotten to love her children, and had lost herself in self-pity and thirst for vengeance. The author projects Draupadi as a perfect wife despite being married to five men simultaneously. She is disturbed by Krishna’s suggestion to Karna that he could share Draupadi along with the *Pandavas*, if he joined them as their elder brother and the foremost *Pandava*. Her sense of pride makes her ponder over the question, which haunts her mind “Are the lives of my husbands alms from Karna?” (*And Now...*, 145) referring to the incident in which Karna spares the lives of her husbands.

P.K. Balakrishnan analyses his characters in a psychological plane, so that the modern reader is able to comprehend the inner turmoil of the protagonists. While Karna’s actions are being analyzed retrospectively by Yudhishthira, Draupadi, Narada and Sanjaya, thereby affecting a character-study of the hero, Draupadi’s character is constantly engaged in soliloquies
that reveal her retrospections and introspections, giving an insight into her character. This inner analysis of Draupadi gives an insight of her as a woman, wife and mother.

Besides being a dutiful wife, Draupadi of the novel is also an understanding person. She fully supports Yudhisthira who is mentally shaken at Karna's death. Yudhishtira's sense of guilt is shared by Draupadi too, remembering how they had insulted Karna, not knowing his true identity. She also shares the mental agony of Kunti, who suffers both guilt and sorrow at the loss of her first born. Draupadi, here, is seen to lend a sympathetic ear to Kunti, who explains her circumstances and actions in rejecting Karna.

But above all, Draupadi is projected as a representative of trampled womanhood, whose pride goes unnoticed by her husbands. The author projects Draupadi as a nathavati-anathavat who, though the wife of five valorous husbands, had to live like an unprotected woman enduring the advances of innumerous men who were enamored by her beauty and also the insults heaped on her. She wonders whether she was really loved by her husbands, who gave more importance to 'dharma', far more above human relationships. The author projects this image of Draupadi, to establish that she is very much an ordinary woman, who considers human relationships more important than anything else. Moreover, looking from a modern context, where the value systems have undergone a change, the reader will be able to establish a mental rapport with the character, developing a sympathetic attitude towards him/her. Thus, while the epic projects the actions of the protagonists, the modern novel concentrates at analyzing the characters at a psychological level, where the inner thoughts and agonies of the characters are brought out effectively.

The characters of Yudhisthira and Kunti are also dealt with in a similar way. While Kunti is seen to be a victim of fate, she is also shown to be a woman who does not have the moral courage to reveal her relationship with
Karṇa. When she does so, she is driven by some selfish motives, which Karṇa exposes. Yudhisthira, un-deterring from the path of 'dharma' realizes with a sense of guilt and shock that he had gloated over the death of his own brother, the real heir to the throne of Hastinapura. But Narada's words expose this pseudo attitude of Yudhisthira: "...You who are the embodiment of humility is in effect doing a foolish act committed at the pinnacle of ignorance. Even while you are getting burned in the fire of sinful conscience, you are displaying egotism. Is there any act more idiotic than claiming the authorship of inconceivable and incredible deeds? Is there anything more ignorant?" (And Now..., 46). Yudhisthira is literally pushed into inaction due to the guilt he experiences. He even curses Kunti and women in general, in his height of sorrow. He is seen suffering from self-contempt as he holds himself responsible for fratricide and genocide leading to the widowhood of innumerous woman and girls. His self-contempt reaches its pinnacle when he realizes that Karna had spared him and his brothers, to preserve his word to Kunti.

**Sum-up**

The author of the novel succeeds in portraying the inner agony suffered by the protagonists at the end of the Kurushetra war. The novel depicting the hollowness reverberating in the minds of the widows that is pictured in the *Sauptika* and *Stri Parvas* of the epic, foregrounds the sorrow of the Pandavas on learning the true identity of Karṇa. Even Yudhisthira, who has the mental courage to face any situation (as proved in his encounter with the *Yakṣa*; described in the *Vana Parva*), becomes perturbed at Karṇa's death and contemplates embarking on vanaprastha. The portrayals of Yudhisthira, Karna and Draupadi in the novel conform to the epic originals. While the image of Draupadi generates sympathy, Karna's image evokes mixed emotions of pity and admiration.
The story of Yayati, the epic king who faces the unusual situation of the exchange of youth with his son, is retold in the modern tale of *Yayati: A Classic Tale of Lust*. The author of the novel V.S. Khandekar transforms the extraordinary legendary king Yayati to an ordinary mortal who is a slave to carnal pleasures. Khandekar builds the story on four prominent characters of the epic in his novel - Yayati, Devayani, Sharmishta and Kacha. The author establishes that the protagonists determine their fate through their actions.

