

**Multiple Perspectives: A Narratological Study of the Techniques of
Revisionism of the *Mahabharata* in Indian Fiction**

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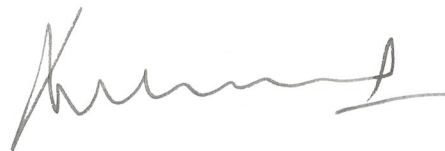
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I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that documentation in this thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested in *MLA HANDBOOK* (9th Edition).

Abbreviations

M. T. Vasudevan Nair – M.T

ABSTRACT

Retellings of canonical narratives deviate from the conventional narratives and reconstruct them to present alternative perspectives through the aesthetic choices they make in terms of plot and character, and focus on a particular angle of the epic. These retellings selectively string together certain incidents to reflect the accepted mode of thinking of the milieu of their times. The present study is primarily based on four revisionist fiction on the *Mahabharata*: Chitra Divakaruni Bannerjee's *The Palace of Illusions*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, P.K.Balakrishnan's *And Now Let Me Sleep*, and M.T.Vasudeven Nair's *Bhima Lone Warrior*. The study aims to determine how different focalization techniques and employment of time and space brought a modern perspective to the epic reflecting contemporary realities through textual analysis of the revisionist texts.

The first chapter deals with the effect of alterations in Temporality, and pace of narration in the selected works. As time and space are interconnected aspects of narratives, they have been examined to identify the innovative narrative practices followed in these texts. The second chapter in the thesis explores the narrative levels and focalization to decipher the effects of different focalization strategies, and variety of narrators in these works. The third chapter studies how revisionist fiction uses multiple viewpoints to create a unique narrative to engage a modern audience. This thesis attempts to examine the multiple perspectives in the revisionist narratives on the *Mahabharata* and the reasons behind the continued popularity.

Keywords

Mahabharata, revisionism, multiple perspectives, narrative levels and focalizers

സംഗ്രഹം

രാമായണവും മഹാഭാരതവും ഇതിവൃത്തമാക്കി ഒട്ടനവധി പുനരാഖ്യാനങ്ങൾ ഇംഗ്ലീഷിൽ എഴുതപ്പെട്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്. മഹാഭാരതത്തെ ഇതിവൃത്തമാക്കി എഴുതിയിട്ടുള്ള നാല് നോവലുകളാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണത്തിന് പഠന വിധേയമാക്കിയിരിക്കുന്നത്. ഇത്തരത്തിലുള്ള മറ്റു നോവലുകളിൽ നിന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്തമായി പാർശ്വവൽക്കരിക്കപ്പെട്ട കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളെ കേന്ദ്രീകരിച്ചാണ് ഈ നാല് നോവലുകൾ എഴുതപ്പെട്ടിട്ടുള്ളത്. പഞ്ച പാണ്ഡവന്മാരുടെ ഭാര്യയായ പാണ്ഡാലിയെ കരുത്തയും ധീരയുമായ ഒരു കഥാപാത്രമായി അവതരിപ്പിച്ച ചിത്ര ദിവാകരനുണ്ണിയുടെ *പാലസ് ഓഫ് ഇല്ല്യൂഷൻസ്* ആണ് ഒരു നോവൽ. പാണ്ഡാലിയുടെ വീക്ഷണകോണിലൂടെയുള്ള ഒരു ആഖ്യാനമാണ് ഇവിടെ അവലംബിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്. എപ്പോഴും രണ്ടാമുഴം മാത്രം ലഭിച്ചിരുന്ന മഹാഭാരതത്തിലെ ഭീമൻ്റെ വ്യഥകളും രോഷവും ഹൃദയ സ്പർശിയായ രീതിയിൽ അവതരിപ്പിച്ച എം. ടി. യുടെ *രണ്ടാമുഴം* (ഭീമ ലോൺ വൊറിയർ) ആണ് മറ്റൊരു നോവൽ. മഹാഭാരത യുദ്ധത്തിന് ശേഷം പാണ്ഡവന്മാരിൽ ഉണ്ടാകുന്ന ആശയക്കുഴപ്പങ്ങളെയും പ്രതിസന്ധികളെയും അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്ന പി കെ ബാലകൃഷ്ണൻ്റെ *ഇനി ഞാൻ ഉറങ്ങട്ടെ* (ആൻഡ് നൗ ലെറ്റ് മി സ്ലീപ്) ആണ് മൂന്നാമത്തെ നോവൽ. താൻ നേരിടേണ്ടി വന്ന അനീതികൾക്ക് എതിരെ രോഷാകുലയാവുന്ന ദ്രൗപദിയെ അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്ന പ്രതിഭ റായിയുടെ *യാജ്ഞസേനി* ആണ് നാലാമത്തെ നോവൽ.

ഈ നാല് നോവലുകളുടെ ആഖ്യാന രീതിയിലെ വ്യത്യാസങ്ങളെ കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഒരു പഠനമാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണ പ്രബന്ധം. പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് സമയം, പുനരവലോകന തന്ത്രങ്ങൾ, ആഖ്യാന തലങ്ങൾ, വീക്ഷണങ്ങൾ എന്നീ നാല് ഘടകങ്ങളെ അപഗ്രഥിച്ചു കൊണ്ടുള്ളതാണ്. എന്ത് കൊണ്ട് മഹാഭാരതം കാലദേശത്തിന് അതീതമായി നിലനിൽക്കുന്നു എന്നതിലേക്കുള്ള അന്വേഷണം കൂടിയാണ് ഈ പ്രബന്ധം.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Narratives are an important part of everyone's life, be it on whatever subject, they help us in organizing and comprehending our experiences. They are usually studied for their ways of transmitting ideas in the literary and cultural context. Even in the twenty-first century when books have been relegated and given way to gadgets, stories continue to retain the attention they always held. Narratives packaged in other guises such as the visual and audio-visual gain ground in this age. Even when the same material or central plot comes in different media, for example as films, television series or as literature, the peculiarities of each media used influence the success of each of these texts. Although these may be reworking of the same and probably well-known tales, there will be some element of freshness in the approach of the texts. This is because there is a peculiar grammar that governs the art of storytelling, whatever be the media used for the tale. Manju Jaidka prompts us to think on the idea that narratives which come in various media are interconnected, being part of a network of narratives as she states here:

Narratives take on another guise, i.e., visual, and come packaged as soap operas or telefilms, or as popular cinema. Yet all three forms, the oral, the written/printed and the visual, have certain aspects in common which are witness to the fact that no text is independent unto itself, each being a link in a larger chain that we call narrative tradition (1)

This network of narratives further continues to give rise to yet other narratives, as evident in the popularity of numerous revisionist writings in literature. All narratives irrespective of the genre continue to inspire people and appeal to many

generations of readers. Hence it is imperative in this context to have the right notion of narratives.

At the basic level a narrative is a representation of events occurring in time and space with causality binding them. Stories abound in our daily lives and reach us packaged as narratives. They are also invariably made up of anachronisms, such as, flash forwards, flashbacks, and sometimes speed up the action or slow it down. There is some form of tampering with the linear time sequence too. As noticed in many narratives, time is a crucial element of narrative. This is why in many narratives one sees how the events of the same time period are recounted differently or in different perspectives in such novels. The old man in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* highlights the importance of narration in stories as much as the content of the narrative: "The sounding of the battle-drum is important: the fierce waging of the war itself is important; and the telling of the story afterwards- each is important in its own way" (123-124). This is why narratives hold place in every society and the events continue to be narrated years later too, because as the old man said the recounting of events is as important as the events themselves. Jaidka's explanation of how narratives vary depending on the sequence of events narrated is worth quoting here in this context:

The narrative is a temporal sequence, but the narrator has the liberty to disturb the time sequence, introducing anachronies, analepsis or prolepsis (i.e., disruption of time sequence, flashbacks and flash forwards) into the narration, thus exerting his authority over the story, over its cast of characters, and also over the recipient or the narratee, whom he/she

authoritatively leads from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness to light

(2)

Manju Jaidka highlights the role of the narrator of a text, holding absolute authority over all aspects of the narrative as well as the reader. The entire story gets told from the view point of the narrator leading to the final judgement on the story as per the direction of the narrator.

The narrator is just one among the many components in a narrative that create variations in a text over time. There are further components of narrative that need to be studied, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle have pointed out in *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. The elements that are non-narrative are as important as the narrative elements and are a significant aspect of the study taken up here:

It is the relation between narrative and ‘non-’ or ‘anti-narrative’ elements that fascinate and disturb. Aspects such as description, digression, suspense, aporia and self-reflection, temporal and causal disorders are often what are most compelling in narrative. A text such as Woolf’s ‘The Mark on the Wall’ indeed, *has* no narrative outside of description and aporetic reflections on the nature of narrative (58-59).

As mentioned above, all the elements of narratives are needed to present a certain perspective and leave a distinct mark on each narrative. Each story may be told in a number of ways with some aspects foregrounded and some elements backgrounded. Especially in retellings the focus would be on different characters or incidents. Some of these narratives interpret the events differently and some might try to fill the gaps or rewrite from a different angle. Nevertheless, all of these

retellings differ markedly from each other and may be wide apart from each other in terms of their time of publication. Close attention to details such as these would reveal many layers of meaning to every text.

The importance of narratives in life cannot be overstated as Roland Barthes attests to this fact in his article “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives”. He includes both oral and written discourse as narrative and felt that,

The narratives of the world are numberless...under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative...

narrative is present in myth, legend, fables, tales, short stories, epics, history, tragedy, drama (suspense drama), comedy, pantomime, paintings (in Santa Ursula by Carpaccio, for instance), stained-glass windows, movies, local news conversation (109).

Whatever form the narrative takes, it is necessarily an indispensable component of life. It helps people make sense of their day to day experiences. The term ‘narratology’, coined by the French critic Tzvetan Todorov, is used to designate the study to understand the structure, techniques and components of a narrative. It helps us to imbibe the art and mechanics of storytelling. Critics such as Gerard Genette, Roland Barthes, Franz Stanzel, Paul Ricoeur, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Mieke Bal and others have dealt with every aspect of narratives. Genette’s *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* provides a systematic tool for understanding and analyzing the complexities of narratives. Starting from his basic definition of a narrative as ‘a succession of events real or fictitious’, Genette gives a detailed and

comprehensive approach to the analysis of narrative (25). He also discusses how he intends to analyze narrative using the categories of ‘tense’, ‘aspect’ and ‘mood’ (29). His work has become a seminal text in the field of narratology and is often used as a framework to develop the theory further. ‘Narrative studies’ has now become a multidisciplinary area of study through the contributions of many noteworthy theorists.

