Metafiction as a Tool to Demystify the Past: A Reading of S. L. Bhyrappa's *Parva*

Anjana S. and Savitha A. R.

Abstract
The subcontinent of India, Bharatvarsha, has for several thousand years been the cradle of civilization and culture. The Indian epic the *Mahabharata* is not only a major work of literary composition, but is a treatise on human life, culture, and society. The epic is often interpreted in modern terms, and S. L. Bhyrappa's *Parva* is unique, as the author demystifies the entire epic and weaves a broad panorama of cultural, geographical, and regional perspectives into it. This article analyzes *Parva* by applying the tools of historiographic metafiction developed by Linda Hutcheon. The premise of the research is that a landscape's past and history can be understood by using fiction as a discourse. The objective is to decode the narrative and literary techniques used by Bhyrappa in *Parva* to achieve the purpose of metafiction. It also reflects on how *Parva*, as metafiction, has succeeded in bringing fresh critical insights into the events narrated in the famous epic of the nation.
Keywords: Mahabharata, Demystification, Literary Techniques Historiography, Metafiction.

Introduction
The *Mahabharata* is a magnificent mirror of the complex social, political, and economic structures that flourished in India during a particular period. The epic of ancient Bharat - the Bharatas - has been retold throughout history and is considered the history of the Indian subcontinent. The first king of the subcontinent, Bharat, was the source of the epic, which was first composed by Vyasa, a descendant of Bharat himself. The *Mahabharata* is the oldest known Hindu epic and is considered the most critical story of ancient India. The poem is sometimes referred to as "history of India," even though the official name of the Indian subcontinent is Bharat. Myths and mythological tales are essential to Indian literature. Moral principles, traditions, and rituals are taught to everyone through these tales. Because of this, both Indian and non-Indian authors frequently incorporate mythology into their works. Even

Western intellectuals have acknowledged this, and J. A. B. Van Buitenen specifically intends this when he states: "the epic is a series of precisely stated problems imprecisely and therefore inconclusively resolved, every inconclusive solution raising a new problem, until the very end, when the question remains whose is heaven and whose is hell?"[1]

Myths have been the subject of much research. The *Mahabharata* has several stories that have been used to explain myths. Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* remarks, "myth has the task of giving historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."[2] The epic describes the historical context, but the tales illustrate a particular viewpoint. These plays and stories are reflections of an individual's sentiments. To explain the circumstances and conditions of that particular era, the author employs myth.

Nevertheless, the epic, or the *ithihasa,* is a part of folklore that spreads the narratives through oral tradition. There are numerous interpretations of the *Mahabharata*; as it says, "*Mahabharata* doesn't belong to one country or race."[3] The reconceptualization of the epic plays a vital role in transmitting the age-old culture, customs, and society. The *Mahabharata* has universal appeal because it depicts Dharma and Adharma in a narrative form. The epic highlights the issues of women: social issues, discrimination, and all the problems and clashes in the world. The epic became so popular that it grew with the growth of centuries "every generation had something to add."[4] The *Mahabharata* story is about the Kurukshetra War between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas. The universality of the war is still the subject of scholarly discussion and debate. The epic *Mahabharata* is a fascinating study of Indian culture and society. Bhyrappa's *Mahabharata* is not mythological but anthropological. The author has also depicted the geography of the places

---

Anjana S. is a Research Scholar, Department of English, Sree Ayyappa College for Women, Chunkankadai. Savitha A. R. is an Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sree Ayyappa College for Women, Chunkankadai.

[1] J. A. B. Van Buitenen, *Studies in Indian Literature and Philosophy*, trans. Ludo Rocher (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1988), p. 39.

[2] Ronald Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Les Lettres Nouvelles, 1957), p. 142.

[3] Sanjukta Sharma, ''Mahabharata' doesn't belong to one country or race – Peter Brook's nine-hour play is proof of that', *Scroll.in*, 14 June (2018). At:
https://scroll.in/magazine/881133/mahabharata-doesnt-belong-to-one-country-or-race-peter-brooks-nine-hour-play-is-proof-of-that.