Yayati, son of King Nahusha, is described in the epic original as an extraordinary king belonging to a noble lineage and is credited with valorous feats including his taking part in the battle between the *Devas* and *Asuras* where he fought alongside the *Devas*. Being of a virtuous nature, he is said to have performed various sacrifices and remained un-assailed by anyone, in battle. He incurs the wrath of the *Asura Guru* Sukracharya and suffers untimely decrepitude; through a strange play of Fate. Yayati exchanges his decrepitude for the youth of his son Puroo who gladly offers it, and this enables Yayati to not only rule his kingdom for long but also to live life to his heart’s content. At the conclusion of a thousand years Yayati realizes the futility of a life of pleasure, returns back the youth to his son and departs to the forest with his wives where he leads a virtuous life.

Yayati, the legendary king, who borrowed the youth of his son, is portrayed as a man in pursuit of happiness in Khandekar’s novel. But whatever he does to achieve his goal, happiness evades him like a mirage and leaves him discontented. This makes him blindly run in pursuit of new pleasures. The author explains that this plight is because he fails to decipher the difference between happiness and enjoyment.

Even as a child, Yayati is a fun-loving youngster, who has a spiritual bent of mind. But this spiritual side of his character is not allowed to develop by his parents who fear that he would follow the footsteps of his
brother Yati, who had renounced worldly pleasures for embracing asceticism. King Nahusha, his father aspires to make his son a mighty warrior and an able king. Yayati, thus grows up immersed in worldly pleasures, and learns to savour every sort of physical pleasure, for the sake of enjoyment.

Yayati yearning for attention holds a special love for his wet-mother Kalika, and a sisterly affection for her daughter Alaka. As an adolescent, he is confused by the strong feeling he has for Alaka but realizes that it is nothing other than brotherly affection. But his mother, who misunderstands his deep feelings for her, puts her to death, fearing that her son would get involved with an ordinary palace maid. This pains his mind very much and he gets aware of the cruel ways of the world. But instead of questioning the cruel act, he accepts the situation meekly. This feebleness of mind gathers intensity and is often exhibited in his later life. Disillusioned by life, he behaves in an equally cruel manner to innumerous women, enjoying their company and discarding them after use. This cruel streak in the personality was probably induced by his own mother, who did not value the lives of less privileged mortals. Yayati, thus learnt to regard others as instruments of pleasure and misutilized his authority as a king to elicit pleasure from every situation.

Married to Devayani, he could not preserve the fidelity in their relationship due to the inherent arrogance in her. Unable to cope up with her selfishness of Devayani, he turns his attention to Sharmishta, who is gentle and loving. Even while knowing that he would incur the wrath of Devayani and her father Sage Shukra, he gets involved with Sharmishta and tries to strike a balance by dividing his time between his legally wedded wife Devayani and his lover Sharmishta. Even the fact that Sage Shukra had warned him against having any sort of relationship with Sharmishta, he does not refrain from establishing a secret relationship with her.

Contrary to what has been said in the epic, in Khandekar's novel, it is Yayati, not Sharmishta, who opens the secret rendezvous between the two.
The King in the novel, guessing Sharmishta’s admiration and sympathy for him, approaches her in the guise of a Sage and reveals to her that Yayati would approach her as a lover. He speaks to her as if predicting her future: “I know that you are in love with Yayati. True love is always blessed by us. Sometime, Yayati will come to you – remember. He will come through that underground passage. He will call on you” (Yayati, 156). This is because he does not have enough courage to approach her openly and disclose his love for her. Instead, he resorts to a sort of emotional blackmailing which a maiden like Sharmishta could not resist. He wanted to ensure for himself that she would not reject his love. This incident shows that Yayati in both cowardly and selfish in love. He deftly hides his relationship with Sharmishta from Devayani for a very long time. Even though he showers love on both Sharmishta and Puroo, the son born of their union, he does not show the courage to openly accept them by bringing their relationship into limelight.

When Devayani, who comes to know of the secret, tries to kill Sharmishta and Puroo by locking them in a dark underground chamber, Yayati takes initiative to rescue her. But even then, he does not openly chastise Devayani, but secretly lets Sharmishta escape from the city. Yayati, though with much pain, deserts Sharmishta and her child, and leaves them in the hands of fate. This again brings to light his innate moral cowardice.