The concepts of narratology put forth by the theorists mentioned above form the framework for analysis in this thesis dealing with revisionist writings on the ancient Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*. The epic has been classified under the head of *puranas* and *itihaasa* by the Indian poet and critic Ayyappa Panniker. The *Mahabharata* is an extensive epic that can be assessed from multiple viewpoints, owing to its massive load of narrative and the innumerable retellings it has been through. Much of the complexity in the narrative of the epic comes from the use of different narrators alternating between Sauti, Vaisampayana, and Sanjaya. The temporality of the epic is also extensive as it frequently shifts between past and present. The retellings of the epic do not follow the temporality and discourse pattern of the epic.

In the view of M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, an epic is “a long verse narrative on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi- divine figure on whose actions depend the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the entire human race” (81). This definition is an apt one to begin the research on the ages -old Indian epic which is regarded to be the fountainhead of Indian mythological tales. The features that constitute the epic are part of the ingredients that have kept researchers still deeply involved in the study of this epic.

The *Mahabharata* is the ideal text for reinterpretation because it has all the elements for a reworking with its innumerable characters, sub plots and digressions.

There are innumerable retellings of the *Mahabharata* with many variations in characterization that leads to a variety of perspectives on the epic. There are still innumerable perspectives to be explored by researchers from the myriad characters that populate it. The vast space and time line of the epic gives these writers ample scope to deviate from the conventional narrative and articulate their views. Often these works reconstruct the epic by selectively stringing together certain incidents to reflect the views of the protagonists. It is a text that highlights the question of *dharma* or ethics in the Indian context. It is still regarded as much of a philosophical treatise. Alf Hildebeitel in *Rethinking the Mahabharata* observes why new revisionist narratives continue to emerge in every age: “Indian heroes and heroines’ epic lives have other lives both behind and before them, and multiple possibilities for different lives the epics give them” (37). This viewpoint is tenable in the Indian mythological context, where it has been widely accepted that the mythological characters in the epic have been reborn to undergo some of the aftereffects of their *karma* in their previous birth.

The frontiers of Indian Fiction in English in the late twentieth century expanded to become a vast domain of such innovative and exploratory novels that caught the fancy of the world. The writers have attempted to redefine the perspective of the readers on the major shifts from what was considered normal. From these milestones the field of Indian Fiction in English emerged as a landmark in English Literature. There were a lot of retellings of mythology in Indian Fiction in English. The writers here made conscious choices suitable to the cultural milieu

of their production. The publication of *The Great Indian Novel* created a niche market success and led to the coming of a new wave of mythological fiction in Indian Literature. This period also witnessed the publication of translation of the *Mahabharata* into English by C. Rajagopalachari and the modern retelling published as *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik. When revisionists focus on particular characters' lives they have the liberty to explore further to decipher the cause of misfortunes or miseries in the lives of their protagonists. This aspect of the epic has been the focus of *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*.

These modern versions create a complicated narrative in place of the good vs. evil struggle and the dominance of Dharma and righteousness in the folk and Sanskrit epic. Some other such reworking are: R.K.Narayan's *The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic*, Ramesh Menon's *The Mahabharat: A Modern Rendering*; Namitha Gokhale's *The Puffin Mahabharata*, and Maggi Lidchi Grassi's *The Great Golden Sacrifice of The Mahabharata*. This epic, along with the twin epic *Ramayana* has lasted a long time in the multifarious interpretations that are creative or critical. Many new versions and readings reveal voices that were silent or unheard of for a long time. The source text is so rich in stories that it has been endlessly reconstructed, especially after the millennium. Some of these voices become dominant while others fade away. For example now there are readings of the epics that recontextualize the epic and bring the spotlight on the Kaurava King Duryodhan, such as *Ajaya- Roll of the Dice* and *Ajaya- Rise of Kali* by Anand Neelakantan. Both these works present the epic from the Kauravas' side as against the Pandavas and raise the question of being right or wrong from

their angle on many events in the epic. Another such retelling is *Arjuna: Saga of a Pandava Warrior* by Anuja Chandramouli. This work is from the viewpoint of the Pandava prince and presents his version along with his deep human feelings and shortcomings as well as his strengths. Each of these retellings is unique because of the perspective it gives to the epic and the standpoint regarding many conflicts and dilemmas in the epic.

When old stories are reworked, the ancient and the modern are set side by side and refer to each other. These reworking of ancient texts merge with the present context as they acquire new dimensions. They become relevant as they make inroads into the present. In the ongoing information age it would be interesting to note how these modern writers pick and choose the incidents in the epic and sometimes even transform the events to give these a new version. The present generation that is exposed to all kinds of information would find it hard to digest the myths and legends of ancient times. Incidentally it is also found that these are being reproduced in abridged or newer versions that are vastly popular among the readers. *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* by Irawati Karve and *Parva* by S.L.Bhyrappa are not essentially retellings but mostly are reflections on the events and provide a deep insight into the minds of the chief heroes in the epic. There are many other such works found in abundance in Indian Fiction which deal with Indian Mythology and dissect the familiar story to give it a different interpretation. They make the epic easy to grasp and leave out all that may tax the reader's attention or reason. *The Aryavarta Chronicles: Kaurava* by Krishna Udayasankar; *Mahabharata: A Modern Rendering* by Ramesh Menon; *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* by Kavitha Kane; *Mrityunjaya, the Death Conqueror* by Shivaji

Sawant are just a few among a wide array of modern revisionist texts and critical studies on the epic.

C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* is an important influence on many of the modern retellings and is considered an iconic text in merging the mythical past with the present for the modern urban readers. Rajaji considers the epic as a national library and includes historical evidence of dates for the present generation in the preface to the second edition of his *Mahabharata Retold*:

The Mahabharata was composed many thousand years ago. But generations of gifted reciters have added to Vyasa's original a great mass of material.

All the floating literature that was thought to be worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical, of nearly thirty centuries, found a place in it. In those days, when there was no printing, interpolation in a recognized classic seemed to correspond to inclusion in the national library (5)

As he mentions, this is one of the reasons for the extensive length of the epic that touches every subject and includes every aspect of life in it. It is a comprehensive bibliography of all noteworthy ideas and subjects. In his narrative, the heroes and villains are clearly marked out as either black or white without any grey matter in between. He never probes the minds of his characters, instead, draws them as mainly flat characters. Devdutt Pattanaik, unlike Rajaji, has explored not just the core of the epic but provided hints to regional and vernacular variants of each episode in his *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*.

The way a writer chooses to deal with the epic depends on his own temperament. P.P.Ravindran in his book *Texts Histories Geographies: Reading*

Indian Literature has examined some of the Mahabharata novels in Malayalam and found that the inter-text in these novels is highly mediated. He observes,

Whatever be the claim of the novelist regarding the meaning of a fictional work and its relation to other works, theorists are aware of the fact that it is not the same reality that an epic and a novel based on the epic represent. In fact the novel might be silent on certain aspects of reality that the epic would well be forceful about. In the same way the epic could be silent on aspects of reality that a novel based on it might choose to elaborate (145).

His comment is relevant to the study here because of the fact that the revisionist works on the *Mahabharata* often use every narratological possibility to create an alternate narrative. More than telling the core story of the epic it is how the story is perceived and who perceives it that makes the difference. Another critic who shares similar views on Indian Fiction is K.Ayyappa Paniker. In his work *Indian Narratology* he states that Indian novels do not have a linear flow of events, instead, they seem to favour a cyclical concept of time where there is no clear cut beginning or end. He includes the *Mahabharata* in the category of *Puranas* which has many beginnings and multiple endings with an open ended structure wherein closure is perpetually postponed.

The same technique has been followed in the many revised texts on the *Mahabharata*. The revisionist works have made many temporal distortions by which they expand the time duration of any incident or compress others that may not be relevant from the perspective they have chosen. Such temporal distortions are the focus of study in this thesis and need to be dealt in detail. This thesis is an attempt to make an acute reading of select Indian Fiction in English to decipher the

innovative narrative practices and techniques employed in them. It also attempts to examine the revisionist elements in these works. The basic research question the thesis seeks to answer is how the modern revisionist works on the *Mahabharata* attempt to put forth their version of the events and thereby sideline the main plot and protagonists of the epic. In their re – creations many revisionist writers try to make their heroes and plots realistic. Hence they select from the innumerable episodes of the original to highlight and foreground the incidents and characters of their choice. They thus deviate in certain ways so that the actions of the characters become comprehensible and acceptable to modern sensibilities. In their attempt they happen to read between the lines and try to imagine what else might have happened apart from what is ostensibly part of the epic narrative. M.T. has made it clear in his introduction to *Bhima Lone Warrior* that re-tellers like him have tried to expand upon “meaningful gaps” and “pregnant silences” left by Krishnadvaipayana Vyasa. Most of these retellings modify the epic in various ways, for example, they include some incidents not found in the epic to justify the actions of the heroes or they may set it in a different context, as in *The Great Indian Novel* or in Chindu Sreedharan’s tweeted *Mahabharata* from Bheema’s perspective. There are remaking in different genres and media too. The media used for promoting the epics enhance the impact of the epics on the audience. There are umpteen recreations of the *Mahabharata* in the visual media such as even cartoons made for children on heroes like Bhima, Hanuman, and Krishna, and are in high demand among young audiences for the refreshing experience they provide. But the study taken up here is limited to the print media because numerous studies have already been taken up in

this field applying the theories of media studies. The scope of this thesis is hence limited to the reading of revisionist works on the *Mahabharata* in Indian fiction.

This thesis attempts to make a reading of revisionist texts on the *Mahabharata* in Indian fiction. It deals with the multiple perspectives in the chosen works. This means that each of the selected works here offer a divergent view on the epic, even though they all are based on the same epic. The multiple perspectives are found by doing a narratological study with the focus on the elements of time and space in these narratives. Each of the revisionist works transform the epic characters they have chosen for their protagonists and make them relevant to the contemporary society. Revisionism is a term propounded by the critic Alicia Suskin Ostriker, who talks about ‘revisionist mythmaking’ in her work *Stealing Language: Emergence of Women’s Poetry in America* (1987). She wrote about rectifying the “images of what women have collectively suffered” as constructed in the canon of American poetry (216). This reading can be applied to the study of Revisionist Indian Writing too to highlight the alternate narratives constructed by shifting the perspective of their writing from a masculine one to a humane and feminist one. Most of these works are written from the vantage point of the peripheral characters that are given a defiant voice to correct the wrong perspective of them in the epic.

