CHAPTER IV

CHALLENGING THE ARCHETYPES : BHYRAPP'A'S PARVA

S.L.Bhyrappa's Parva is a fictional rendering of the Mahabharata from the twentieth century perspective. In "Mahabharata My attempt at recreation' the novelist says that he wants to understand the epic with his twentieth century mind (Dandekar 264). The twentieth century perspective is suggestive of a gamut of changes in the social, cultural, political and intellectual spheres of life. The rapid strides of progress in western science and technology have made man question the irrationalities of myth and religion. Feminism as a strong socio-political movement has brought about a number of changes in the developed countries and has not been without an effect in the developing countries. Social reawakening leads to the need for establishing gender justice and equality between the sexes. Several writers reassess the earlier works in view of the growing awareness about the status of women. The contemporary writers too cannot ignore the social realities of the times.

Bhyrappa affirms that he decided to see the whole material of the Mahabharata through the form of a novel (Dandekar265) But irrespective of cultural and linguistic limitations, the novel, viewed as a fictional creation, gives infinite scope for the free play of the artist's imagination.

In Parva Bhyrappa combines several strategies in fictionalising the epic. The process includes recasting of select events, reinterpretation of some characters, demythologisation and distortion of myths resulting in startling
deviations from the epic of Vyasa. The novelist demythologises events such as the birth of Karna, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the disrobing of Draupadi and the killing of Kamsa. The major characters of the epic such as Bhishma, Yudhishthir, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi are reinterpreted from an entirely new perspective. The fictional recasting of events and characters has to be carefully examined in the light of Vyasa’s epic to explore the significance of deviations.

M.N. Dutt's translation of the *Mahabharata* in seven volumes has been used as the basic text for all references to study the deviations made in *Parva*. The transliterated verses from the Sanskrit text of Vyasa, based on *Srinman Mahabharata* by Nag Publishers, Delhi, are given separately wherever necessary. (Problems related to authenticity of the text have been dealt with in Chapter I)

In Bhyrappa's novel, there is a different account of the birth of Karna. He makes Karna the son of Pritha (Kunti) and sage Durvasa. When Kunti was young she was given to her father's friend Kunti Bhoj in adoption. The sage Durvasa paid frequent visits to Kunti Bhoj. Kunti had to attend to his needs and comforts. Her service to the sage brought about an intimacy between the two. This resulted in the birth of Karna. Fearing disgrace Kunti gave away the child to Radha, her mother's friend (67). This account is different from that of Vyasa in the Adi Parva CXI.7-11 Durvasa is said to have anticipated her future predicament and taught her a mantra to invoke the celestials of her choice to get children: "Through the effulgence of those celestials whom you will invoke by this mantra, offspring will be certainly begotten on you" (Dutt 161) Later
Kunti is said to have invoked the Sun-God to realize the power of the mantra, "That illuminator of the Universe Tapana (Sun) received her embraces. Thereupon was born a hero known all over the world by the name of Karna" (Ibid).

Later in life, after her marriage, he uses the same mantra to beget sons for Pandu who has lost his procreating powers. The Adi Parva chapter CXXIII 2-5 contains the accounts of the birth of the Pandavas.

That lady (Kunti) offered adoration to Dharma and repeated in the proper form the Mantra formerly given to her by Durvasa.

The deity Dharma, being overpowered by the Mantra came on his car resplendent as the Sun to the place where Kunti was seated.

She was united with Dharma in his Yoga (Spiritual) form and that beautiful lady obtained a son devoted to the good of all creatures (Dutt 1 : 175).

In Vyasa’s epic Pandu entreats Kunti to invoke Dharma (Yama) to beget a son who will lead the Kuru race along the right path at all times.

Āhvayāmasa vai kuntu garbhārthē dhamam – acyutam//

[Kunti invoked the god Dharma for the sake of conception]

After the birth of the first son who was named Yudhishthir, Pandu wanted a second son who would be endowed with extraordinary strength.

Tatas – tathōktvā bhartrā tu vayum evājuhava sā

[Having been told thus by her husband (she) Kunti invoked the god of the wind]
The second son was named Bhima. Then Pandu thought they must have a warrior-son whose prowess at arms should be unmatched. After a year's penance Kunti prayed to Indra, the chief of Gods for a son of heroic glory.

\[\text{Putram tava pradāsyāmi, trīśu-lōkesu viśrutam/} \ (123 \ 22-23)\]

[Indra told Kunti, “I will give you a son who will be renowned in the three worlds.”]

In Parva, Dharma, Vayu and Indra are not celestial beings but eminent men of the hill tribes called “devas.” Going by the evidence of the practice of polyandry in the Himalayan regions and the story of the Pandavas growing up in these regions in their early age (Adi Parva 126) the novelist has probably chosen to portray the gods as hill tribes called “devas.”

The birth of Kauravas is yet another event in the novel that has been recast by Bhyrappa. He dispenses with the myth of Gandhari’s hundred sons springing up from a hundred pots. Through the recollections of Gandhari it is reported that Gandhari gave birth to only fourteen sons. She says, “The count of hundred is to the Maharaja’s credit. This is his count. But the sons borne by this servant maid with the name Gandhari were only fourteen (812).

The event has been revisioned by Bhyrappa by demythologising the account found in Vyasa’s epic. In the original epic it is reported that when Kunti gives birth to a son, Yudhishthir, the question of dynastic succession causes concern to Gandhari. Though she has conceived there is inordinate delay in delivering the child. Gandhari certainly, not above jealousy, pounds her abdomen in a fit of anger. The inert fetus has to be cut up and stored as advised by Vyasa. In the Adi Parva CXV 9-20 the account of the birth of the Kauravas is given:
She bore the burden in her womb for two years without being delivered; she was therefore much afflicted with grief.

[...] She struck her womb with violence without the knowledge of Dhritarashtra.

(Vyasa) let one hundred jars filled with Ghee be brought in the proper way; let them be placed at a concealed place and let cool water be sprink’ed on this ball of flesh.

O King that ball of flesh in time became gradually one hundred and one separate parts (Dutt 1·165)

Gṛtta – pumāṁ kundaśatam ksīpramēva vidhīyatam!
Sugupteṣu ca dēśēṣu rakṣā caiua vidhīyatam
Śītābhīr adbhir asṭhiśīlam imām ca pari śincayai(110 18-19)

[Order a hundred ghee-filled ports to be brought. Keep them in a secret place, protect them and sprinkle cool water on these pieces.]