This setback in life is too much for him to bear and when Devayani too leaves him, he starts leading a licentious life, using innumerable girls for his personal pleasure. Yayati, here, proves to be a weak-minded person, who, instead of fighting his fate by standing upright and discharging his duties as a king, succumbs to worldly vices to forget his pain. He completely neglects his duties as a King, a husband and a father, and changes into an emotionally drained man. He vents his bitterness by immersing himself in carnal pleasure.

The curse of Sage Shukra also fails to inculcate a sense of responsibility in him. Instead of being penitent, he finds pleasure in seeking
to exchange his youth with his son. His love for carnal pleasure had reached such intensity that he does not even give a thought to the propriety in exchanging his son's youth with his decrepitude. The only goal in his life was to seek pleasure, and pleasure he would seek, at any cost. His moral deprivation reaches its pinnacle when he seeks pleasure from a girl resembling Alaka whom, he had once accepted as his sister.

Thus, Yayati is portrayed as a weak-minded man caught in the web of his own vices. He is unable to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong. Even Kacha's philosophy does not help Yayati to overcome his persistent craving for carnal pleasure. Nor do his responsibilities cause him to traverse in the right path of action. He proves himself to be a person totally prompted by his carnal cravings - a true representative of the pleasure-loving modern man.

Devayani, the only daughter of the Asura Guru Shukracharya and the royal spouse of King Yayati of the Kuru clan is one of the dominating characters in the novel, who controls the lives of Yayati and Sharmishta. But the tragic fact remains that she has no control over her own life, being spurned in love by Kacha, the son of Deva Guru Brihaspati. Throughout the novel she is portrayed as an embittered woman, disillusioned in love and rejected by her lover. Being the only daughter, Devayani, is presented to be naturally arrogant and selfish. In the words of Kacha: "Devayani is ... obstinate, short-tempered and an egotist" (Yayati, 101). Even as a child, she disliked being defeated in any competition. She looks upon Sharmishta, the daughter of the Asura King Vrishaparva, as her main contender. The sweet and gentle Sharmishta was always a thorn in the flesh for the egoistic, arrogant Devayani. She, an only child, being motherless, was given undue liberties by her father, which resulted in her being a spoilt child.

The greatest tragedy in her life was the rejection by Kacha, whom she loved with all her heart. Kacha who had come on a specific mission to gain the knowledge of Sanjivani from Shukracharya, had given love to Devayani
in abundance, but only as a brother would love a sister. Devayani, who feels that Kacha is indebted to her for saving his life, cannot digest the fact that he had spurned her love. She turns into an embittered woman. It is during this time that the quarrel between Devayani and Sharmishta occur. Devayani turns blind with anger on seeing Sharmishta wearing her sari, given to her by Kacha, as a gift. In the ensuing battle of words, both shower insulting words on each other and Sharmishta inadvertently pushes Devayani into a well, which was hidden from sight by shrubs and grass. Devayani makes use of this opportunity to enslave Sharmishta, for she knew that neither Sharmishta nor her father would dare to refuse Devayani’s wishes, fearing Shukracharya’s wrath. Devayani proves to be a great manipulator, as she traps Yayati into marrying her. She convinces him that by taking her right hand to rescue her from the well, he had as good as taken her hand in marriage. Yayati, enamored by her beauty, agrees to marry her. Devayani’s attitude is obvious from her words: “I wish that wily Kacha was also here to witness the revenge I had taken. Truly, how pleasing even revenge can be.” (Yayati, 93).

Throughout the novel, Devayani is projected as a woman who is egoistic, ambitious, spiteful and disappointed in love. Her ambitious nature prompts her to accept a husband from a lower caste than herself. By enslaving Sharmishta, she proves not only to be spiteful, but also to be cruel. Her innate cruelty is revealed when she traps Sharmishta in an underground cell, with the intention of killing her. The fact that she is disappointed in love is reflected throughout her life. She refuses to adjust to the ways of Yayati, who is a kshatriya, and behaves in a disrespectful manner to her husband. Even as a new bride, she has no qualms to fight with him and shouts at him. She deliberately makes the life of her husband unhappy and miserable, and literally drives him to a secret affair with Sharmishta. Being disappointed in love, and embittered, she refuses to give true and sincere love to her
husband. Devayani thus proves that she had married Yayati only for selfish motives, born out of ambition.

But at the end of the novel, there is a drastic change in the character of Devayani. Overwhelmed by the self-sacrifice of Puroo, her character undergoes a metamorphosis as she realizes her follies. Her repentant mind sheds of its arrogance and she adapts herself to accept the role of a loving wife and mother. Though her meekness comes as a surprise to the reader, it goes well with the happy ending of the love triangle.