Among the many revisionist writings on the *Mahabharata*, one text that stands apart is Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel*. It contains all the features of a rewriting, including intertextuality and parody. It metamorphoses and challenges the gender stereotypes embodied in the epic by turning the well-known villainous male figure Duryodhan into a femme fatale with an equally powerful clout. At the end of the novel, the narrator Ved Vyas, who is referred to as V.V, is

not satisfied with his own narration and says that he must retell the story repeatedly. When the reader expects some sort of closure for the story, the narrator further confuses him saying, “I have told the story so far from a completely mistaken perspective. I have thought about it Ganapathy, and I realize I have no choice. I must retell it” (418). This may be taken as Tharoor’s comment on the multiple attempts writers have made in interpreting the epic for centuries. This is how writers feel when they make further revised versions of the epic in different genres and media too.

Over the past fifty years Indian fiction has evolved into a rich and evocative genre reflecting the complexities of its society and its place in the global scenario. It has become more accommodating of the plurality and diversity of authors from various social and cultural backgrounds. Writers often explore the theme of cultural hybridity. As more and more people migrate in search of livelihood to different countries, diasporic narratives has diversified and enriched this field. Many writers have also started experimenting with unusual narrative styles and structures, breaking away from the traditional mode of narration. The age has also witnessed a blurring of distinction between different genres as writers deliberately mix up these and create a unique blend of multiple genres. The proliferation of digital platforms for publishing in the last decade has led to a plethora of works on a variety of subjects being published. The age also witnessed a rising interest in Indian mythology and the reinterpretation of the twin epics- the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The catalyst that triggered so many re-interpretations is the changed mindset and attitudes, as well as social conditions of the present world. The interpretations vary depending on the cultural contexts. The newer theories of

interpretation and the author's own experiences also contribute to this. These revisionist works do not strictly follow the sequence of events in the *Mahabharata*, but add some incidents and characters that merge into the grand narrative.

Nitambini who is introduced as a Sakhi of Krishnaa in *Yajnaseni* is one such character not found in the other versions. She has been introduced by Pratibha Ray to support and authenticate the version of Draupadi presented in her novel.

Although the different texts are written in different backdrops there is a commonality of purpose that binds them.

Aim of Study

The present study is primarily based on Chitra Divakaruni Bannerjee's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008); Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (1997), translated from Oriya by Dr. Pradeep Bhattacharya; P.K.Balakrishnan's *And Now Let Me Sleep* (2002), published in Malayalam as *Ini Njan Urangatte*; and M.T.Vasudevan Nair's Malayalam novel *Randamoozham*, translated into English as *Bhima Lone Warrior* (2013) by Gita Krishnankutty. The study focuses on these four revisionist works published in vernacular languages and translated into English. In common they are based on a certain perspective of the Mahabharata that each of these authors has chosen for their theme. The first two novels, *Yajnaseni* and *Palace of Illusions* are written from Draupadi's perspective. The third one *And Now Let Me Sleep* is a philosophical approach to the life of Karna from the angle of Yudhistira and Draupadi. The last one is a study of Bhima's perspective in the Mahabharata by M.T.Vasudevan Nair, titled *Bhima Lone Warrior*. Though each of these novels has picked out a particular perspective, they are generally considered revisionist works of the *Mahabharata*.

The revisionist works examined here are studied for the deviations and variations they provide from the established texts based on the epic *Mahabharata*. Revisionism involves challenging of traditional reading of narratives and reevaluation from a different perspective. It is a more inclusive approach that tries to rectify misrepresented, dominant and biased narratives. It also reframes these narratives from alternate standpoints to highlight hidden areas and characters in them. In postmodern revisionism even traditional narrative structures are challenged and reevaluated. The aim of this thesis is to examine the above mentioned Novels based on the *Mahabharata* in the light of the theory of revisionism using the theoretical concepts of Time and Space in literary narratives, revisionism and narrative levels as well as focalization. The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Gerard Genette, Roland Barthes, Monika Fludernik and Paul Ricoeur provide the theoretical framework for the study. The retellings of the epic examined with this theoretical approach leads to a different perception of the characters and events in it. The study aims to examine how the shift of focus in these narratives by means of a different focalization or employment of time and space will bring a modern perspective to the epic and reflect contemporary realities.

Methodology and Theoretical Tools

The method of study adopted in this work of exploratory research is a close reading and textual analysis of the chosen works. These works being revisionist works, a comparative analysis using the theory of Totosy de Zepetnek is used to compare the literary works belonging to different time periods. His comparative studies have highlighted representation of culture and cultural diversity in literature. His work *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method and Application* offers practical

guidelines for the study and analysis of literary works from different cultures, time periods and languages. Hence the methodology would involve a textual analysis of the primary texts and secondary sources such as critical material on these texts. The works *Jaya* by Devdutt Pattanaik, *Mahabharat* by Kisari Mohan Ganguli and *Mahabharata* by Rajagopalachari have been used as referral texts for the study. With the help of these referral texts the works have been analyzed to study the variations and distinctions of these revisionist texts. The tools employed are the theories of Narrative analysis of time and space by Michael Bakthin, and the theory of levels of Narratives by Gerard Genette. Further, the theoretical approach of revisionism is also used in the study to reinterpret the selected texts. Revisionist works are altered in tone and texture from the work they are based on, for aligning them with the ideology and temperament of the time of their publication.

The primary texts for evaluation in this thesis are based on the epic *Mahabharata*, which by itself has been the subject of numerous studies in different disciplines. Chakrabarti and Bandhopadhyay in their introduction to *Mahabharata Now: Narration, Aesthetics, Ethics* mentioned that “Mahabharata is at once an archive and a living text; a museum and a laboratory; and a sourcebook, complete by itself, and an open text, perennially under construction” (xix). Further, they say, “there are many Mahabharatas; many versions in Sanskrit, many versions in regional vernaculars, but more deeply, each era, perhaps each civilization, writes and rewrites its own Mahabharata” (Chakrabarti, xvii). The longest Sanskrit epic poem ever composed in more than a million *slokas* and also referred to as the ‘fifth Veda’ by the prominent western scholar on the epic, Alf Hiltebeitel. The uniqueness of this classical and perennial epic is such that it could reflect and elevate ordinary

events to remarkable and noteworthy ones through its style of rendering the tale. This is one of the reasons for the continued relevance of the epic even in the present century and its timeless nature. Even as we see the past of this region called Bharata, where a majestic dynasty was at helm, it also presents valuable lessons on administration of a nation and even individual wellbeing applicable to the present. This has been aptly stated by Chakrabarti and Bandhopadhyay: “Thus, in the case of the Mahabharata, two interpretive paths – one devoted to the uncovering of a shadowy past and the other engaged in negotiating the contemporary- keep intersecting” (xix). This point of engagement in the epic is imperative for the present study of revisionist writings on it. Among these modern retellings there are many character – centric narratives that not only retell the story from their perspective, but also provide a detailed study of the main character and his/her motivations.

The epic portrays every emotional conflict found in the world today in the complicated relations between its characters. This has been effectively captured and presented by the revisionist retellings of the epic. In the revisionist works chosen here we hear the voices of the marginalized, because the protagonists of these novels have been either marginalized by patriarchy or by the other characters attributed with superhuman qualities. In two of these novels written from the perspective of Draupadi it is her voice that comes through. In the other one written from Bhima’s perspective the muscular hero himself is marginalized by his own family where he is regarded as a ‘blockhead’ and dull- witted person compared to the other brothers who are regarded as smarter than him. Draupadi similarly is one

who is forced into a polyandrous marriage by the patriarchal heads in the family. She is accosted by many troubles in her strange life with many a tragic element.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* is remarkable for its innovative techniques and is regarded to be the most prominent among the retellings of the *Mahabharata*. The narrator of the novel, V.V. is an 88 year – old spectator or commentator. The narrative moves in a zig zag manner constantly shifting from the past to the present and from reality to illusion. He often draws attention to his faltering memory to prove himself to be an unreliable narrator, which is another postmodern revisionist technique. He not only narrates his version of history but comments on the nature of historic discourse itself. Tharoor in the form of V.V engages in a dialogic relationship with the readers where the reader has to enter the text and interact with the narrator and the scribe as one more voice. In this way the novel turns out to be a polyphonic novel. Tharoor in this novel gives a jolt to the reader who is unaccustomed to such brazen attitude, especially in Indian fiction, in this sample of a discourse:

Behave yourself Ganapathi. What do you mean, how could I know? You don't expect me to spell out everything, do you? I just know, that's all. I know a great many things that people don't know I know, and that should be good enough for you, young man (65).

The lines cited here is an example of the irreverent attitude towards the epic in postmodern revisionist writing. V.V also leaves many gaps in his narrative, which the reader's imagination must fill out. Though he has included many elements of the epic such as the characters, plot, and shift in tenses, he has left out just as many important ones. He tells Ganapathi, "We have left too many of our dramatis

personae inconveniently frozen in various parts of our tableau” (199). He is thus rejecting the authority of the omniscient narrator and questioning his legitimacy to narrate stories. He seems to suggest that there is no need to trust a single voice or a single version of the epic and that even multiple perspectives on the epic can be valid.

All these contemporary revisionist writings exhibit some features of Mythopoeia, which refers to the act of constructing or incorporating myths in the epic narrative. Especially Indian mythopoeic writers turn to ancient literature and cast them in the mold of current trends adding to them a newer perspective. They weave myth and archetypes in a garb that appeals to the modern audience. Recent Indian fiction has witnessed the rise of a class of writers such as Amish Tripathi, Aswin Sanghi and Ashok Banker who easily blend mythology with fantasy in their fiction. Such kind of writings that deal with Indian mythology help readers connect with the ancient cultural past and their roots. For example, Amish Tripathi reworks the story of Lord Shiva in the *Shiva Trilogy* so that he is shown to be one amongst us and then is exalted as a savior and God, which appealed to the emotions and beliefs of readers and became the reason for the popularity of his fiction.

One of the primary texts chosen for this research is the novel *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni. She is another such distinguished Indian Diasporic writer who also draws upon myth in her works. She specializes in different genres such as poetry, fiction and short story. She is currently the Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of Writing at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program. Most of her works have the US and India as the setting and talk of the experience of South Asian immigrants in the US. Her collection of short

stories titled *Arranged Marriage* concerns the plight of immigrant brides forced to acclimatize to vastly different cultural conditions. It won the prestigious PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Prize for Fiction. Her major works include *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), and many more. She continues to publish her works even now from Texas, where she lives now. *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), *The Last Queen* (2021) and *Independence* (2023) are her recent works of fiction.

The Palace of Illusions is a modern rendering of the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi. The contemporary perspective of Draupadi in this novel gives her a space that is both mythological and modern for the contemporary readers. She understands her flaws very well and analyzes them meticulously. From the beginning she harps on her self - absorption and obsession with the story of her birth. Her irreverence towards all the male characters who are the paragons of patriarchy reduces their roles as valorized heroes whose acts as the savior of entire humanity to the most ordinary of beings with very common weaknesses. She draws strength from her sufferings and rises with vengeance to showcase her strength and dynamism fighting for her independence. In this way she rebels against the peripheral stand in the epic's structure.