[4] V. S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahabharata* (Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass, 2016), p. 2.

where the epic took place. With stunning backdrops, each chapter is rich in detailed landscapes, whether it is the Himalayas scene or the war scene in a splendid manner. Bhyrappa researched every detail of the epic, like rituals, food, habitats of certain regions, mountains, and so on.

Bhyrappa's *Parva* is a rethinking of the *Mahabharata* in modern consciousness. *The Mahabharata* is not only considered a poem or story; however, it is considered a wealth or treasure. As A. K. Ramanujan asserts, "No one ever reads the *Mahabharata* for the first time" for the reader "doesn't usually read it in Sanskrit" but for its "oral tradition."[5] So, there is no limit to rewriting this epic in different ways with new insights and perceptions of reality. *The Mahabharata* itself was a *dharamyudh.* These plays are a way of looking at the epic through the eyes of the characters, and they have also taken on a natural form in terms of human experience. Bhyrappa undertook eight years of extensive research to compose this work. *Parva* also took a tour of the places associated with the events of the epic. He used a stream of consciousness technique to study each character's inner life. This technique helped the author portray the characters' individual and collective experiences. In writing and recreating the epic, Bhyrappa has destroyed many myths, invented to develop certain facts and incidents.

The historical past and epic are the most complex entities because of their fantastical elements. According to Peter Heehs, "Myth is more difficult to define"[6] because of its superhuman characters. The two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, have been the epitome of Indian life, society, and culture, and have the irreducible elements of myth. History accounts for the facts of what happened in the past and contrives a form of the past to wield in the future. So "it would be a grave error to reduce history to myth because the function of history is not the same as that of a myth."[7] So, the modern narratives demystify the past by removing all the fantastical elements from the epics by breaking their divine character and giving them all human emotions. Unlike other forms of discourse, modern narratives are distinguished by their ability to transcend social and cultural differences. They tell stories that different people with different backgrounds may understand. The most striking aspects of the past serve a purpose in

---

[5] A. K. Ramanuja, 'Repetition in the Mahabharata', in *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, ed. Vinay Dharwadker (Neywork: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 161.

[6] Peter Heehs, 'Myth, History, and Theory', *History and Theory*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1994). p. 2.

[7] K. Raghavendra Rao, 'Myth as Modes of Human Experience: Bhyrappa's Kannada Novel, *Parva'*, *Indian Literature,* vol 3, no. 1 (1998), p. 116.

understanding and also give new meaning to things: "Bhyrappa's Pandavas are not semi-divine heroes, but middle-aged men slowed by regret for their wasted life."[8] Bhyrappa is among the modern writers who demystify the past because of his strong base in philosophy. In an interview he states that:

> I wanted to probe the inner truth of the story, the characters and the incidents tearing the mythical cover. What was the emotional experience of Draupadi in her conjugal life? What were the tensions and sufferings of Kunti and other characters? By placing the characters in human mold, I could bring out many, many new truths which the earlier writers had missed.[9]

The exploratory novel focuses on the characters' feelings, situations, and settings, which are reconstructed via the current viewpoint.

The text is infused with demystification and reinterpretation of myth in the form of a novel, allowing the author to narrate the events freely without any artistic hindrance. Bhyrappa, in *Parva*, does not bother about the historical personages but their life, tragedies, and ambitions which is still prevalent in the modern era. Bhyrappa humanized all the celestial beings, for example, devas, as strong mountain tribes from the Himalayas who are the direct descendants of the Aryan clan. According to Hutcheon, this work is "intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages."[10] Bhyrappa reconceptualized the mythical characters and "made them dearer and nearer to us, transforming them into the most modern, yet ancient and universal beings.''[11] Bhyrappa's narrative techniques are adopted from postmodern fiction, where he brings a series of flashbacks from multiple characters who narrate their lives, emotions, and situations through monologues. He also used various techniques involving self-reflexivity, stream of consciousness, and historiographic metafiction to dissect the past. This narrative style unveils each character's inward experiences and meanings as separate entities.