In all these instances Bhyrappa has rejected the ancient myths and views them in terms of human experience. But the novelist says that this was absolutely necessary as his rendering of the epic was to limit it to a strict human possibility. He says:

In the context of the Mahabharata we must understand that myths were intended to explain the incidents which were not acceptable to the changed mores [...] After several centuries they invented myths to explain the Kaninaputra and the Niyoga of Kuntī. There is no moral damage to our moral fibre if we frankly accept the mores of our early ancestors as history. (Dandekar 264)
This fictional strategy of demythicising can be viewed as the influence of western skepticism that rejects the superhuman achievements of the ancient Indians. But westerners like Paul Brunton and David Frawley acknowledge the powers of the sages and yogies of India, with awe and amazement. By chanting mantras ancient sages have been able to work wonders, such as bringing on the rain, parting and diverting the course of rivers, curing certain illnesses and controlling wild animals. But Bhrappas's desire to limit the epic to human possibility sets aside the question of biased approach in viewing the ancient myths.

But myths cannot be totally rejected as untrue. In the myth of a foetus being preserved in a hundred pots one finds, indeed, a disconcerting similarity to test-tube babies and cloning of humans. Probably the ancients had their own system of medicines with scientific validity.

M.M. Thakur in *Thus Spake Bhiṣma* gives almost a similar account of the birth of the Kauravas. Sakuni is said to have impressed upon Dhritarashtra that the "only way to power was through securing a superiority in numbers in the house", Sakuni's project resulted in the "influx of young Gandharis from distant Gandhara not less than a score of young maids[1], The maidens were all brought into the Palace in strict secrecy and were kept in confinement all through the winter" (49). At the appropriate time the news of the birth of the hundred "Kauravas" was duly announced. Thakur views the event as a political necessity which later became "the legend of the Hundred Births" (Ibid)
Closely linked with the issue of Kunti begetting children through ‘Niyoga’ is the issue of dynastic succession. The conflict between Pandavas and Kauravas in the novel arises out of Duryodhana’s rejection of the right of inheritance of the Pandavas. Duryodhana is unwilling to give the Pandavas their share of the kingdom as they are not, genuinely, the sons of Pandu but only the sons of Kunti. Bhyrappa has depicted the Niyogee fathers of the Pandavas as hill tribes. On account of this lineage Duryodhana denies them the right to ascend the throne.

It may be argued that the hill tribes called ‘devas’ are the fictional creation of the novelist. Yet, the question of legitimacy of succession remains unsolved, as Kunti has violated the norms of the Niyoga practice. According to the accepted norms of the society the woman can beget sons at the behest of her husband through ascetic brahmans or her husband’s younger brothers. This is not so in the case of Kunti: “Yet one thorny issue arises out of this. If there had to be Niyoga why go all the way to the far off Himalayas? Why instead of getting done through upright Brahmans or husband’s brothers, did she have it done through outsiders that too, barbarians from the mountains”. (408)

The genuineness of Pandavas’ Kuru lineage figures as an issue not only in Parva but also in M.T.Vasudevan Nair’s Second Turn. Duryodhana tells Bhima in a tone of mockery that stories were made up about their births. ‘In order to hide the identity of the Father, the children were conveniently conceived in the forests. The poor people would believe anything said by the sages. But do you have to repeat that to me, wolf boy?’ (33)
Duryodhana's contention in Parva is that Kunti has violated the norms of the institution of Niyoga. The conditions laid down for the practice of Niyoga are true to the epic of Vyasa. In the Adi Parva CXX 15-41 there is a reference to the custom of Niyoga. "O greatly fortunate lady like her you too at my command raise offspring by some Brahmana who is superior to me in ascetic merits" (Dutt 1: 172)

When Kunti expresses her unwillingness to beget children through anyone other than her husband, Pandu explains to her that it is an accepted custom. "At the time of emergency (failure of offspring) men raise up sons by their accomplished younger brothers" (Dutt 1:171).

In the case of Kunti it is neither Dhritarashtra nor Vidura, who have fathered the Pandavas. The novelist's depiction of gods as hill tribes is in keeping with his intention of dispensing with myths and miracles. He makes an attempt to fit the incidents of the epic into rational structures and inevitably he has to refrain from investing any character with divinity. Whether they are the hill tribes or gods is less important than the corollary of the issue regarding the legitimacy of succession. Viewed from the twentieth century perspective the question acquires great relevance. There are several legal disputes regarding the rights of inheritance of children raised by artificial insemination or by surrogate mothers. The ancients have arrived at amicable solutions to these contentious issues by prescribing codes of conduct for 'Niyoga' as well as succession. Bhyrappa's rejection of myths serves, on the contrary to assert the wisdom of the ancients.
Bhyrappa has recast the episode of Draupadi's disrobing to dispense with divine intervention. The episode of disrobing in the novel is true to Vyasa's epic: "Dussasana was not the one to miss the chance. He came close to me and got hold of my saree's edge. He started to pull it off" (219) This episode occurs in the Dyuta Parva 67.40 of Vyasa's text

\[Tatō duśśāsanō rajan draupadyā vasanām balāū//
Sabhā madhyē samakṣi pya vyapakṛṣṭum pracakramē//\]

(O King! Then Dussasana placing Draupadi in the middle of the assembly (Sabha) began forcefully to pull her robe.)

But there are no miracles in Parva. Draupadi's honour in the Kuru Sabha is not saved by the miraculous powers of Krishna, but by human intervention. It is Dhritarashtra's fear of Karmic consequences of humiliating a woman to extremity that made him grant her three boons.

In Vyasa's text, Dyuta Parva LXVIII 4-48 contains the account of the miracle of protection to Draupadi during Duhshasana's disrobing her.