The next primary text for this study is *Yajnaseni* by Pratibha Ray. She is an eminent and accomplished novelist and short story writer from Odisha. She has produced eighteen novels, seventeen short stories, a travelogue and nine books for children. She has been honoured with several prestigious awards, including the Padma Bhushan in 2022 and the Jnanpith Award in 2011 for her literary output. She was the first woman who won recognition with the Moortidevi Award in 1991. In

her writings, she tries to present the stark realities of life alongside the mysteries in society. She has attempted to portray a variety of themes in her works. These include the complexity of modern life, alienation, artificial insemination, corruption in politics and moral degradation. She likes to make dissidents and marginal characters her protagonists. *Yajnaseni*, *Ullanghan*, *Aparichita* and *Shilapadma* are the best known among her novels.

Being an advocate of order and equality in society, she was criticized and branded a feminist and a communist. Like many other writers who tried to fill the gaps and find answers for the many questions in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Ray too has developed the story of Draupadi in her own fascinating way to make her reasonable and noteworthy for the new-gen readers. Her *Yajnaseni* is an outstanding portrayal of one of the most misunderstood and berated female characters in the epic. She not only justifies her actions and stands up for her rights but also speaks up for other women like her who have been similarly crucified for no fault of theirs. All that she wishes to convey she presents through a blood drenched letter to her *Sakha* Krishna in the last moments of her life when she climbs Mount Meru with her husbands. In the process she gets to see things differently and is able to interpret her own actions and those of her close ones too, when looked at minutely, the actions become clearer. In this revisionist work she becomes the pivotal character on which the plot revolves, whereas the other characters fade into the background.

The next novel taken up for study is *And Now Let Me Sleep* authored by P.K.Balakrishnan, a novelist and critic. He is best known for his Malayalam work *Ini Njan Urangatte* which won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1974. He has also been recognized with the Vayalar Award for Literature. He is a noted writer in

Malayalam for his critical works on Kumaranasan and Ezhuthachan. He was into politics soon after he joined college and later became editor of a prominent daily in Malayalam, Dinaprabha. He was also involved in publications like Kerala Kaumudi and Madhyamam. *And Now Let Me Sleep* is a psychological take on the moral dilemmas and issues faced by Yudhistira and Draupadi in their daily life as they take rein of the devastated Hastinapur after the Kurukshetra. It became a land of widows and orphans. In such a critical state they took up their responsibility to bring back the land from chaos. The novel develops through a lot of discussions and advice from Sage Narad on such issues. It was translated into English by K.C. Sarasamma. It was also translated into other vernacular languages like Kannada, Tamil and Hindi.

The next novelist whose work is also analyzed here is M.T.Vasudevan Nair, who needs no introduction. He is a literary giant in Malayalam literature whose works continue to be widely translated into many languages that he is now reckoned as a major literary figure in Indian English literature too. Born into a Nair family in Kudalur in Palakkad district, he spent his childhood in Kudalur as well as in Punnayoorkulam. He completed his B.Sc degree in Chemistry from Victoria College, Palakkad, and taught in a high school for a year before he joined Mathrubhumi weekly as a Sub – Editor in 1957.

M.T, as Vasudevan Nair is fondly referred to in his homeland, shot to fame when he was a student at Victoria College having won the prize for the best short story in the World Short Story competition conducted by the New York Times Herald Tribune and Mathrubhumi. He continued composing many short stories which were successful and popular. *Iruttinte Athmavu* is the most widely acclaimed

among his collection of noteworthy short stories. It tells the story of a 21 year old lunatic and the way the world which seems to be sane, treats him. His first novel was *Nalukettu*, translated into English as *The Legacy*, which he wrote when he was just 23 years old. It won him the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958. *Manju*, *Kalam*, *Asuravithu* and *Randamoozham (Second Turn)* are some of the other famous novels written by him. Most of his novels are set against the backdrop of the matriarchal family in the Nair community and they seem to be the outcome of many emotional experiences he went through in his childhood.

After a slew of successful novels, M.T moved on to writing scripts and directing Malayalam films. He is credited with directing seven Malayalam films and writing the screen play for 54 films. The National Award for Best Screen play came his way four times. In 1995, he received the Jnanpith, the highest literary award in India for his overall contribution to Malayalam literature. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 2005. He has received many other awards including, Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, Vayalar Award, Vallathol Award, Ezhuthachan Award, Mathrubhumi Literary Award and the J.C.Daniel Award for Lifetime Achievement in Malayalam Cinema in 2013.

Randamoozham, translated into English by Geetha Hariharan was titled *Second Turn*. The next edition that was published as *Bhima Lone Warrior* in 2013 is one of the primary texts for this study. It is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* from the view point of Bhima, the second Pandava Prince who is always treated as a second-comer. Though the novel is a retelling of the epic, it stands apart from other such works for negating the divine elements and presenting a realistic picture. The novel opens on a poignant note of the description of the destruction of the city of

Dwaraka by the waves and bandits through the voice of an omniscient narrator. The Pandavas are on their way to salvation and walking towards the Himalayas. It traces their journey beginning with the Mahaprastanika parva where they leave this world for their heavenly abode back to the time when they arrive in Hastinapur as young princes. This book brings to light many actions of Bhima that went unnoticed but helped the Pandavas side in their ultimate victory. It presents Bhima lamenting for the lack of importance given to him by his family although he was their pillar of strength though out their lives. *Rendamoozham* that has been translated into many languages, still regarded as his masterpiece and a cult text in Malayalam in a class of its own.

The protagonists of the primary texts for this study, regardless of their gender, fight their own inner battles apart from the actual war raging in the epic. They struggle to establish their individual identity that had never been explored in such a manner earlier. The numerous revisionist works enable such multiple perspectives and subversive views which do not conform to the traditionalist views. Such readings also give us an insight into the minds of the marginalized characters in the epic. These works explore the technique of Revisionism as a genre in postmodern literature that has become popular in recent times. They primarily retell or reinvent a well-established literary artifact from a divergent perspective. They also tend to subvert the patriarchal structure by questioning its authority and thereby deconstruct or reinterpret the myths leading to another kind of mythmaking.

Review of Literature

Contemporary revisionist texts on the *Mahabharata* can rarely appropriate the huge bulk and merit of the original epic as has been rightly stated by Gokak:

Says Ugrasravas: Each chapter, each sentence, indeed each word in it is blended with beautiful meaning and each word is exquisitely placed. The epic has been adorned by Vedic and secular meanings as well as refined and natural symbolic devices...Its style is such that the words and sentences originating in it reveal clearly the hidden significance of the book which helps each reader to accumulate merit (3).

The positives of the epic have been emphasized by the narrators themselves in it as observed here. This is also the reason for the numerous reproductions it has gone through over the years. The revisionism of mythology is a time tested method to bring instant popularity of these writings because they draw upon a well-crafted narrative and characters. Whatever alterations and remolding is done is anticipated and eagerly imbibed by their audiences. These retellings in fiction and in the visual media have formed a vast network created a huge market among a worldwide audience. Spates of such literary and critical works that are revisionist writings of mythology have cropped up in Indian Fiction in English. Well-known tales are getting reshaped in the contemporary context in blending into the modern writing style. In their re-analysis they have adopted a new kind of style and context although the core story or basic elements of the plot remains the same. Recent revisionist writing on the epic include: Indira Parthasarathy's *Krishna Krishna*, Irawati Karve's *Yuganta*, Shivaji Sawant's *Mrityunjaya*, *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Divakaruni Bannerjee, and *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* by Kavitha Kane and many others. Each of these retellings makes a selective presentation of the content of the epic from the perspective of the protagonists they have chosen.

Many critical and scholarly studies have been done on the Sanskrit text that sought to make a close reading of it in the light of modern literary theories such as gender studies and queer theory. These include works by Indian and Western scholars on the epic. Alf Hiltelbeitel, a German scholar has tried to decipher the spirit behind the writing of the epic that covers every aspect of human life. Some of his important works in this regard are: *Rethinking the Mahabhatrata* and *The Cult of Draupati* (2 volumes). Another notable work is *Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata* edited by Simon Brodbeck and Brian Black. *Mahabharata Now: Narration, Aesthetics, Ethics* by Chakrabartha and Bandyopadhyay is another scholarly text on the subject. Chaturvedi Badhrinath has also examined the select female characters in his work *The Women of the Mahabharata: The Question of Truth*.

The Malayalam poet and critic Dr. K.Ayyappa Paniker in his book *Indian Narratology* has compiled a monograph on ancient Indian narratives. This is an important text on narrative studies in Indian *puranic* literature. He has identified ten types of narratological devices found in classical Indian narratives, of which, the Mahabharata is modeled on the *Itihasa* or epic narrative. He has also analyzed the use of time and space in this epic and concludes that the epic gives more importance to space or locale than to time. When compared to time, the locale needs to be more specific because the eternal question of right or wrong can be attributed to any century. As Paniker puts it, “the battle of Kurukshetra could be located in any century, for the question of right or wrong is of all time; but Hastinapura is Hastinapura and Indraprastha is and has to be Indraprastha” (162).

This different treatment of time and space is observed in the other narratives too that he has analyzed in the work.

Devdutt Pattanaik is another renowned contemporary novelist and scholar on Indian Mythology who has to his credit many revisionist writings on the twin epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In addition to his numerous scholarly publications, his articles appear frequently in newspapers where he comments on recent occurrences linking them with some aspect of mythology. In the Introduction to his book on Indian Mythology he states:

If myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea. Mythology constitutes stories, symbols and rituals that make a myth tangible. Stories, symbols and rituals are essentially languages – languages that are heard, seen and performed. Together they construct the truths of a culture (xvi-xvii)

Pattanaik has emphasized the value of myths in any culture and analyzed several myths found in Indian narratives in his works on mythology in his *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*. In this work he includes several little known details on the epic from its regional/ vernacular and folk adaptations.

This study also relies on the theory of comparative literature and revisionism in literary studies. Comparative studies in literature have been of much interest in the present century because it is not just about comparison between two different texts, but much more. The process of comparison itself leads to a new perspective on both the texts and helps to discern the affinities between them, especially if the two works belong to two different cultural contexts. The tools and techniques for such a study were put forth by Steven Totosy de Zepetnek in

Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application. This is a highly influential text in the discipline of comparative studies in Literature. Revisionism in literary studies is a major part of the study conducted here. *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Books and Screen* by John Bryant categorizes all the revised texts or those that have been adapted into different versions and genres as ‘fluid texts’ because of the further possibilities for revision in them. This particular text provides a logical and coherent approach to the study of Revisionism. Two other major texts on revisionism in literature include *Literary Revisionism and the Burden of Modernity* by Jean P Mileur and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism* by Harold Bloom. These works provide guidelines for analyzing revisionist works for the alteration in perspective, approach and re-imagination of any work. Revisionism is also concerned with the inter-textuality in these works.