---

[8] Arvind Adiga, 'An Epic Without Heroes', *Hindustan Times*, 27 January (2012). At: https://www.hindustantimes.com/books/an-epic-without-heroes/story-XlqUrEParLvYsUrAFCCbKL.html. Accessed 21 December 2022.

[9] R. Surendran, Arsu and S. L. Bhyrappa, 'My Life, My Work', *Indian Literature*, vol. 54, no. 6 (2010), p. 120.

[10] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 5.

[11] L. V. Shanthakumari, 'Demystification in SL Bhyrappa's *Parva*', *preskā*, 11 April (2018). At: https://www.prekshaa.in/demystification-sl-bhyrappas-parva.

Metafiction as a Tool

Metafiction is a genre of literature that has developed since the early 1900s. It offers an alternate perspective to traditional narrative fiction and seeks to explore psychological, philosophical, political, and social issues in a way that is more abstract than traditional readers, writers use the power of fiction to demystify it. As Patricia Waugh stated, "contemporary metafictional writing is both a response and a contribution to an even more thoroughgoing sense that reality or history are provisional"[12]. They are employing the metafictional form of writing, which aids in the study and understanding of a landscape's past and history. According to Waugh, "metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."[13] Ironically, metafiction calls into question how history is recorded and perceived. As Susana Onega observes:

> Metafiction is a late modernist phenomenon, the combination of metafiction and history produces a new effect: the leveling of history and literature to the same status of human construct, evincing a similar linguistic nature.[14]

Bhyrappa has used metafiction to represent and create his version of the real historical world. Through this, he demystifies and gives a different account of the story: the birth of Karna and the Pandavas; Krishna as a diplomat and an advisor; the annihilation of Kamsa; the denuding of Panchali; and all the main characters in Vyasa's epic have been recreated. Modern ideology and its significant changes affect the concept of metanarratives and history. The traditional genres witness sudden locomotion, which questions the thinking and ideology of the tradition.

Modern historical discourse interferes with tradition in every form of classical text, resulting in a new form of understanding that establishes new values. As a result, the *Mahabharata* has undergone multiple narratives in this new discourse, which seeks to restructure the interpretation of ancient characters and values. As Monika Fludernik notes, the "historical novels also imitate ways of writing history, and it should therefore come as no surprise that postmodernist attempts at the historical novel imitate both fictional

---

[12] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 7.
[13] Waugh, *Metafiction*, p. 2.
[14] Susana Onega, *Metafiction and Myth in the Novels of Peter Ackroyd* (London: Camden House, 1999), p. 1.

innovations and historiographic developments."[15]

Modern historical novels fall into the category of historiographic metafiction texts that primarily contemplate history, and metafiction that institute the boundaries of history, culture, and life of the society of the global account. What contends is "historiographic metafiction does not point to the historical past and attempt to render it realistically, but rather points to our *discourse* about the past, since it assumes that this is the only access to the past that we have."[16] Hutcheon's *Beginning to Theorize the Postmodern* marks the birth of historiographic metafiction, which is further developed in her ground-breaking work, *A Poetics of Postmodernism.* According to Hayden White, historiography asserts "that every history is a history of some entity which existed for a reasonable period of time, that the historians wishes to state what is literally true of it in a sense which distinguishes the historian from a teller of fictitious or mendacious stories." [17]

Historiographic metafiction "embeds intertextual references that locate the reader in a specific past historical moment." It uses metafictional strategies to defamiliarize the chronicles of history to unearth its philosophical ideas by "telling" the history in a "possible narration."[18] Bhyrappa's writing shows his rising interest in history and its portrayal of the past. He delves deep into Indian history, tries to create its alternate narration using fictional techniques, and unearths the truth behind all the chronicles. He often plays with words interweaving to portray history and epic by infusing the theory and the narrative technique to manifest the essential postmodern concept of "the presence of the past."[19] The characters are typical in historiographic metafiction, and their "emotional life is built up by the effect of the environment" on them, and "manipulating emotional responses were considered desirable for the society."[20] The characters "signify the self and the sign represent the text both are symbiotically

[15] Monika Fludernik, 'History and Metafiction Experientiality, Causality, and Myth', in *Historiographic Metafiction in Modern American and Canadian Literature*, eds Bernd Engler and Kurt Müller (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1994), p. 101.