"When Yajnaseni (Draupadi) was crying for protection to Krishna, Vishnu, Hari and Hara the illustrious Dharma remaining unseen covered her with many excellent clothes. O Lord, in consequence of the protection (extended towards Draupadi) by Dharma, hundreds of cloths of many colour appeared". (Dutt 1:411)
In the novel Krishna is apologetic to Draupadi and Yudhishthir for his absence at the time of the game of dice. It is said that he was in Dwaraka

I had planned to leave forthwith but at that time Salva was trying to invade Dwaraka. He had with him a massive army. But by the time I managed to collect my people, defeat and slay Salva and made sure that no further threat came from his side, it was too late and you had lost everything in the game of dice (213)

There is sufficient evidence in the Vana Parva Ch XIII to support this view. Krishna tells Yudhishthir, "Having reached Dwaraka, O foremost of Kurus, O son of Pandu, I heard all about your misfortune from Yuyudhana" (Dutt 2:24)

Earlier in the beginning of the chapter he says "O King, of the earth, had I not been then present at Dwaraka, O King this misfortune would not have overtaken you". (Dutt 2:23)

Bhyrappa denies divinity to Krishna and portrays him as a member of the Yadava community. Irawati Karve is of the same opinion. She says that the Krishna of the epic is a different character.

The Krishna shown in the Mahabharata has no resemblance at all to the flute-playing lover of milk maids, the divine child or the miracle worker of later tradition. The Krishna in the Mahabharata is definitely not a god, as depicted in later literature. He was, however, an extraordinary man, and his great personal ambition was to be called ‘Vasudeva’ (167-168)
According to Karve, 'Vasudeva' meant a position approaching divinity. If Krishna is not divinity then it follows that the Gita is not a sacred text. In Parva there is an indirect dismissal of the sacred text, Gita, by alluding to Krishna’s advice to Arjuna as a kind of indoctrination. In the novel, when Arjuna raised the question of dharma (morality) in fighting one’s own kin and his fear of decimating Kshatriya males which could create confusion of castes and communities, Krishna tried to bring him round. “Then he took hold of Arjuna and pulled him away to his tent. The whole day, that is, after-noon, evening and night, he talked to Arjuna and indoctrinated him. By yesterday morning it seems he succeeded in restoring Arjuna’s mind to its original position”(627)

Myths are inseparable from religious beliefs. Hinduism believes in the theory of rebirth. Bhyrappa is skeptical about such beliefs, and this is expressed through Bhishma’s reminiscences.

All this business of re-birth, is this true? I am sometimes gnawed by doubt. Well, this morning, those two were arguing against such beliefs. They were saying that, whatever cannot be tested by the senses is pure imagination, pure illusion. May be those two are right. A eunuch was born to Drupada. But then such children are born to many! May be my enemies, intent on destroying me because I have been the back-bone of the Kuru-Kingdom, have mixed up legend and fact so that the eunuch may be triggered to kill me. (615)
Interpretations, generally rise out of ideological conceptions. The ideology behind the rejection of myths seems to be rationalism. Myths and miracles are rooted in the beliefs of the community. Lewis Spence in *Introduction to Mythology* says, "The study of myths is assisted by comparative religion, while myths in their turn often explain gods, men and the universe, and customs and organisations of society." (14)

Bhyrappa's fictional strategy of demythologising the ancient myths is similar to the deconstructive practice of the poststructuralists. The novelist reverses the binary opposition of the sacred and the secular. A secular vision of the epic necessitates the marginalisation of the sacred. But Bhyrappa does not totally succeed in destroying the myths. In the process of rejecting the ancient myths he has created new myths. For instance, examining the cause for the cruelty of Kamsa, Bhyrappa consciously or unconsciously creates a myth about his birth. Kamsa is said to be the son of a Rakshasa. This is narrated through the reflections of Chithra, a companion of Kamsa's mother (332). It is said that Kamsas' mother once lost her way while chasing a deer and reached a secluded part of a forest. There came a Rakshasa, by name Drumila. Drumila is said to be the son of a Rakshasa mother and an Aryan father. Drumila appeared before Kamsa's mother in the garb of her husband, Ugrasena. She mistook him for her husband and out of their union was born Kamsa. This mythical account finds no basis in the text of Vyasa.
In Parva Narakasura is portrayed as a highway robber, who is outwitted by Krishna’s courage and intelligence:

Narakasura was a highway robber. Because of him Dwaraka had become so insecure that no outsider could arrive there without the support of a sufficient number of body-guards[...]

If at this time, Krishna’s courage, endurance and cleverness had not come to our aid, it would have been impossible to hunt him and his band (366)

The creation of new myths testify to the fact that myths form an integral part of creative process. According to Lewis Spence, “they are mostly explanations of intellectual difficulties, answers to such questions as, what is the origin of or reason for this or that phenomenon or custom? How came the world and man to be formed as they are?” (21)

To portray Krishna as a courageous diplomat is intellectually convincing. Tharoor also portrays him as an intellectual. Krishna marrying the women rescued from the tyranny of Narakasura is also given a similar explanation. Though the novelist does refer to the mockery and derision with which this act was viewed, he later offers an insight into the true motive behind it. One of the women remarks, “but for Krishna these women would have drowned in the sea out of despair (367). Pratibha Ray has also viewed this act of Krishna as an act of social rehabilitation of women.
Bhyrappa has reinterpreted some of the major characters of the epic from a non-traditional perspective. The novelist observes some contradictions in the delineation of major characters such as Bhishma and Yudhishthir. The novelist says, "In the *Mahabharata* the actions of the characters and the opinion on them of their author Vyasa do not always support each other" (Dandekar 258). Contrary to the traditional opinion, Bhyrappa finds Yudhishthir and Bhishma weak characters. According to him, Yudhishthir has been idealised in the epic as the epitome of Dharma; but when analysed in the light of his actions he is found to be a weak character, mean and selfish at times. He says, "Apart from being the Jyestha which was due to the accident of birth, he has no achievements either in war or in management or in solving a crisis" (Dandekar 258).

Bhyrappa accuses him of irresponsibility: "He gambles away the whole of the kingdom earned and developed by his brother's sweat and Krishna's guidance. When it was given back to him by Dhritarashtra's boons to Draupadi, he again gambles it away and makes his wife and brothers go to forest for twelve years and lead life incognito in the forest for another year" (Dandekar 258).

His lack of self-control and failure to rectify the situation from his own experience hardly justify the reverence with which he has been glorified as 'Dharmaraja'. Such views of Bhyrappa on the character of Yudhishthir are similar to the views expressed by Irawati Karve in *Yuganta*. The question of influence exerted by the earlier work on later writers cannot be ruled out.
According to Karve, Dharma could hardly be called a man of action a role demanded by his right to the kingdom.