This thesis seeks to comprehend the recent *Mahabharata* retellings in the light of the aesthetic choices and revisionist techniques that set them apart from the other versions. Some of these productions focus on particular characters, whereas some like Pattanaik and Rajagopalachari’s present the crux of the story without any particular emphasis. They write in the *Kathakara* tradition, where the narrator is at liberty to interpolate or validate a certain stance by including folk versions and sub tales, and still retain the mythical and moralistic tone of the epic. There are also writers like Tharoor who use the epic frame to situate it in the post –independence modern Indian scenario employing parody and dark humour to create a unique retelling in every sense. Krishna Udayasankar is another contemporary novelist who reimagines the epic in and its characters seeping into the present century. *The Aryavarta Chronicles* in three volumes and *Immortal* are a combination of a thriller

and fantasy set in a mythological background. These works have gained huge popularity for their unique blend of different approaches and their contemporary setting.

Other forms of revisionist narratives have appeared as publications in the form of e-books and graphic novels, for instance Chindu Sreedharan's *Bhima*, and Amruta Patil's *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean*. These works have also left their mark on the Mythological wave that swept Indian fiction in the recent years.

Retellings of the *Mahabharata* have reached a saturation point in Indian as well as in the South-Asian context in a variety of art forms too. Many of these retellings reflect the perspectives, cultural ethos and ideologies of the time of its production. Not only is the main plot of the epic reimagined, but even the subplots such as the story of Sakunthala have been perceived in numerous viewpoints based on the mode of thinking prevalent during that time.

Textual analysis forms the primary methodology of study in this thesis. Selected sections of the novels are closely analyzed here applying the theoretical framework pertaining to the topic of discussion in each chapter for a comprehensive study of the chosen texts. Primarily the theory concerning *chronotopes* by Michael Bakhtin and the analysis of time in narratives by Paul Ricoeur form the theoretical framework for the first chapter. The second chapter in the thesis that explores the narrative levels and focalization in *Mahabharata* retellings is an analysis in terms of these concepts formulated by Gerard Genette. The third chapter that deals with revisionist narrative techniques draws on the theory of Revisionism put forth by John Bryant and J.P Mileur. The basic concerns that are addressed in this thesis include an attempt:

- To understand the basic structural differences and styles of presentation of four novels with *The Mahabharata* as their background.
- To analyze the narratological techniques employed in the novels selected for study
- To compare the impact created by each writer's unique perspective on the tale.
- To understand the psychological depth bestowed on each of the main characters in these retellings.
- To identify the archetypes and myths in the novels selected for study.

Chapter Scheme

Chapter I - Introduction

Chapter II - Intersection of Time and Space in *Mahabharata* Narratives

Chapter III - Narrative levels and Focalization in the Epic Reworked

Chapter IV - Revisionist Narrative Techniques in the Modern

Reworking of the *Mahabharata*

Chapter V - Conclusion

The first chapter titled 'Intersections of Time and Space in *Mahabharata* Narratives' deals with the effect of alterations in Temporality, and pace of narration in the selected works. It examines how these changes affected the perspective and brought in differences in the story time and discourse time. The treatment of time in the selected novels varies from one to the other because the same incidents are sometimes elaborated in some versions and are condensed in some others. Time in narratives have a deep connection with the space or location of the story. So these two interconnected aspects need to be studied in conjunction with each other to

identify the innovative narrative practices followed in these texts. As each of the primary texts in this research has chosen to focus on a particular character or incident in the epic, they produce a shift in the chronology of narration and the pace of narration may turn out to be elaborate or rapid. *Yajnaseni*, for example, follows a non-linear narrative pattern in which the narrator begins her narration from the last stage of her life on Mount Meru and then goes back to the time of her *swayamvar*, frequently moving backward and forward in time. Buildings and spaces such as palaces have been used as *chronotopes* in these novels because these spaces affect the lives of these characters. For instance, in *Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi compares her father's palace to a fortress that made her feel as if she is a prisoner. This chapter discusses them using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (time-space metaphor) to find the recurring patterns in these texts.

In the next chapter titled 'Narrative Levels and Focalization in the Epic reworked' a detailed analysis of the selected novels is done to decipher the effects of different focalization strategies and levels of narratives in them. The term focalization was introduced by Gerard Genette to represent the perspective in fiction, or the perception of the angle of the narrative discourse. When a narrative is externally focalized, the readers do not get access to the thought process of the characters, instead they get a picture of their actions and appearance. An internally focalized narrative, on the other hand, provides access to what passes through the minds of the characters which may distort or clarify the events as per their perception. Genette has also identified a third kind of focalization as zero-focalization in which an omniscient narrator perceives everything including the thoughts in the minds of his characters. The chapter examines the use of the above

mentioned concepts introduced by Genette in revisionist *Mahabharata* fiction. These retellings have a specific audience in mind to make alternative perspectives work. It compares the levels of narration and perspectives in these contemporary works. The variety of narrators and frames of narration employed are also analyzed. The thesis argues that the levels of narratives produce a different kind of reading experience for each of these works. For example, the novel *And Now Let Me Sleep* uses four different narrators who are focused on remembering and analyzing the actions of the warrior Karna posthumously. When the narrators examine his past actions in the light of the present revelations about his birth, the entire story appears different. The villainous enemy they were fighting against turns out to be an innocent victim and the narrator Yudhistira is racked with the guilt of committing fratricide wishing to undo all that had happened. In this novel P.K.Balakrishnan uses internal focalization of Yudhistira and Draupadi as well as the extra-diegetic narrator Sage Narada to recount and re-examine details of the events in the plot.

The third chapter of the thesis titled, 'Revisionist Narrative Techniques in Retellings of the *Mahabharata*' makes an in depth study of how revisionist fiction uses multiple narrators and multiple viewpoints to create a unique narrative to engage a modern audience. The aesthetic choices these narratives make in terms of plot and character influenced by the milieu they belong to helps them to perform a deep psychological analysis of their protagonists and their motivation. When the narrative is presented from the perspective of a marginalized or insignificant character, the narrative itself takes on a different colour. Also, the retellings such as the ones selected here deconstruct the mythical and legendary characters to reveal contradictory elements in them. The novel *Bhima Lone Warrior*, for example, has

incorporated several revisionist elements such as humanizing the mythical hero undergoing conflicting emotions. The novel projects Bhima as a rebel trying to break free from the oppressive authority of his brother Yudhistira simultaneously exposing his brother to be far from the person he is often perceived to be: patient, intelligent and soft-spoken. The chapter also examines how the selected works incorporate and deal with contemporary issues such as gender justice, social equality etc. as revisionist writings often do. These novels also use the technique of metafiction, which means that the narrator/ character is aware that he/she is part of an artistic construct and is in a position to comment on the events described in it. The chapter first establishes a theoretical framework for the study by making clear concepts such as revisionism; revisionist narrative techniques; deconstruction etc., and then examines the selected novels using this framework.

The concluding chapter of the thesis summarizes the key findings of the study and makes recommendations for further study and scope for future research. When the findings of the research in each of the three chapters are put together, a final picture of the chosen texts in the light of narratology emerges. All of these revisionist works focus on one particular angle or character in the epic. They select particular episodes from the epic and present them from a different viewpoint, thus effecting a change in the perception of the readers on the incidents and characters. In three of the four texts examined here, Draupadi is the protagonist; hence these works highlight her positive traits and gloss over her flaws. Similarly the protagonist of the fourth novel, *Bhima Lone Warrior*, is also presented as a brave but sensitive warrior who perceives the errors in the judgement and actions of his brothers and their mentor Krishna. Contemporary retellings, such as these examined

here, interrogate the values expressed in the epic and this leads to a change in society. Modes of thinking and perspectives change according to the social conditions of the age. The present age's interest in these epics and legends are like the inquisitive child's curiosity to know of his own heritage. Now in the postmodern world, news has turned into something more than just a report of all that happened. With the explosion of the media there are numerous ways of narrating the same incident. So the mode of telling has gained significance over the tale and Narratology helps us in this endeavor.

Revisionist writing is a mode of postmodernism where the existing texts of the canon are revisited in newer perspectives. When a retelling is produced, it is affected by the era and the social realities of the author and thus it gets modified in such ways as to make it a new version itself. In such writings the new viewpoints expose areas that are not present in the dominant structure. Not only in the revisionist versions, but even in critical works the interpretations and analysis of the epic tends to change. This altered perspective of the modern age is evident in Chaturvedi Badrinath's comment on the women in revisionist works of the *Mahabharata*:

The women of the *Mahabharata* are incarnate in the women of today. To read the stories of their relationships is to read the story of *our* relationships. They demand from the men of today the same reflection on their perceptions, attitudes and pretensions too, as they did from the men in their lives, and equally often from other men full of pretensions, even if they were kings and sages (8).

This observation of Chaturvedi Badrinath is pertinent for the revisionist fiction analysed here, especially in *Yajnaseni* and *Palace of Illusions* which have Draupadi as the protagonist. Draupadi demands attention and acknowledgement for her different attitude and perception of herself and others from the readers. These revisionist works attempt to swerve from the overwhelming patriarchal viewpoint of the epic into a feminist postmodern perspective. The characters, especially the divine characters like Krishna have been humanized with their follies although wielding much authority in these works. The cultural values inscribed in the epic needs to be thus re-evaluated and re-interpreted to make them compatible to the present society.

The text that had been an authoritative religious text in Hinduism gained significance over time to represent the whole of Indian culture through its grand narrative. Over time it has turned into a vast repository of knowledge on our tradition and culture. It continues to influence social and personal life of people by the concepts of dharma being inculcated into everyday life. Though its grandiloquence has not subsided, people have realized the shortcomings of the epic in its conflicting and contradicting ideas. Western scholars like Jab Van Buitenen have raised the issue of the contradictions and complications that have remained unresolved as he has put it:

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? (39)

Revisionist works on the *Mahabharata* are attempts by the modern writers to resolve these contradictions and complications. In this attempt they are compelled to make their plots realistic, minimize divine interventions and mystification of characters which is an essential feature of the epic.