[16] Amy Elias, 'Historiographic Metafiction', in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, eds Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 302.

[17] Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 7, no 1 (1980), p. 4.

[18] Elias, 'Historiographic Metafiction', p. 302.

[19] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p.4

[20] T. Ravichandran, *Postmodern Identity* (Jaipur: RBSA Publishers, 2007), p. 92.

controlled and governed."[21]

Bhyrappa is concerned with depicting and analyzing the epic by creating a lucid narrative of accurate accounts of what became known in the past. Many argue that history will not come to us "as it was;"[22] it is present in the form of text or documentary objects which provide the reader with the mediated knowledge of history. According to Sheldon Pollock, "The proper and critical task of history here maybe not what "really happened" but how people come to believe what happened."[23] Likewise, history is interpreted in various forms and viewpoints, providing different stories. Each character has their perspective of seeing things, so when different characters narrate the story, the 'universality' of the story does not offer a transparent window into reality. Bhyrappa's *Parva* also dwells on local practices and events without averting universality. Incorporating stories into cultural life is a normal process of human development, and "narratives itself needs no Legitimation."[24] Narratives are one of the fundamental ways they help figure out reality. As R. Barthes asserts: "narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."[25]

Postmodernists view history with skepticism, as opposed to realistic writers who assumed their writings were tools for analyzing the past. They highlight the unavoidable rewriting, omissions, and distortions authors make when representing the past. The postmodernist writers have extensively made use of the possibilities of narrative techniques, bringing in revolutionary shifts in the knowledge base. They incorporated intertextual elements like parody, playful irony, pastiche, historiographic metafiction, fragmentation, and so on, into the writing technique. Postmodernists problematized history and social issues. History and postmodernism are mystically interconnected, and the historians who intermingle their thoughts with postmodernism proclaim multiple truths in a subjective sense. Postmodern historians project new themes which mirror ethnicity, culture, tradition, and gender, which were once omitted and demoted from

---

[21] Ravichandran, *Postmodern Identity*, p. 151.

[22] Victor E. Taylor and Charles E. Winquist (eds), *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 178.

[23] Sheldon Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2011), p. 264.

[24] Stuart Sim (ed.), *The Lyotard Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 173.

[25] Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 79.

mainstream history. The postmodernists developed the "new desire to think historically," and to contemplate historically to them is "to think critically and contextually."[26]

In addition to its historiographic metafiction, *Parva* also exhibits the elements of intertextuality, irony, and parody. Intertextual novels combine "ironically, parodically, and anachronistically"[27] references to historical forms, texts, and events to produce a type of historical fiction that challenges our understanding of and ability to communicate with the past. Bhyrappa incorporates "characters, images, structures, or themes from earlier works that change our understanding of those works."[28] As a result, understanding historiographic metafiction necessitates familiarity with key intertexts. The recreation of an epic novel has its strong base in its original version, and the author makes many references to the same. The only difference is that the author reconceptualizes the real one. According to Hutcheon, "when dealing with historiographic metafiction that demands of the reader not only the recognition of textualized traces of the literary and historical past but also the awareness of what has been done—through irony—to those traces." [29] In *Parva* Bhyrappa brings in the "irony does indeed mark the difference from the past, but the intertextual echoing simultaneously works to affirm—textually and hermeneutically—the connection with the past."[30] For instance, Draupadi was nearly humiliated by Dushasana after Yudhishthira lost the game of dice. None of her five husbands came to her rescue.