Whatever he got was through the valour of others. His beautiful wife, his powerful father-in-law he owed to Arjuna. For protection in both exiles he was indebted to Bhima. Indraprastha and the incomparable Mayasabha were secured by Arjuna and Krishna. The war itself was won through the valour of his brothers and the statesmanship of Krishna. To add to Dharma's humiliation, he had to plead with Arjuna and threaten to renounce the kingdom altogether if Arjuna did not fight (73).

Karve wonders if he thought it a manly deed to throw to the winds all that others had won for him. Bhyrappas' inferences are that Vyasa or those who contributed to the growth of the Mahabharata idealised Dharmaraja a little too much. He was learned in the traditions and customs of the community and he followed them meticulously. And the myth that he was the offspring of the spiritual element of Yamadharma made the religious-minded people view him with moral awe and their analytical sense was choked (Dandekar 258). The novelist concludes that he is hardly a strong character with integrity.

It can be argued in defence of Yudhishthir that he followed the concept of Sacivayatta or the kind of kingship in which the king acts on the advice of the ministers. This is different from Svayatta type of kingship in which the king
chooses to act on his own. Probably the concept of Sabha, the role of the ministers and the allocation of responsibilities to the King's deputies - all have to be taken into consideration before making a reassessment of Yudhishthir's character. But the fact that besides Bhyrappa, others writers too, have expressed similar views cannot be ignored.

Krishna Chaitanya cites an instance of Yudhishtir's unethical behaviour. He says that Yudhishthir found Karna formidable and far superior to Arjuna as a Bowman. It is this dread that drives this moralist to the thoroughly immoral intrigue with Salya on the eve of the war to sap Karna's morale. Chaitanya adds that "Yudhishthir's intrigue with Salya, is totally immoral and his rejoicing with all his brothers when Indra obtained Karna's armour and earrings show that he is no angel[...]. When self-interest is involved Yudhishthir can be mean like most of us (135).

T S Rukmani in "Moral Dilemmas in the Mahabharata" remarks that Dharmaputra was guilty of an immoral act when he uttered loudly within the hearing of Drona, "Asvatthama is dead" and added softly whether the man or the elephant (Matilal 21).

Krishna Chaitanya finds many ambiguities in Yudhishthir's behaviour at the time of disrobing of Draupadi. He says that when Draupadi and Bhima assail Yudhishthir with many arguments during the exile, Yudhishthir accepts their accusations as merited. For he now confesses that he had accepted the invitation out of the greedy hope that he would be able to win all the wealth and
lands of Duryodhana and appropriate them for himself. In the Vana Parva XXXIV-3 Yudhishthira says, “I was engaged to play at dice with the desire of snatching from Dhritarashtra’s son his kingdom with its sovereignty” (Dutt 2:52)

When Keechaka humiliates Draupadi, she bitterly blames the gambler’s greed of Yudhishthira which has brought all the suffering upon her. In the Virata Parva XVIII-10 Draupadi says, “You should pass censure on your eldest brother who is sorely addicted to the despicable game of dice, through whose act alone I have received this endless woe” (Dutt 2:475) Yet another instance that casts a shadow on Yudhishthir’s integrity is cited by Krishna Chaitanya. During the battle he made an offer to Duryodhana that the latter could choose any one of the Pandavas as his adversary and if he won he would be regarded as the victor in the war though he had already lost it.

Chaitanya says that this offer has the look of a gambler’s ostentatiously reckless challenge.

All the demands of his integrity could have been met if he had suggested that Duryodhana should fight Bhima with the final victory in the war as the stake. In making the ostentatiously generous offer Yudhishthir does not seem to have given a second’s thought to what would have happened if Duryodhana had chosen Nakula or Sahadeva as his adversary. And because of the flawed motives here, he deserves the very sharp upbraiding he gets from Krishna for this indiscretion (140)
The twentieth century perspective of the character does not give credence to the reverence with which Yudhishthir has been traditionally viewed

Bhishma is another important character of the epic, found to be flawed. The terrible vow he made and his life-long sacrifice do not in the least exonerate him from his unjust treatment of women. Gandhari in Parva makes a taunting remark on Bhishma. While referring to Dhritarashtra's praise of Bhishma's prowess, She says, "of course I have heard that tale of your uncle's habit of interfering in other people's affairs and mismanaging them" (659)

Bhyrappa accuses him of being unfair to Amba, Kunti, Gandhari and Draupadi. Bhishma has ruined the chances of Amba's marriage to Salva by carrying her off as a bride for his half-brother. Amba had to immolate herself when she was rejected by both Salva and Bhishma. Amba's grief is referred to in the Udyoga Parva of Vyasa's epic.

Amba seeks the help of Rama (Parasurama) to avenge the wrong done to her by Bhishma. She says in the Udyoga Parva - CLXXVIII -38, "The root of this distress of mine is Bhishma of great vows, since by him was I brought under suspicion taking me up by force" (Dutt 3:244) In the same Parva CLXXIX-18 there is a reference to Amba's self immolation

And making a large funeral pyre and having set fire (to it), O monarch, with a mind burning with wrath, even in that flaming fire

The eldest daughter of the King of Kashi,

O King, entered the fire on the banks of the river Yamuna.

(Dutt 3.258)
In the novel, Bhishma's musings reveal the fact that he felt uncomfortable about Amba's misery. "But I sent back Amba immediately to King Salva. Was I wrong? Did Salva reject her because it would damage his honour and reputation if he now accepted as gift a bride whom he had failed to win through his prowess and valour? (614).

Bhyrappa's strategy of probing the inner consciousness of the characters through self-introspection, reflections, reminiscences and memories is quite effective in reinterpreting the characters. He makes Bhishma reflect on his own life as one of failure. "He was not so much concerned with the questions of Pandava's defeat or victory, or the survival of mankind itself, in view of the massive armies involved, as the question of whether his whole life has been a total failure in terms of his own ideals" (497)

Bhyrappa holds Bhishma responsible for forcibly arranging the marriages of not only Ambalika and Ambika but also of Kunti, Madri and Gandhari to the Kuru princes who were all either sick or blind or impotent. He was a mute witness to the disrobing of Draupadi. Even his singular aim of propping up the Kuru dynasty was not fulfilled as the kingdom was reduced to smithereens by war, death and disintegration.