While some of the revisionist writings inscribed ideology into it, some others merely shifted their emphasis onto a new idea or person. In fact, in *Bhima Lone Warrior* the protagonist Bhima is so self-reliant that he does not even believe in miracles. The mythical stories about him are made to appear as rumours circulated about him and his family by the attendants in the palaces. In the opening scene of the novel Arjuna is presented as helplessly witnessing the destruction of Dwaraka and the plight of the Yadava women being caught by bandits. He starts doubting the divinity of Krishna saying, “Had Krishna who died when a hunter’s arrow pierced him, foreseen his end? Krishna, who wielded the strength of his weapons and of his soul?” (V.Nair, 7). Arjuna notices his own strength ebb away and feels like an ordinary person without any superhuman strength or abilities. In this retelling epic protagonists like Arjuna and Krishna are shown to be powerless and ordinary, whereas in the epic they are shown to possess magical powers which could summon divine weapons for them by the chanting of mantras. It is this technique of demystification that enables modern readers to relate easily with the epic heroes and made this work an iconic creation of the century.

This thesis seeks to examine the contemporary revisionist retellings of the *Mahabharata* in Indian Fiction. Four contemporary novels are compared with a famous retelling by Kisari Mohan Ganguli to shed light on the narrative strategies in them and to study how each of these works diverge from the epic. All these

retellings add to the corpus of epic literature. These retellings differ basically from the epic in having an individual protagonist who often turns out to be a neglected or sidelined character. The contemporary retellers of the epic engage with it and reorganize the incidents in it to suit their particular view of the epic, in turn changing the perspective of the readers too. This thesis is an attempt to examine the pattern in the choice of protagonist, incidents and narrative point of view in these contemporary retellings to reflect the perspective of the authors on the epic aligning with present realities. All the retellings point to the immense possibilities of revisionism and the continuing relevance of the epic in the present times too. The following chapter would be an analysis of the specialized use of time and space in these retellings to study the approach of the authors towards the epic.

Chapter II

Intersections of Time and Space in Mahabharata Narratives

Stories can transport their audiences and characters across time and space. They provide a means to understand the reality of the world. They are also all-pervasive and universal in their narrative force because every story is located in time and space. Temporal and spatial understanding of narratives is essential for readers to reconstruct the scenes depicted in the narratives. All readers have an idea about the time needed for occurrences and the order in which they would have taken place aside from what is explicit from their reading of the narrative. This understanding of the order of events and the time duration of those events often do not match with the presentation in the narrative discourse. As Bridgeman stated, “to read a narrative is to engage with an alternative world that has its own temporal and spatial structures”, spatial and temporal design of stories leave various impressions on the readers (52). Both these components are crucial for any understanding of narrative, which is one of the reasons why literary works are analyzed for their temporality and spatial effects. In fact, in a discourse, time and space complement each other. Bridgeman underlines the connection between time and space in narratives as seen in the concept of Chronotope proposed by Bakhtin:

Time has always played an important role in theories of narrative, given that we tend to think of stories as sequences of events. Space has often been set in opposition to time, associated with static description which slows up and intrudes into the narration of dynamic events. However this opposition fails to recognize how far time and space are bound up with each other, as Bakhtin has shown (53).

Although description of the locale or space where events take place is a necessary component of narrative, as Bridgeman points out, it may delay the speed of action happening in the discourse. This is an important area of study in narrative studies but there is not much written on specific considerations of time and space. Critical frameworks of narrative space and narrative time are essential for the understanding of any narrative. Hence this chapter would be a study of the structures of time and space generally in narrative, and specifically in the revisionist retellings of the *Mahabharata* in Indian Fiction.

Time and space characterize every story and are found converging to construct narrative. Recent research in this field has recognized the interconnection between time and space in narratives. Since these concepts form the background for all narratives they can create ample distinction in perspectives, voices, focalization etc. Time is in fact a catalyst for many catastrophes in fictional works. The treatment of time in literature has assumed much significance because there are temporal distortions, fragmentations, overlapping and over time this has become a complex case of study in narratives. The scope for studying these two concepts has also become a complex aspect of narratological analysis now. Roland Bathes elucidates how time proves to be an illusion in narrative:

Temporality is only a structural category of narrative ... from the point of view of narrative, what we call time does not exist, or at least only exists functionally, as an element of a semiotic system. Time belongs not to discourse strictly speaking but to the referent; both narrative and language know only a semiotic time 'true' time being a 'realist' referential illusion...

(99)

In Barthes view, temporality of fiction can be studied as a category, but objective analysis of time as a concept is not possible because time is no more than an illusion. Time in narratives gets manipulated in order to make sense of the present, past and future experiences of people. There are different temporal levels in narratives, which are the main ways in which time gets manipulated since characters and events occur in time and space.

Space and time cannot be treated as separate because together they create a canvas for the presentation of events in the plot. These two are in constant interaction as the ‘when and where’ of the story and enable the narrative to create connections between the *fabula* and *sjuzhe*. Space and time are mutually constitutive and not separate categories. The opposition between time and space has been challenged by Bakhtin through his concept of the *chronotope* which stands for time space to connect the spatial and temporal relations in narratives. In *Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics* he affirmed that “all narratives in which human image is presented establish an interconnectedness of time and space which binds them into a chronotope” (85). Time and space are thus two complementary aspects of narrative that are intrinsically bound to each other as they construct a story world. It is their constant interaction that generates meaning in texts. Bridgeman too stresses the importance of their interconnection as follows:

Time and space are more than background elements in narrative: they are part of its fabric, affecting our basic understanding of a narrative text and of the protocols of different narrative genres. They profoundly influence the way in which we build mental images of what we read (52-53).

Space and time are therefore interlinked and together they recreate a fictional world for the readers, as mentioned by Bridgeman, although much of the emphasis in narrative studies has fallen on the importance of time than on space. H. Potter Abbott stressed the importance of time in *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* saying, “Narrative is the principle way in which our species organizes its understanding of time” (3). He further emphasizes that narration of events is far distant from the description of setting (12). Space needs to be presented as suitable background for events to happen, but it is very difficult to recreate space with real dimensions as it needs to have both real and imagined dimensions. Robert T Tally Jr. speaks of *Literary Cartography* in the collection he has edited, *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space - Literary Geographies, Spatial Literary Studies* about different kinds of spaces, such as, domestic spaces, cosmopolitan and fantastic spaces (321). Whether these are private spaces or public spaces, they are invested with meaning because they influence the actions of the characters.

Chatman also defines narrative space as, “the framed area to which the implied audience’s attention is directed by the discourse” (24). Using the clues in the narrative discourse, the readers mentally reconstruct the story world. Unlike in the digital media where space can be more effectively conveyed through visuals and auditory means, space in written narratives cannot be so accurate. Hence, space in narratives is rarely accorded more significance than as the setting for the events to unfold. Though there is much discussion on the role of time in narratives with a huge body of research outcome published on the same, not much attention has been paid to examine the importance of space in narratives so far. The unique employment of space in narratives is a pertinent aspect of narrative analysis as that

of time. In most cases space serves as the background or setting for the plot. Even the setting or space has consequence on the tale it narrates. J. Hillis Miller points out the importance of space in narratives:

The landscape in a novel is not just an indifferent background within which the action takes place. The landscape is an essential determinant of that action. No amount of a novel would be complete without a careful interpretation of the function of landscape (16)

Spatial descriptions can thus add to the visuality of the narrative. Spaces in narratives are recreated through descriptions of shapes and sizes. They are also often connected with the emotions a character experiences, for example, feeling of security, belongingness or insecurity may be associated with a place. The description of space can be done either in an inaccurate or vague manner, or may be very precise with detailed descriptions. It depends on the authors' perspective on the amount of spatial effects needed for each scene described and hence spatiality becomes a major concern of narratology.

Temporality is an equally important element in narrative that has received the attention of many scholars. This is because a slight shift in the ordering of events in the fabula may produce a totally different story from that of the *sjuzhet*. In the discourse time there may be deviations of time radically or moderately from the actual sequence of events in the story time. The narrative may move to extremes in the rapidity of narration where many years progress in story time in a few pages or may even elaborate at a slow pace the events of a short duration in many pages. Time is an integral element in any story though the narrative may attempt to de-chronologize the events. The temporality of a narrative deals with how time is

experienced in the *sjuzhet* in contrast to the chronological sequence in the *fabula*. The temporality in the narrative can be examined by contrasting the representation of the *sjuzhet* with that of the *fabula*. Often one does not find one to one correspondence between these two elements of the narrative. The distortion in time and space does not disturb the narrative but facilitates it. Such discrepancies are found in flashbacks which are technically termed *analepses* by Genette, which he defines as “any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment” (8). Every narrative has elements of *analepses* that connect past events to the present through causality. *Analepses* is possible only for the omniscient narrator who moves freely in space and time. Narrative itself is a connection between two or more events in a sequence with the use of time, space and causality. Narrative implies an idea or sequence of events that is mediated, is time bound and embedded in space.

The sequential ordering that each author chooses depends on the motive behind his writing. The manipulations that happen behind the scenes, at the level of the discourse build up the suspense and pleasure element in the narrative, as Mieke Bal has commented, “the *fabula* is ‘treated’, and the reader is being manipulated by this treatment... it is basically at this level that suspense and pleasure are provoked, and that ideology is inscribed”(79). This ordering and treatment of time applies to space too in narratives. Bakhtin speaks of the connection between time and space in literature that also connect the different elements of the plot:

Abstract thought can, of course, think time and space as separate entities and conceive them as things apart from the emotions and values that attach to them. But *living* artistic perception (which also of course involves thought,

but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation. It seizes on the chronotope in all its wholeness and fullness. Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* of varying degree and scope. Each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value (243).

Bakhtin thus substantiates the connection between space and time in his concept of the chronotope. Writers often use the technique of jumping forward to avoid the monotony of chronological narration. This allows them to suddenly put forth a serious condition that needs to be explained or resolved and thus push the narrative forward. Sometimes the flashbacks add sensory details instead of long summaries. Dramatized flashbacks have been used often to explain past events in the narrative and also enrich the reader's understanding of the present. Sometimes it is also used to provide an insight into the mind of the protagonist. Over the century, the treatment of time in literature has become an important aspect of literary analysis. There were temporal distortions, fragmentation, and *anachronies*, as per Genette's narrative theory: "An anachrony can reach into the past or future, either more or less far from the "present" moment...and also cover a duration of story that is more or less long" (48). These anachronies also serve the purpose of explaining present anomalies in the plot or for hinting at some future event that will arouse the curiosity of the reader.