Decoding the Events of the Text

Bhyrappa used many strategies to fictionalize the epic. He researched for years and "toured and briefly lived in those parts of the Himalayan region which were associated with the *Mahabharata*."[31] The chapter combines a bit of action with many recollections as the character at its center recalls the past through the mirror of the tension of war. Through monologues and a stream of consciousness, Bhyrappa intellectually examines the relationships and motivations of the different characters. The story of *Parva* itself begins in a

---

[26] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p. 88.
[27] Elias, 'Historiographic Metafiction', p. 302.
[28] Barbara Z. Thaden, 'Charles Johnson's Middle Passage as Historiographic Metafiction', *College English*, vol. 59, no. 7 (1997), pp. 753–766.
[29] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p. 127.
[30] Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, p. 125.
[31] S. L. Bhyrappa, *Parva: A Tale of War, Peace, Love, Death, God, and Man*, trans. K. Raghavendra Rao (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2009).

war-panic between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The author used the entire text by Vyasa to extract certain events to accentuate the socio-political matters still pertinent in the current era. *Parva* has multiple narratives, which take the readers to many dimensions through flashbacks. Bhyrappa covered all the main characters from the epic, and the whole story revolved around them. The author has recast many events from the *Mahabharata* and developed the same situations differently. For instance, in the original epic, Durvasavu taught Kunti a mantra so she may have children, but Bhyrappa debunked this story through the practice of Niyoga, in which Kunti and Madri get their offspring from the Devas (the Himalayan hill tribes).

In short, *Parva* is a modern version of the *Mahabharata*. Every character is a human and sinks into the sea of emotions, whether jealousy, ego, anger, forgiveness, or politics. The introspection of the Pandavas raises several essential questions about the primary epic and examines the reasons for their plight, lives, and decisions. On a few occasions, Are the Pandavas the perfect example of fraternity among themselves? Or, have they ever fought about little matters? Is it possible to conceive children by reciting mantras? Was Draupadi's marriage to the five Pandava brothers compelled? What kind of diet did they follow? How were the political alliances formed between the other kings? Has Dhritarashtra fathered 101 children? In the actual *Mahabharata* epic, these skeptical questions never seem to surface. However, Parva undoubtedly appears to be questioning these claims.

The story shifts from one person's perspective to another; it starts with Salya, Kunti, Bheema, Draupadi, Arjuna, and Yuyudhana, and the narration flows toward the war. Through each character's monologues, the author analyzes their situation and inquires about *dharma,* which differs from each character's perspective. The possibilities considered dharma are changed when seen from each character's stand. For instance, in the act of Niyoga: some of the characters, like Duryodhana, Rukmangada, and Dhritarashtra, were against Kunti and Madri's Niyoga. Nevertheless, it is an unsolved issue; many accept this, and many oppose this because Kunti and Madri did not follow the norms that the women beget children through the Brahmins, or by the younger brother of their husband. As Duryodhana said, "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 Brahmins or husband's brothers, did she have it done through outsiders that too,

barbarians from the mountains."[32] Thus, Bhyrappa recreated the scene of the birth of Pandavas in different scenarios.

The intricacies of the myth and story of the *Mahabharata*, the throng of characters, and their vigorous development create a massive issue for those who want to translate the epic into a literary narration. According to B. S. Chandrasekhar

> The complex characters of Kunti, Bhishma, and Karna have been developed through the stream of consciousness method. For the not so introvert characters the retrospect method is adopted. Some of the significant events are pictured as seen by two or three characters, which again bring out the clear focus on the difference in their mental make-up. Some characters are studied through their alter-egos. For example, the character of Krishna comes through Yuyudhana, a Yadava, who was a friend of Krishna but one who could also review his actions from a distance. In some parts of the novel there is also the Radio feature technique, wherein different voices are juxtapositioned to produce a montage.[33]

The war has been narrated through the mode of commentary by Sanjay, who keeps updating Dhritarashtra:

> I could easily gather information relating to our side. Even amidst the bustle of the war, Maharaja Duryodhana, whenever he caught sight of me, would ask me to give a detailed account of our daily successes in the battle. I am also in touch with the spies we have planted in the enemy camp. If Duryodhana does not return us our kingdom in the fourteenth year, I swear I shall keep up this vow. I shall give you the details I have gathered through these and other sources.[34]

The Kurukshetra War begins in the middle of the novel. Bhyrappa has picturized the war between the great warriors and its brutality. The battleground was full of corpses and a vulture was flying in the sky; the corpses had rotted away. In the final chapter, Krishna states, "it is possible to identify spots where people have died. And, here on a battle-field vultures, dogs, wolves, and jackals gobble up all corpses without distinction between kings and common soldiers. They would have obliterated all identification. Even otherwise, corpses rot and grow indistinguishable."[35]

Bhyrappa develops the character of Arjuna in a negative frame, who is egoistic, selfish, and a coward who is not as brave as he mentions in the

---

[32] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 408.
[33] B. S. Chandrasekhar, 'Mahabharata in the Modern Idioms', *Indian Literature*, vol. 26, no. 3 (1983), p. 93.
[34] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 625.
[35] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 825.

original epic. Arjuna's jealousy of Bhima can be seen throughout the novel. One instance is when Panchali was humiliated. She went to Bhima instead of Arjuna, which pricked his pride. Arjuna asked, "Did Panchali imagine that this Arjuna did not exist?"[36] Another instance that shows Arjuna's cowardice is during the dice game. When Duryodhana waits and Arjuna contemplates, Panchali makes a vow: "if Duryodhana does not return to us our kingdom in the fourteenth, I swear I shall keep up this vow."[37] Then Bhima said

> Arjuna, do not make a vow like a dog that has been thrashed. Do it like a lion, that whether he returned the kingdom or not, you shall kill them. I swear that I shall smash Duryodhana's thigh, tear apart Dusasana's intestines, and drink his blood. Let your vow be equally heroic.[38]

Bhyrappa created these specific scenarios by demystifying the real epic, which other literary elements cannot easily incorporate. Bhyrappa's *Parva* is a product of an objectivist supposition of the individual writer. According to Nivedita Balgia "*Parva* tells you what each of them thought about war before, during, and those who reminded, after the war It gives you a verbal sketch of the soldiers and warriors trenching to the war field, the confusion and chaos of war and fills the gap between the known events."[39]

Bhyrappa presented the stream of consciousness techniques in *Parva*; he illustrates the condition of women in the world coliseum. The author was remarkably descriptive. The author remarkably sketches the three women characters from the epic; Kunti, Draupadi, and Gandhari. Bhyrappa examines the sufferings and alienation faced by these women through their inner monologue. The author highlights the unhappiness implemented by the patriarchal society. In Vyasa's story, the character of Kunti is depicted as a wife who is full of devotion to her husband. Kunti's giving birth to the Pandavas is deconstructed in Bhyrappa's *Parva,* and her dissatisfaction with her marital life is also reconstructed. Kunti was forced into the act of Niyoga by her husband to keep his lineage which is evident through her monologue:

> Only to give warrior sons to the Kuru lineage and under his orders' ... Thoughts overflowed but the throat became choked. How can these people know and appreciate the sacrifice of my own happiness for this lineage! If there had been another husband who was using as a pretext

---

[36] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 285.
[37] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 228.
[38] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 228.
[39] Nivedita Baliga, 'Parva (Epoch) by SL Bhyrappa: A review', *The Pensive*, 2 August (2020). At: https://niveditabaliga.wordpress.com/2020/08/02/parvaepoch-a-review/. Accessed 21 December 2022.

> a wife's promise, was prepared to sacrifice his wife's entire happiness
> he would have understood.[40]

The birth of Karna is also given a different perspective. Karna was born out of wedlock to Kunti by the sage Durvasav, who visited Kunti. Nevertheless, Kunti's father gave away the child to Radha to keep his daughter safe and sound.