The views of Bhyrappa are strengthened by similar opinions of other writers. The women characters who are marginalised in the epic are made to occupy the centre of focus by the contemporary writers. Shashi Deshpande's short story, "The Inner Room" poignantly portrays the agony of Amba who was
rejected by both Salva and Bhishma. Amba is depicted as the victim of patriarchal authority. "She was to be disregarded, ignored, her will, her determination had to be set aside as nothing because she was only a woman" (Lal 1:374).

The Bhishma of the epic represents the patriarchal authority. Writers with a feminist perspective denounce his callousness to the sufferings of women particularly to Amba. Bhishma rejected her in order to keep up his vow of celibancy. But, even the genuineness of Bhishma's sacrifice is viewed in skeptical terms by Shashi Deshpande:

Suddenly Bhishma's "great" act of renunciation appeared to her in its true colours. Of course, she thought, that is how it is. By renouncing his right to the throne and to have children of his own so that his father Shantanu could marry that fisherman's daughter, Satyavati, Bhishma let go the shadow and grasped at the substance. He gained power over all of them, his father, his stepmother and their two sons. Power drunk he had become arrogant, uncaring of how he sacrificed others (Lal 1:373).

Similar views have been expressed by M.M Thakur, Irawati Karve and M.T.Vasudevan Nair. Thakur's Thus Spake Bhishma is a fictionalised autobiography of Bhishma in which he is said to disavow his heroic role, seeing his whole life as a series of acts of his ego. Looking back in remorse Bhishma says, "After Amba was refused by Salva, she undertook a course which finally
turned her into the instrument of my eventual fall in Kurukshetra. Considering what my action or lack of it did to her life, what Sikhandi did to me was perfectly just” (30).

Irawati Karve remarks that the injustices done by idealists, patriots, saints and crusaders are far greater than those done by the worst tyrants “Had Bhishma too become intoxicated by his own public image?” (77).

Karve suggests that Bhishma was blinded by the very splendour of his renunciation. His concept of dharma reveals only his commitment to the vow of celibacy and lacks far-sighted thinking.

Bhyrappa’s portrayal of Yudhishthir and Bhishma is an attempt to reinterpret Vyasa. He finds some discrepancy between the author’s intent and execution in relation to the portrayal of these characters. According to the novelist, the actions of the characters hardly merit any attempt to deify them. Bhyrappa’s handling of these two idealised characters of the epic goes beyond the traditional parameters of assessment. Bhyrappa’s perspective causes a rupture with the tradition, which is what the poststructuralists identify as the core of deconstructive practice. The novelist has attempted a conscious reworking of the past in the light of present socio-political norms. It also reflects the growing awareness of the reader of the epic to develop an unbiased approach in the assessment of the characters by acknowledging their imperfections. The reader of the epic today is not blindly venerating any of the characters who, according to him, are very human. It has often been remarked that the Ramayana deals with the ideal whereas the Mahabharata is a record of human weaknesses.
Irawati Karve remarks, "In fact the whole Ramayana is filled with idealized characters. The ideal brother, the ideal servant, ideal subjects, even ideal villains. It is not that the Mahabharata has no extraordinary characters. But even while depicting the extraordinary person the poet does not let us forget the ordinary in him" (80).

Probably Vyasa also knows that they are 'ordinary' given to weaknesses but draws them as men who had ideals and believed in some standards of dharma as against men who lack any ideal.

There is greater awakening in the society in the recent decades regarding women's rights. Earlier works are examined in the light of rising protests against oppression of women. Bhyrappa seems to evince greater interest in the principles of gender justice and equality. A study of the portrayal of woman characters of the epic by the novelist reveals his determination to focus on the marital unhappiness, disappointments and sufferings of major women characters such as Kunthi, Gandhari and Draupadi.

A close examination of the self-reflections and interior monologues of these characters shows that the author has a very humanistic conception of these women characters contrary to traditional image. Bhyrappa's reinterpretation of these characters highlights the marital unhappiness of these woman characters in the epic, which has been glossed over so long by attempts to idealise them as archetypes.

Kunti has been idealised as a firm-minded mother who lived to see her sons united in prosperity and adversity. But according to Bhyrappa's novel,
Kunthi's life as a wife has been sadly ignored in all the earlier versions of the epic. The novelist uses "the stream of consciousness" technique to reassess the character. A study of the flow of thoughts from Kunthi's mind, as imagined by Bhyrappa reveals that she does not belong to the tradition of women who worship their husbands. Traditional view of Indian woman lays great emphasis on a faithful and uncomplaining wife. The ideal wife is a 'pativrata' devoted to her husband willing to undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations for the sake of loyalty to her husband. It is a value dearly cherished by ancient Indian women, in the following of which they achieved great satisfaction. It can be compared to the individual freedom and personal satisfaction experienced by modern women by pursuing a career.

Bhyrappa has shattered the image of a 'pativrata' by portraying Kunti and Gandhari from the humanistic perspective, as emphatically stated by him in the novel Kunti is depicted as a woman born to endure only sorrow. "What did I get out of life except cruel persecution and stark misery?" (47). Bhyrappa's portrayal of Kunti seems to bear influences of Irwati Karve's study of the character. "Her own father gave her away to a friend. One life-long sorrow was born of this action. Her adoptive father gave her in marriage to an impotent man; and all the rest of her sorrows were a result of this union" (45)

In the novel Kunti has nothing but contempt for her impotent husband. She is repulsed by the very sight of Pandu (52). But Pandu living in a patriarchal society demands an impossible degree of devotion from her by citing
Gandhari as a model to be emulated. Little does he realise what was in the mind of Gandhari. In compliance with Pandu's wishes she undergoes "Niyoga" three times to beget sons for Pandu. But Kunti is not free from any of the human weaknesses such as ego, jealousy and prejudice. She does not want Madri to have children outnumbering hers. "The fact that Madri bore twins made me jealous of her. I became alert to future possibilities." (97) This aspect of Kunti's character is true to the original. In Vyasa, Pandu requests Kunti to teach the Mantra again to Madri even after she gets twins. But Kunti is firmly against such a proposal. In the Adi Parva CXXIV the dialogue between Kunti and Pandu bears out the evidence.