In post - modern novels such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the lapse of time is of no consequence for the plot and is rarely hinted at even as the Buendia family continues to thrive over generations. Shashi Tharoor, on the other hand, chose to impose a time line on the events of a century

on those that happened very early in the history of mankind as in *The Great Indian Novel*. He innovatively superimposes the time line of the eighteen *parvas* of the *Mahabharata* on the social and political events of post – independence India, as we see in the words of Chaudhury:

Tharoor works out the idea of the eternal present in quite an ingenious manner. Instead of using two separate time- frames, one of the epic age and the other for the modern, he fuses them into a single one presenting characters, events, and situations pertaining to the *Mahabharata* as contemporaneous with the present time (110).

This kind of unique technique in the temporality of a novel is rarely found in Indian fiction. A different approach is seen in the monumental *Midnight's Children* where Rushdie creates a narrator who can see the events that happened in his extended family years prior to his birth in retrospect. Here the time line of some portions of the plot is much advanced than the life time of the protagonist.

There are also rare examples of novels that work backward in time in what is considered 'Reverse Chronology', where the story begins with the final moments of the protagonist's life and uses the flashback technique to relate his life up to the time of his birth. Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* is one such novel that innovates on the presentation of time using this unusual technique. This can be observed in the description of the life of the character Odilo Unverdorben in reverse order beginning with his death upto the time of his birth. This technique goes to the extreme in the novel, even verging on absurdity in its lack of logic and causality, sometimes forcing the reader to read the text from the bottom of the page to the top.

Many temporal sequences are introduced in the story when the character dreams, wishes or remembers the past. These sequences interrupt the linearity of any narrative. They are also the ones that complicate narratives. In the webpage *Living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by John Pier, time is explained as a dimension of the world that can be used as a parameter to represent the relation between discourse time and story time in a narrative. It further explains how time is used to frame a setting in narratives for characters, events and actions and is in turn also shaped by them. Time may also be stated precisely or vaguely mentioned sometimes. A noteworthy definition of narrative time is provided by Rimón – Kenan in *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*: “The peculiarity of verbal narrative is that in it time is a constitutive both of the means of representation (language) and of the object represented (the incidents of the story). Thus time in narrative fiction can be defined as the relations of chronology between story and text” (44). Complex patterns of temporality can thus be created by the ordering of events in the plot. In the epics the narrative can be out of chronological order as the narrator uses the terms ‘meanwhile’ and ‘by now’ to juxtapose events. Sometimes the ‘narrating time’ needs to be contracted so as to accommodate all the elements of the story. Hence the technique of summarizing, skipping time (for example, ‘many years later’) and iteration (mention of daily chores or routines) may be employed.

Mieke Bal, in her analysis of narrative introduces the concept of ‘double linearity’ in “the text, the series of sentences, and that of the fabula, the series of events” (218). In her view following the sequential ordering of a text is the key to understand the text and thus lays emphasis on this factor in this quote too:

Deviations in sequential ordering may contribute to intense reading... They can, however, be so intricate as to exact the greatest exertions in following the story. In order not to lose the thread, it is necessary to keep an eye on the sequential ordering, and the very effort forces one to reflect also on other elements and aspects (219).

Sequential ordering of the elements of the *fabula* in the *sjuzet* has been analyzed in detail by Mieke Bal as it is of great importance on the overall impact of the narrative. She further elaborates on sequential ordering:

Playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization and much else besides (241).

The details added on to the basic sequence of the plot create a dense image in the narrative that attracts the reader to the narrative. This is the distinction between discourse time and story time and is comparable to that between *fabula* and *sjuzet*. Whereas *fabula* is the plot that drives a story, *sjuzet* is the narrative representation of it in a sequence that may be temporally distorted according to the requirements of the writer. Thus the same *fabula* may be represented in different ways.

Another important concept in narrative time introduced by Tzvetan Todorov in *Structural Analysis of Narrative* differentiates between story time and discourse time. He proposes that the latter is somewhat linear in structure whereas story time can be multi – dimensional as many things happen simultaneously. So deviations may happen through manipulations such as shifting, reversing and stretching the

linear order of time. When events get retold, there are edits and repetitions of certain incidents in different contexts. The narrative may also include comments on the happenings like a flash back or in anticipation of future events. All these techniques together create the complexity of the sjuzet different from the fabula.

A story is produced from the constant association between space and time in the narrative. One can be considered the location and the other the action part of the story. The space where the events take place has the peculiarity of familiarity and strangeness that evokes strong emotions in characters. These places have boundaries and border crossings for the characters. These boundaries mark the distinction between the inner and outer worlds. The borders give identity to the individual by marking the inner and outer consistencies. The locations are also sites of border crossings and these spaces along with time are able to create narratives. The interconnection between time and space is emphasized in the words of Susan Friedman, "Space in narrative poetics is often present as the "description" that interrupts the flow of temporality or as the "setting" that functions as static background for the plot, or as the "scene" in which the narrative events unfold in time" (192-193). Though the descriptions of setting pause or delay the action, they are needed for the reader to get the right perspective on the events. The reader's mind correlates textual space with real space outside fiction. There needs to be some coordination between the dimensions of the textual space and the lived spaces because specific spaces are associated with certain experiences.

The spatio-temporal coordinates of fiction have been incorporated into the term coined by Bakhtin: 'chronotype'. In his analysis of the chronotope in literature Bakhtin says:

What is the significance of all these chronotypes? What is more obvious is their meaning for narrative. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative (250).

Here we notice the use of the *chronotope* by Bakhtin that combines space and time equally, giving equal weightage to both. He defines *chronotope* in his essay 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature...What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time...Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (84)

As Bakhtin has pointed out the interconnection between space and time and how they complement each other, here *chronos* stands for time and *topos* is meant to be space in his unique coinage, *chronotope*. When space is studied in relation to time, such readings bring out a new perspective on the texts. Here space is not treated as a static background, but as active and in a flux.

Though space in narrative is often regarded only as the setting and is accorded secondary significance when compared to time, there is an emphasis on space in the revisionist mode of narrative poetics. Much study and effort has gone into the role of temporality in narratives. Time is always found to be reconstituted

and distorted in many ways in novels. Novels are found to have three modes or levels of temporality, such as temporal compression, temporal expansion and zero degree where the reading time and the actual time taken for the occurrence are roughly congruent. All the three modes are employed in fiction in a judicious manner. It might be difficult to accurately demarcate the distinction between these modes in fiction. The sequence of events in the *fabula* when altered into the *sjuzet* might become incongruous and distinguished from the former and create the temporality of fiction.

In his analysis of the function of time in narrative in *Narrative Discourse*, Genette has explained the concepts of order, duration and frequency (35). According to him a narrative is a sequence of events depicted in a certain order. The duration of narration corresponds to the time taken to narrate something. This time may be contracted or elaborated as per the requirements of the plot. Sometimes a very important sequence of events may be summarized quickly in which a large segment of time gets compressed into a few words, at other times the same event may be stretched to a few pages by including thoughts, dreams and the stream of consciousness. Such altered chronology of narrative time can be examined in many ways using the categories of order, duration and frequency as proposed by Genette. These concepts when applied to fiction allow the narratives to skip forward, speed up or slow down; and move in different directions too such as flash forwards and flashbacks. Time is thus often found to be privileged over space. Time plays a role in the action or it affects the action of the plot, whereas space is just the static background in which the action takes place.

If there is one such grand narrative that can be the perfect material for the study of time and space, it must be the Epic *Mahabharata*. It has been in a unique position in world literature because of the reverence in which it is held even now and the everyday aspect of the commonality of life present in it. Writers have not yet explored and exhausted all the possible means of interpretation of the epic. They still find newer ways to rewrite it and find a captivated audience for their version. These tales are relevant even in the present century that not just in literature but in various other fields people are making ongoing efforts to interpret the epic in newer perspectives. The retellings vary from each other as per the culture and contexts in which they are set.

This chapter examines the crossover of the paradigms of time and space in Indian Fiction, particularly in *Yajnaseni*, *Palace of Illusions*, *And Now Let Me Sleep*, and *Bhima: Lone Warrior*. The common plot in all these works being that of the epic *Mahabharata*, each of them chooses to select some particular aspect to be dealt in them because the original work has innumerable episodes, twists, subplots and thousands of characters in it. Every version of the Mahabharata adds more layers since there is no fixity or finality to the *fabula* of the epic. These also explore a new facet and spin further the network of *sjuzet*. Alf Hiltebeitel opines that the Indian epics consist of “deep structures whose continuities and transformations, through time, space and different social contexts” are perennial (xix). This rings true in every sense with regard to each revisionist telling that gets published. Hence this chapter of the thesis is an attempt to study the postmodern literary narratives that have radically reconstituted the concepts of time and space. The method of

analysis adopted here is a comparative study of selected Indian revisionist fiction in terms of these two concepts.

Temporality is the condition of the narrative being time – bound and spatiality refers to the space in which the events take place. Though space and time are continuous, the human mind segregates them into recognizable segments to form the basis for their complex narratives. Our intellect imposes these structures and patterns on our experiences. These are the interpretations of those experiences by the narrators with their point of view that affects the response of the reader as well as make them believe in the actuality of the events represented. There is no structure for time and space in real life events but in a fictional narrative such as a novel the intellect imposes some kind of framework for these for better understanding. This ordering of time and space is an important means of making sense of our experience.

All of the novels selected here have borrowed heavily from the original epic and reframed it in accordance with their particular contexts. In its bare outline the epic explores the power equation between two dynasts of the same family tree. It is basically the struggle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the descendants of the composer of the epic, Sage Vyasa. Initially the Kauravas dispossess their cousins and take over their lands. Later this power struggle blows out into a full-fledged war for righteousness. Finally though the Pandavas emerge victorious, they face a troubled future in a country peopled by widows that they had to rebuild from scratch. This engaging dynastic struggle has been treated in various perspectives in Indian Fiction. The revisionist works on the epic give the much needed textual space to the women to voice their concerns from being marginalized as in the

earlier versions. The time of reception of these novels found a favourable atmosphere for subversions and reworking modifying the entire plot and reversals where minor characters find their voice.

The first novel to be analyzed here is *And Now Let Me Sleep* by P.K.Balakrishnan. The novelist picks and selects those incidents from the elaborate fabula of the epic which have left deep scars on the mind of the protagonists. Through the memories of the protagonists an attempt is made to understand those events in the light of new revelations. The narrative is reflective with constant reference to the past. The past is not only recounted but ruminated upon from the perspective of a mature narrator often trying to decipher the meaning of those events. Here the focus is on the psychological issues the protagonists pass through rather than just physical descriptions of the people or the battle. The novel deals with the conflicts raging in the mind of Yudhistira about the sin of Fratricide he presumes to have committed by having Karna killed in the war. To have his conscience cleared there are many philosophical debates between him and Sage Narada and Draupadi. Not only the events themselves, but even the self-reflexive nature of the narrator becomes an object of interest for the reader.