The author reinterprets the original epic by demolishing the tale of Gandari, who is revered as a goddess and the model for a perfect wife because of her sacrifice. In the real epic, Gandhari blindfolded herself because she did not want to see the world that her husband could not. Nevertheless, Bhyrappa recast the event in another way; Gandhari's marriage to Dhritarashtra was forced not by her willingness. This statement demonstrates her contempt and displeasure: "irrespective of my own desire, I had to blind-fold myself and become blind, receive the worthless semen of a blind husband, and give birth to poor quality off-spring, and suffer."[41] Bhyrappa has demystified the disrobing of Panchali and has been alerted to befit the setting. Krishna did not stop Panchali's disrobing as in the epic, and it is her reply that made everyone in the sabha shiver:

> Don't imagine that I have the support of only my father and brother.
> You curs, do you remember who was given the most honoured place
> in our *Rajasuya*, he who sliced the throat of sisupala for dissenting?
> The news will soon reach him, too. He, too, will hurry here to take
> care of you. I have now realised that these five husbands are eunuchs.
> But let me remind you that my father and brother are not eunuchs.
> Krishna of the Yadava clan is also my elder brother. He is male
> enough to be a husband to all of you put together. He shall be here
> with the entire army of Dwaraka. From the south will march the
> Panchala army. Beware, they will uproot this Hastinavati, dig into it,
> let the Ganga flow into it, and then grow an orchard over it![42]

Draupadi is depicted as a woman who suffers from her five husbands. In the real epic, it is Arjuna and Draupadi, but in Bhyrappa's story, it is Draupadi and Bhima. She loved Bhima the most. Unlike Arjuna, Bhima understands Draupadi's needs and intention: "It was Bhima who worked himself to death to save her honour and modesty, after the game of dice when Dushasana stripped her saree, when Jayadratha wanted to carry her off in the forest and when kichaka aspired for her."[43] In an interview with Arsu, the question put

---

[40] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 88.
[41] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 822.
[42] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 221.
[43] Bhyrappa, *Parva*, p. 135.

forth by him, "the last thought of Gandhari and Kunti in *Parva* are extremely thought-provoking. Were they not becoming the neighbors of your soul? The female characters of *Parva* seem to be the most compelling". Bhyrappa answered, "I found more potential in the female character - to explore and develop. Emotionally, they are richer."[44]

Bhyrappa gives empowerment to women in his story. The patriarchal system could not stifle a person's inner self or urge to defend their uniqueness and self-identity. Even with the negative, they stood in situations that their fate had contrived, firmly opposed the harm done to them, and accomplished their goals. Nonetheless, given the patriarchal nature of the country, it was not as powerful, and they lacked the freedom to choose their judgments autonomously, but the social norms and laws constrained them. They identified with and presented themselves as members of the perfect woman figure in Indian history.

Conclusion

Bhyrappa's writing possesses a genuine authenticity connected to the historiographic metafiction writing technique when viewed from a postmodern perspective. The writer has narrated the great epic of India on a symbolic level using the characters of *Mahabharata* as if they were a present-day social/ political fiction culture in the new limelight. Bhyrappa's novel is considered a modern version of the *Mahabharata*, where Vyasa's epic gives the whole story while Bhyrappa's text tells selected events in the epic. Bhyrappa's recreation of the epic shows that the problems faced by society are still unchanged. As Prema stated, "The Mahabharata is valued not because it has been traditionally so but because we need it to know ourselves and our situation. It is not merely the traditional attribution of veneration that keeps it alive, but its continuing relevance makes it a living tradition."[45] The author has destabilized the grand narrative of history, thus making it a historiographic metafiction. Retelling the epic, Bhyrappa opens a new way for the readers to question and intercept the text in many ways.

---

[44] Surendran, Arsu and Bhyrappa, 'My Life, My Work', p. 120.

[45] R. Prema, 'The living tradition of the Mahabharata in the fiction of shashi tharoor pratiba ray and S L Bhyrappa' (Undergraduate Thesis, University of Madras, 2022), p. 206.