In private, when the faithful Pritha replied to him thus, "Having given her the Mantra only for once, she has got two sons. I have been deceived by her.
I fear she will surpass me in the number of her children. This is the way of all wicked women" (Dutt 1178).

Irawati Karve, commenting on Kunti's fear of Madri establishing her superiority over her says that such rivalry and intrigues among co-wives in Kshatriya households is an important part of Indian history. She says, "To have more sons than the co-wives was also a means of securing, if not the love of a husband, at least the position of the chief queen" (49)

Kunti, in comparison with Madri, appears to be less loyal and devoted to Pandu. On the contrary, Madri is more devoted to Pandu and commits 'Sati' at
his death because she thinks that she is indirectly responsible for his death. This act of hers elevates her to the level of a conscientious spouse, if not a worshipper of husband.

In Parva Kunti is seen as a prejudiced woman in her relationship with her daughter-in-law. She has nothing but contempt for the Rakshasa wife of Bhima, but she is very fond of Draupadi. Bhima is puzzled by his mother's advice to him to leave Hidimbe in the forest and return to the Aryan land. He recalls with anguish that his "mother was unfair and even deceitful in giving her a name" (137). Kunti gives her an Aryan name Salakatankati. A change of name will affect one's identity. Bhyrappa seems to depict the relationship from the point of view of racial differences. The Aryan-non Aryan conflict has been emphasised in the novel by Bhyrappa. But recent historical studies point out that Aryan invasion itself is a myth, as Aryans are said to be the indigenous cultural groups in India. David Frawley, Michael Danino and Sujatha Nahar are some of the historians of today who dismiss the theory of Aryan invasion as baseless.

David Frawley in The Myth of the Aryan Invasion of India says, "We should first note that the Aryan invasion theory was foreign to the history of India, whether north or south; which has no literary or historical record of any such event" (9).

It is an instance of irony that Kunti who cannot be impartial to her daughters-in-law expects Draupadi to treat all her husbands equally. Either
Kunti does not want her daughter-in-law to be in any way superior to her having more than one husband or she is advocating the custom of the Deva tribes that a married girl is wife to all her husband's brothers. She becomes the bride of the family. In the novel Draupadi sees it as "an illusion natural for a woman, who had seen the best part of her life without real marital life" (199). Similar idea, expressed by Yajnaseni of Pratibha Ray, has been already discussed in the previous chapter.

Whatever be the human weaknesses one finds in Kunti, the over-all impression that emerges from Parva is that Kunti never experienced happiness in her life. Karve remarks that Gandhari and Draupadi, in spite of their suffering, virtually lived as queens, but "Kunti alone among them seems to have been born to endure only sorrow. A dozen years of happiness were too few to compensate for her long life of sorrow and humiliations. Every man in her life contributed to her unhappiness" (43).

Bhyrappa’s delineation of the character of Gandhari is similar to that of the character of Kunti. He highlights her suffering on account of her forced marriage to a blind man. From her reminiscences it is evident that the most revered Bhishma was unfair to most women, including Gandhari. To Krishna she expresses her inner anguish, "The marriage was fixed. I thought of running away from home. Even if I had fled I was sure that Bhishma and his soldiers could have razed our city to ground alleging that my father had deliberately hidden me" (814).
It is reported that Bhishma sent a large contingent of soldiers and cartloads of grains, utensils, ornaments, and jewelry with the message that "these are tokens of friendship. But if you refuse to offer to my blind son a bride, there is the army, a token of my enmity" (814). Since their military strength could hardly match that of Bhishma in Hastinavati, Gandhari's father was forced to consent to the marriage. Besides, the bride-price he offered was irresistible.

Gandhari out of revulsion and bitterness took a strip of cloth and declared "if you insist on giving me away in marriage to that blind fellow I shall never set my eyes on him" (814). It is this vow that she kept up till the end. In the eyes of the world it created an illusion of impossible devotion to her husband. Gandhari recalled that a legend was built around her by heaping praise after praise. Intoxicated by the glory of the legend spun around her, she forgot the real reason behind her self-imposed blindness (815). Yet a grouse very painful to her was that her husband had never once asked her to remove the band to enjoy the gift of vision. Such a denial went only to nourish the ego of her husband.

Referring to Gandhari's self-enforced blindness, Krishna Chaitanya remarks "This is a detail that shares the hyperbole characteristic of epics and one can have doubts about its propriety since a blind husband can hope to see only through the eyes of his life companion" (159).

But according to Vyasa, Gandhari did not want to have any advantage her husband lacked, as referred to, in the Adi Parva Chapter CX 14-10.
Bhishma approached Suvala, King of Gandhara for his daughter’s hand in marriage to his blind son, Suvala is said to have hesitated at first. But on hearing of the prince’s blindness, Gandhari is said to have acted immediately:

O King, ever devoted to her husband, Gandhari bandaged her own eyes with cloth, gathered into many folds out of her desire that she would not be wanting in respect and love for her husband

She ever devoted, to her husband pleased her superiors by her good conduct and vow-observing as she was, she never referred to other men even in words. (Dutt 1160)

Gandhari of Vyasa’s epic is the archetype of ‘a pativrata’ who stands for an impossible degree of devotion to her husband. The society of the epic period venerated such a woman who underwent a great deal of misery for the sake of loyalty to her husband

Gāndhāntu – atha susrāva dhrtarāstram – acakṣuṣam
Atmanam – ditsutam cāsmai pitṛā mātrā ca bharata
Tatas – sapattam – ādāya kṛtvā bahu – gūṇam tadā /
Babandha netre svē rañjan pativrata – parayana
Nābhyaśuyam patim – aham – ity – ēvam kṛtaniscaya

(110 13-15)

Then the King who was willing to give Gandhari in marriage to Dhritarashtra, told Gandhari that Dhritarashtra was blind. Then Gandhari took a
silken cloth—piece, folded it and tied it to her eyes in order that she may be on par with her would-be-husband (as far as absence of vision is concerned). She took a firm resolution (and said) on no account will I hate my husband.

Since then the society’s attitude has undergone a sea of change. In the twentieth century, suffering of women due to forced marriage invites serious consideration as it has been glossed over down the centuries by attempts to idealise women as archetypes.