Sharmishta, according to the author, is the representative of true love, which endures everything. She is ready to provide everything her husband needs – love, physical pleasure, respect and devotion – unlike Devayani. She wins the heart of Yayati, by her sweet and sincere ways. Sharmishta is no ordinary woman, because of the great sacrifice she does for her community. She willingly burdens herself with the ordeal of being a maid to Devayani, who hates her to the core. She accompanies Devayani to the palace in Hastinapura, knowing fully well that she will never have a marital life herself. Khandekar does not portray her as a woman who spreads her net around Yayati for her personal gain; but as a woman who is caught in the net of true devotional love for the only man in her life. She tries hard to fight her feelings for Yayati, because she does not want to commit the sin of adultery and deception. She suffers from an intense feeling of guilt when she gets involved with Yayati. But she exhibits courage by not disclosing the identity of his child’s father to Devayani.

It is very clear from the love Yayati has for Sharmishta, that she has been able to give him something much more than physical pleasure. Yayati is compelled to part with her, fearing the curse of Shukracharya, and is left completely disoriented when she leaves him. Thus, Sharmishta proves to be the guiding spirit of Yayati’s life. Even though she suffers much in exile, she is able to bring up her son Puroo as an accomplished young man, endowed with the ability of right thinking. Puroo proves to have inherited his mother’s
selflessness when he shows his readiness to part his youth for the sake of his father.

Kacha is the guiding force in the novel, whose philosophy of life influences all the three protagonists in the novel — Yayati, Devayani and Sharmishta. He is the manifestation of different kinds of love portrayed in the novel. Kacha proves his single-minded devotion to the mission of his life by returning to heaven, spurning the love of Devayani. He rejects her love, and the rejection is based on the logic that having entered Sage Shukracharya's stomach even though, for a short span of time, he is as good as her brother. He tries to convince Devayani about this, but fails to do so, because of her stubborn nature.

Kacha proves to be a true friend of Yayati and Sharmishta. He is able to provide mental support and spiritual solace to both of them. It is Kacha's advice, which guides Sharmishta through her problem-ridden life. He is the sole person, who sincerely helps her during the days of her exile. Kacha together with Yati, sustains the philosophical thread of the novel, and provides a contrast to the pleasure-loving king, with their lives rooted in penance and spiritual knowledge.

Sum-up:

Yayati, in the epic is weighed in contrast to Pitamah Bhishma who is the epitome of sacrifice. But finally he realizes his folly as he becomes conscious of the transience of worldly pleasures. V.S. Khandekar, while attempting to convey a moral through his novel, transforms Yayati the extraordinary king of the epic, into an ordinary human being. The characters in the novel suffer intensely like the unsatisfied human beings of the modern world. King Yayati, in the epic returns his son's youth after having fulfilled his life's duties and wishes. But in Kandekar's novel, a twist is introduced where Kacha, by his spiritual powers makes Puroo regain his youth while enabling Yayati to remain young. While the epic Yayati possesses a noble
mind, Yayati in the novel is the embodiment of moral turpitude. Yet, at the end of the novel, Yayati becomes a changed man and attains wisdom.

Devayani and Sharmista act as a foil to each other in the novel. While Devayani aggravates the evil in Yayati, Sharmista soothes his wounded soul and inspires love and benevolence in him. While in the epic, both women are subdued characters, Khandekar bestows them with strong characteristics. Kachha and Yati who do not come in contact with Yayati in the epic act as a spiritual force in bringing back Yayati to the path of righteousness.

VI

As discussed in the previous chapter, Shashi Tharoor's The Great Indian Novel is a subversion of the epic characters and narrative. Tharoor borrow(s the epic characters to fit in the image of the power crazy political leaders of independent India.

The narrator of the story Ved Vyas is depicted as a learned man, who like Krishna Dvalpayana Vyasa is a storyteller, a character as well as a detached spectator to the events of the story. V.V. is presented as a 'cantankerous old man' who does not stand the chance of getting a party ticket or even a ceremonial governor's post. He is just "a man who lives in the past, a dog who has his day" (The Great Indian Novel, 17). His scribe Ganapathi is a south Indian, with a big nose and shrewd intelligent eyes, to go with his elephantine tread and broad forehead.

Dhritarashtra, though blind, is fine looking, slim, of aquiline nose and aristocratic bearing. Having been educated at Eton, he turns into a fashionable young man of "formidable vocabulary and the vaguely abstracted manner of the over educated" (The Great Indian Novel, 41). He was not only a Bachelor of Arts, but also a great debater and a Fabian Socialist. Tharoor has modeled the character of Dhritarashtra on Jawaharlal Nehru.
Gangaji, who is also known as Bhishma, is the man who had sacrificed his life for his family and kingdom. He enters Indian politics and proves his to be an undaunted satyagrahi, bent on ousting the British Raj from India. He is presented as a small, balding man, scantily clad and drinking goat's milk. Though instrumental in India's gaining independence from the British, he is assassinated by Shikhandin. Tharoor strives to strike a parallel between Bhishma of the Mahabharata and Gandhiji.

Pandu the pale never lacked in strength or courage, but never had much of judgment. He was educated in India, unlike his brother Dhritarashtra and was expelled from one of the country's best colleges for striking a teacher, an English man, who had addressed Indians as dogs. Though married to two beautiful and accomplished young ladies Kunti and Madri, he is unable to enjoy nuptial bliss with either of them due to massive coronary thrombosis. He is described as the "absentee land lord of his wife's womb" (The Great Indian Novel, 87) and help Kunti in choosing the right 'genetic mix' for his sons. He dies a timely death subsequent to a physical union with his wife Madri.

Karna better known as Mohammed Ali Karna was born with an extraordinary golden skin, glowing like the Sun, and had a birthmark on his forehead, resembling a bright half moon. He is the natural son of Kunti and Hyperion Helios, a foreigner, and had been brought up by a Muslim chauffeur. Karna and arrogant and ambitious like the Karna of Mahabharata, and is a London trained Bombay lawyer who works for the cause of the Muslim population of India and is involved in Indian politics. Tharoor refers to him as 'the star of the inner temple' and 'the defender of the mosque'. He is the one who causes the partition of India and the founder of Pakistan.

Priya Duryodhani, the daughter of Dhritarashtra and Gandhahi, is said to be equal to a thousand sons. She is slight, frail girl, with a long thin tapering face with a serious look. Her dark, lustrous pair of eyes rendered her otherwise plain face, striking. Influenced by her father she embarked
into politics and proves herself a strategist in her move to bifurcate Karnātaka. She is also instrumental in defeating the Pandavas in the game of dice with the help of the lawyer from Bengal, Mr. Shakuni Shankar Dey and a pair of loaded dice.

The Pandavas represent the Indian citizen, wedded to Draupadi Mokrāśi (Democracy). They are not singled out, neither are their actions viewed individually. Yudhishtir is educated and wise, Bhim is strong and Arjun is a good warrior. Sri Krishna of the epic transforms to D. Krishna Parthasarathi, a local M.L.A. and secretary of the Kaurava party, who befriends the Pandavas.

Sum up

The characters in Shashi Tharoor’s novel are not fully developed characters; but are caricatures modelled on certain leaders in Indian Politics in the Post-Independence scenario. Tharoor only uses the epic characters as a medium to convey the sarcastic portrayal of the Indian leaders. He uses humour, sarcasm and hyperbole to direct scathing criticism at the leaders.

Conclusion:

In the epic, the narrators present the characters before the listeners/readers reproducing their speech and reporting their actions. The soliloquies, monologues or musings, which are the usual literary techniques that facilitate a psychological analysis of the character, are absent in the epic. Modern retellings effectively employ these devices as a means to arrive at their desired objective of psychological delineation of characters. The epic characters could be understood only from these speeches and from their actions that are discussed by the narrators.

But, in the novels, the authors endeavour to fathom the minds of the characters. They present the characters as ordinary human beings. The characters in the novels speak out their mind exposing their happiness,
anger, sorrow and guilt thereby making it easy for the readers to understand them better. The readers are able to establish a rapport with the suffering Draupadi and Kunti, the arrogant, yet affectionate Karna, and the spirited Bhima.

While in the *Mahabharata* all the characters are of equal importance, the modern reteller isolates a particular character from other characters. The isolated character forms the nucleus of the retelling. Thus, the novel becomes the story of an individual, which the *Mahabharata* is not. The concept of individual uniqueness is foregrounded by the novelists and individual actions are justified on the basis of the individuality of character.

Shashi Tharoor's novel is an exception to this trend, as the characters are not what they are in the epic, but are caricatures of modern Indian politicians, who are known figures to Indian citizens. Shashi Tharoor projects the oddities of these political leaders and at the same time make them vaguely resemble the epic characters.