Irawati Karve’s historical study of the character also refers to Gandhari as a wronged woman. Her marriage to Dhritarashtra was a trick played on her. She was brought from Gandhara to Hastinavati to marry Dhritarashtra without being told of his blindness. Her companion told her, “you are betrayed, poor darling. We are betrayed. The prince you are going to marry is blind from birth’—For a moment Gandhari did not comprehend her friend’s words. The next moment she fell to the floor unconscious” (32)

M.T. Vasudevan Nair also gives such a twist to the incident. The novel is a first person narrative from Bhima’s point of view. Bhima refers to the marriage of Gandhari and says, "Aunt knew only when the wedding rites were on that her bridegroom the Prince Dhritarashtra was blind" (28).

According to Karve, towards the end, Dhritarashtra seeks forgiveness from Gandhari for the dishonest trick played on her. After the war Dhritarashtra having lost all his sons decides to leave for the forest and tells Dharma about
his decision. Vidura supports him. Kunthi decides to join them. "Nobody asked Gandhari for her opinion. Everyone assumed that her husband's wish was hers. In the forest Dhritarashtra and Gandhari give vent to their frustration, looking back at their past in regret. Dhritarashtra admits to Gandhari, "You were deceived. Without being told of my blindness you were married to me. We did you a thousand wrongs Gandhari. But you have paid them back; Can't you ever forgive and forget?" (37). The twentieth century perspective highlights the need for a psychological understanding of the characters, particularly the women.

Bhyrappa's delineation of Draupadi's character is also from the point of view of her marital life. It is a myth that she was able to love all her husbands equally. To be the common wife of all the five brothers was a challenge to her physically and mentally. It puzzled Draupadi herself how her gentle self got the strength to manage the aggression of five husbands. She was particularly attached to Bhima whom she found to be her "only refuge." He was the only one who could understand her half-expressed wishes, thoughts and interruptions. "It was Bhima who worked himself to death to save her modesty, after the game of dice when Duhssasana stripped her of her single cloth, when Jayadratha wanted to carry her off in the forest and when Kichaka aspired for her" (135). The question of loving all her husbands equally and other related charges and accusations arise only in a patriarchal society. Draupadi is portrayed as a woman denied gender justice. Bhima could not love all his wives equally. Arjuna could not treat all his wives alike.
In Draupadi’s reminiscences her marital life is reportedly one of suffering: “Conception after conception, Children, post natal period and again marital life. This eighteen year old, bubbling with life was transformed into an exhausted twenty four year old, a worn out cow” (199). She recalled that it was ‘a suicidal onslaught on her body to preserve the unity of Pandava brothers.

It is noteworthy that Draupadi’s revelations cast Yudhishthir in a different (poor) light. The cause, for the fall of Pandavas was Yudhishthir’s weakness for the game of dice and the unethical act of using his wife as a stake in gambling. Dharmaraja, supposed to be the embodiment of Dharma practically failed to uphold the values of Dharma. In this context it is worth recalling the great Tamil Poet Bharati’s words in Panchali Sapatam 19-126

Tharuman
Ennang Kalangich chila sol uraippaan
‘Manru punaindadhu kettumichi choodhin
Vaarthai yaik kettuming genran manaththe
Chenru varuththam Ulaikinra thiaiya
Chindaiyil aiyam vilaikurathaiya (435)

[Dharma, mentally agitated said, “When I heard that the sabha is arranged for the game of dice, my mind is troubled with doubts and fears. This news gives me great sorrow”]

According to Bharathi, Yudhishthir was reluctant to accept the invitation to play dice as evident in his reply to Vidura who met him with the message from Duryodhana. In Bhyrappa’s novel there is no such
hesitation on the part of Yudhishthir Draupadi is sore over Dharmaraja’s failure to understand her, “this Dharmaraja who started his day with discussion with Vedic experts didn’t know this vedic dictum” fretted Draupadi (231)

In Bharathi’s Panchali Sabhatham 66-281 Bhima bursts out that the hands of the one who staked Draupadi in the game of dice should be burnt

Ithu poruppathillai Thambi
Erithazhal Kondu vaa
Kathirai Vaithizhandhan - annan
Kaiyai erithiduvom (485)

[We cannot put up with this. Bring the burning coals. Let us set ablaze the hands of our elder brother, who staked and lost the light of our lives.]

Dharma is the main source of her miseries, according to Draupadi “This Dharma who had been the main source of all my miseries ceased to talk to me face to face” (231) Even the anomalous situation of her polyandrous marriage would have been averted if Dharma had not coveted her. Referring to the context, Draupadi says, “he did not stop stealing looks at me all the while” (188) All the brothers were falling foul of each other because of their infatuation with Draupadi. According to Bhyrappa, Kunti even threatened to return Draupadi to her father to prevent conflict among brothers. Her sole aim in life was to keep the Pandavas united in order to get the throne.
In the Adi Parva 190.2 of Vyasa's epic Kunti is said to have told her sons to share equally what they had won without seeing what they had won. 

\[
\text{Kutigata sā tuanauksya putrav}
\]

\[
Prōvūca bhuṅktēti sametya sarve / 
\]

\[
\text{Pascācca kuntī prasamikṣya krṣnām}
\]

\[
\text{Kaśtam mayā bhāṣitam ityuvāca /}
\]

[Without looking at her sons Kunti told them, "share it equally and eat it (enjoy it)"
Afterwards Kunti saw Kṛṣṇa (Draupādi) and said, "I have committed a blunder in telling (my sons) to share (their earning) equally and eat it (enjoy it)"
]

Bhyrappa deviates from the epic and shows Pandavas' infatuation with Draupādi leading to the strange case of her polyandry. He has marginalised the role of Kunti in effecting such a marriage. There is no reference in the novel to Kunti's injunction to share equally what they have won, though Draupādi is suspicious of Kunti's motives. Nor does Bhyrappa refer to Drupādi reacting against it. Drupādi expresses his shock at the proposal in Vyasa's text In the Adi Parva CXCVII 27-28 Draupādi tells Yudhishtīr,

O descendant of Kuru, it is ordained that a husband can have many wives, but we have never heard that a wife can have many husbands.

O son of Kunti, pure as you are and acquainted with the rules of morality, you should not commit an act that is sinful and opposed both to the Vedas and usage. Why has your understanding come to be so? (Dutt 1:268)
Krishna Chaitanya also says that Drupad was shocked when he heard that Draupadi was to be the wife of five men and rejected the proposal as unheard of and immoral (146). Drupad's objection is referred to in M.M.Thakur's *Thus Spake Bhiṣma* also: "Drupad admitted to me later that he was not prepared at all for such an eventuality" (101) referring to his daughter's predicament of having to marry the Pandava brothers. Draupadi's polyandrous marriage has drawn the attention of several critics.

A.N.Janī in "Moral Dilemmas in the *Mahabharata*" says that the custom of polyandry was prevalent in ancient times not only in India but in other countries too such as North and South America, Africa, New Zealand, Tibet and Srilanka. In the Himalayan region, it was an accepted custom:

It prevails even today among the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills. Among the Nairs of Kerala and in the northern part of Sikkim it is prevalent even today. This custom seems to have originated out of social necessity in those regions where the number of females was less than that of males. In some places it came into existence with a view to keeping the family wealth, in one place elsewhere it originated from the problem of protection of a woman whose husband was away from home for a very long time. Thus the custom originated out of the social and economical needs of the peoples concerned (Matilal 72).

Though historical evidence of existence of the polyandry is cited by many, Bhyrappa reduces the entire situation to an act of human weakness.
The novelist has also wrapped up the story of the epic with post-Kurukshetra gloom permeating the entire novel. Sanjaya functioning like Greek chorus reports to Dhritarashtra the miserable scenes of the battle field.

Sanjaya, "How can I say? who can count how many thousands of men died in the last ten days of the fighting, how many got wounded with their limbs torn and blood flowing? When an event took place in one place, it is no longer a site of action the next day Why? The deadmen, the dead horses, the dead elephants rot and exude terrible stench" (661).

Bhyrappa evokes a poignant picture of the dead and the dying

Countless horses yoked to the chariot and used by the cavalry, lay, writhing in death agony, their legs broken or crushed. As the horses put out of action in the battle cannot be driven back, they had to remain there. The only use for them was to carve out their meat. As the dead animals piled up and their blood flowed into rivers, the other horses ran helter-skelter. The death-cries of fallen soldiers reached one's ears even in that battle confusion and noise (722).

The vivid description of blood-shed and horror, death and destruction creates a sense of colossal waste everywhere.

Blood flowing and solidified, flies buzzing, fallen bits of warrior equipment, necklaces torn from necks, ear-rings torn from their
ears, heads handing from mutilated trunks and all sorts of head
gear rolled away from the heads of the dead and the lost [...] How
much can one man’s memory carry of that awe some sight?
one thing was certain Everything there was broken, destroyed,
damaged, dying, dead and rotting And the packs of wild animals
feasting on flesh and blood with total abandon (727)

V.S. Sukthankar in On the Meaning of the Mahabharata examined the
story on the ethical plane and commented on the cosmic dimensions of the
epic.

What gives the trivial tale of petty jealousy, intrigue and strife [ ]
real depth and significance is the projection of the story on to a
cosmic background, by its own interpretation of the Bharata war
as a mere incident in the ever recurring struggle between the
Devas and the Asuras; in other words, as a mere phase in cosmic
evolution [ ] This war - or to give it a more general name
conflict is an eternal recurrence, a phenomenon assuming in the
space - time continuum the most diverse forms and aspects. The
Mahabharata thus becomes the type or the archetype of all wars
or conflicts of the past, the present or the future (63)

The futility and colossal waste of human energy and ressources causing
an oppresive gloom after the end of the war are effectively brought out by
Bhrappa. T.S.Eliot in “The Wasteland” also, through the vision of Tiresias,
refers to this universal fact that all wars are one and the same in the sense, the
ultimate result of a sense of vacuum and nothingness is common to all wars
The novel *Parva* is also remarkable for the environmental concerns expressed in the novel. The pollution created by the carcasses and foul stench of the battle field pose the greatest threat to environment. Bhyrappa refers to the acute water scarcity suffered by the soliders in the battle field. Duryodhana had to face the problem of feeding and housing his supporters. All classes of workers demanded their wages whether there was work or not. War was draining out the economic resources of the country. Even the saints and the sages had to surrender the property of the hermitage to the king, as it was believed that all the land in the country belonged to the king. General resentment of men for compulsory enlisting in the army, the fear and panic of the soliders, their apprehension and sense of insecurity are all vividly portrayed in the novel.

Bhyrappa's novel can be considered as a sub-text of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*. The main text, the original epic provides the core and the sub-text deals with the selection of materials from the core. Vyasa's text is an objective report of events, it just narrates what happened, without offering a commentary or interpretation. Creative writers have exploited this absence of interpretation in Vyasa and have chosen to draw their own conclusions and interpretation. The reader of the epic is inspired to rewrite or recreate the epic to suit the changes in the socio-political conditions of his times. It is evident in *Parva* that the novelist has used the text to express his ideology, to lend a rational credibility and humanistic approach to ancient myths. One cannot miss the contemporary relevance of the novel.
Intertextuality seems to be more complex, observes Sethuraman in "Resonance and Intertextuality". The term signifies the interdependence of any one literary text on or interrelationship with all those that have gone before it. According to Sethuraman, a text is just a mosaic of quotations. "Texts absorb and transform one another. Meanings from one kind of discourse are overlaid with meaning from another kind of discourse; and the creative artist is rather a synthesiser, someone who draws together and orchestrates linguistic raw materials, than an inspired maker" (154).

Bhyrappa has successfully synthesised the core of the main text, and produced a different text that reinforces the contemporary relevance of the epic, the *Mahabharata*. He has adopted an effective combination of narrative techniques such as reflections, reminiscences and interior monologues. Such techniques, absent in the text of Vyasa, contribute to fresh insights into the original

In the process of reinterpreting the epic from a twentieth century perspective Bhyrappa has challenged the archetypal figures in Vyasa's epic. Paradoxically the challenge has invested the ancient classic with a value reasserted time and again. Referring to the rewritings of literary classics, John McLeod observes that, "rewriting will always invest value in the source-text as a point of reference, no matter how much it is challenged as a consequence" (169) Bhyrappa's Parva takes Vyasa's *Mahabharata* as a point of inspiration as well as departure but the interrogation of the source text ultimately serves to enrich the value of the epic.