The novel also focuses on Draupadi's thoughts about Karna who faced unrighteous defeat at the hands of the Pandavas. The revelation that Karna was Kunti's eldest son was another shock for her even as she was reeling from the shock of the cold-blooded murder of her kin.

There are many flashbacks that deal with the life of Karna with Sage Narada explaining about the interventions of fate in the life of Karna. Most part of the novel is an analysis of Karna's life posthumously by the protagonists on knowing his real

identity. It also brings out the complexity of her thoughts and her thought process that was confused about the legitimacy of their victory and the resultant chaos. Her situation forced her to wonder whether their celebrated victory was futile as the villain here shockingly took away the lives of her kin too. Some of her doubts are dispelled by the master sage Narada and the rest by her husband Yudhistira.

An assessment of this novel as composed of elements of time and space can be judiciously done using the techniques stated earlier. The novel starts with a long description of the spatial setting of the Kurukshetra battleground lying “benumbed like the drained depths of the ocean stretching dreadfully afar” (Balakrishnan, 3). The setting is further described to recreate an atmosphere of dread for the characters and the readers: “The blaze of fire mingled with moonlight and created a dreadful dusk in Kurukshetra. In that pale yellow glow were seen the scattered corpses and crumbled chariots.” (Balakrishnan, 3). This locale of a climatic event in the epic where the eighteen day- war was fought becomes an active space littered with corpses and vultures and jackals waiting to consume them. The battlegrounds become the places where many lives are sacrificed unjustly for the sake of *dharma*.

While Balakrishnan opens his novel with this setting in the final stage in the life of the Pandavas, the *Mahabharata* in C. Rajagopalachari’s version begins by describing the snake sacrifice by King Janamejaya, the grandson of the Pandavas to avenge the death of his father Parikshit through snake bite. This is where we can find the core narrative of the *Mahabharata*. Here the narration of the entire history of the Kuru clan takes place. The poem is recited by Sage Vaisampayana, who was a disciple of Vyasa. It is also significant that the final space of the epic is the ascent

of the heroes onto Heaven from Mount Meru on the Himavan where all the Pandavas succeed whereas their wife Draupadi falls and none of them turn back.

Several sections of the novel are narrated by Draupadi where one finds many instances of temporal shifts in narration. For example, the scene of the insult of Draupadi in the Kaurava court soon after the game of dice includes not just description of the scene but dialogues that are presented in the mimetic mode of narration. Immediately after the narration of this scene, time shifts to Draupadi's reminiscences of her sons who had been murdered. She recollects the loss of her sons and the scene of the tents burning at midnight with huge flames rising from them in her mind several times. The locale of the incident is as much crucial as the shocking incident itself. This happens by the riverside where the Pandavas had pitched their tents near the battleground. The tents where the women were staying were right across these tents. She recollects their image as kids playing in their palace, but finds that she could not recollect any memory of them in their youthful appearance as warriors in full armour, the way they had last appeared before her seeking blessings. The searing pain of not being able to remember her sons' faces in their youth devastates her and she spends the whole night calling out the names of all her five sons one by one. Her mind unravels the past from the time of her painful disrobing in the Kaurava court and the rest of the events leading up to the fabled war between the cousins. She hears about Karna's past and the discussion Krishna had with Karna, offering him the Pandavas' allegiance along with Draupadi as his royal consort. She vividly recollects those moments and imagines the reaction and expression on Karna's face. The narration progresses to show the thoughts running through the mind of a sleep-deprived Draupadi. She sees pictures as if revolving on

a mirror. The scene of her disrobing , that of Karna and Krishna discussing on his chariot, that of Karna sitting enthroned by her side, and that of his humiliation at her *swayamvar*. These pictures whirl around her head until finally it becomes a nihilistic white space.

There are many such shifts in the time sequence such as the shift from the final scene of the devastating sight of the battleground to Yudhistira's nightmare of seeing Arjun killing Karna. Again there is a disruption in the sequence of narration where Yudhistira narrates the event of the exhibition of skills of the young princes of Hastinapur which happened long ago. After the description of the scene he notes that the same event when viewed from a different perspective gives him a totally different picture. In the light of his mother's revelation that Karna is his own brother, the entire event takes on a different appearance. These parts of the novel can be considered examples of the temporal shifts used by P.K.Balakrishnan in his revisionist retelling of the epic where he selectively presents the incidents that have deeply touched the lives of his protagonists instead of following the time line of the epic.

The massacre of her kin is reiterated here many times in Draupadi's memory to posit the trauma she goes through. This incident is the last straw in the series of traumatic incidents in her life. By the end she becomes a mental wreck unable even to sleep peacefully. We see her praying for sleep to soothe her frayed nerves. Her life is like a small boat tossed about by the turbulent waves of the ocean. She sadly notes, "Fate created a single wife for all the sons of a mother by different husbands. Draupadi, destiny was composing a humorous story by your life and that of Kunti" (Balakrishnan, 174). The entire focus of the novel is on the effects of the actions in

the epic on the minds of Draupadi and Yudhistira, whom he presents as vulnerable to hopelessness and experiencing a depressed state of mind. In fact, Yudhistira is seen to be totally incapacitated in the following interior monologue:

He mused: In the nest in yonder tree trunk, the fledgelings are crying for food. The mother bird is here at a considerable distance. The life of the little ones are in danger. The mother's duty beckons you. Bird, hurry up with the prey to your nest. Yudhistira soliloquized. "Poor bird! It is lying on the ground with both the wings clipped, how can it fly?" (Balakrishnan, 16)

The picture of the helpless mother bird is a metaphor for the state of the Pandavas soon after the war when they are faced with the challenge of a ruling a country peopled by widows and children and most of them left with no desire to continue living.

The novel moves among the spaces in the plot and not connected in any particular sequential order. Not only do buildings represent heterotopes but even plain lands and rivers, mountains and forests. The rivers provide the means for survival of the protagonists in their exile in forests. These buildings as narrative space move the narrative forward as much as time for most part of the discourse.

The fluidity of time and space can be observed here in the narration of the incidents involving Karna on the battlefield by Sanjaya via his divine sight. The description of the battle was done by Sanjaya to the blind king Dhritarashtra. In an innovative stroke, Balakrishnan makes Sanjaya narrate the same to the desperate Yudhistira and Draupadi. Beginning with a prayer to the Gods for protecting her family from destruction, Draupadi requests to be blessed with peaceful sleep, only to be roused by loud lamentations and the scene of the tents on fire. From here the

whole novel is retrospection on the real meaning of life for her and about all the misunderstandings she had.

Another incident that gets reiterated is the insult of Karna during Draupadi's *swayamvara*. She relives in her memory that day of his insult in front of many mighty kings and princes of Bharata. Her mind is guilt – ridden and full of woe for having rejected him. Similarly there are incidents in which Yudhistira too had insulted Karna in the past. During such discussions Sage Narada justifies their actions philosophically as fateful interventions and says:

You see the strange turn of events. Fate that bestowed on him wonderful powers has along with it bored holes of self- destruction with the same hand. Destiny is organizing the yearning and ability to perform great deeds on the one hand and paves the way for self- immolation at the other – utterly incomprehensible conduct of fate. You are vainly lamenting over the disappearance of Karna considering it as a fratricide committed by you (Balakrishnan, 50).

Sanjaya's narration here focuses entirely on the heroic deeds of Karna on the battlefield where he deliberately spared the lives of the Pandava brothers except Arjuna, in spite of getting many opportunities to kill them. This way he fulfilled his promise to mother Kunti who had begged him to spare the lives of her sons. Narada also attributes the fall of Karna to his pride; he strongly believed that he would be safe even without his divine weapons. In this retelling the divine sight and narration of Sanjaya are used to highlight the heroism of Karna and emphasize the role of fate in his downfall. As a result the guilt of Yudhistira of his supposed fratricide also gets addressed. As he returned from the battlefield another question arose in his

mind, why was Bheeshma who treated Karna as his arch – enemy throughout his life, now praising his nobility? Both the husband and wife want to know the answer for this question, so they asked Sanjaya about it. Sanjaya is confused about their relationship. He explains:

The meaning and aspect of the action remembered is the colour of the picture left in memory. Something that happened in the past; when its meanings and aspects are turned topsy – turvy by time, not only the colour of the picture, but the shape itself becomes vague (Balakrishnan, 119)

Through Sanjaya's counseling Draupadi too is able to resolve the conflict in her mind for having rejected Karna in the past. The selections made by the author in choosing to include only the incidents involving Karna in the epic gives him scope to deal in detail with the agony of Draupadi and the guilt of Yudhistira. The philosophical explanations of the actions of the protagonists add weight to the discourse.

And Now Let Me Sleep mostly deals with the horrible nightmares and disturbing illusions endured by Draupadi during her long and excruciating marital life. She longs for a restful night's sleep, but is prevented by these rising visions before her eyes. P.K.Balakrishnan's work finally resolves itself as the homodiegetic narrator unburdens her soul by accepting and acknowledging the valour of Karna and comes to terms with her loss. The identity of the protagonist is created from her recollections of the past. Here P.K.Balakrishnan presents a minute exposition of the inner consciousness of his character. The first scene of action is at Kurukshetra battlefield by the side of the Samantapanchaka Lake. The order of narration here is in reverse chronology. This had happened after the eighteen day war had ended, but

this is the first incident to be narrated in this novel. The story time is ahead of the discourse time. Suyodhan lay only half conscious by the bank of the lake. The narrative consciousness records the details of the scene and the feeling of the jackals as they approached his body greedily. This incident forms the frame narrative where the discourse commences, whereas this was one of the last incidents that happened according to the *fabula* of the narrative. Thereafter the narration moves back and forth in time. There is an *analepsis* about the insult of Karna at Draupadi's *swayamvar* where he was insulted by being called a *suta*. The discourse time is back to the present when Draupadi notices Yudhistira waking from sleep and calling out to Arjuna at the battlefield not to murder their elder brother Karna. These scenes are interpolated in the narration as it moves back and forth. Yudhistira recalls that scene in his mind as follows:

Yudhistira began to contemplate on the strong but strange relationship that binds the mind of man, time and incidents. The same incident is viewed by different people in different perspectives. The same person views it differently on different occasions. Not only the inner meaning, but even the shapes of things tend to change (Balakrishnan, 28).

Here it is more of an interior monologue where Yudhistira speaks of viewing the same incident from a fresh perspective. There are many such reflections on all that has passed in the discourse time. The dilemmas, regrets and disappointments of the characters become evident in these reflections that seem to haunt him. When Draupadi contemplates the end result of the war she says, "What a terrible culmination!... When viewed in the background of the tragedy, it is merely a question of evil pride that paved the way to the destruction of the Kuru race – nay

the whole Kshatriya Clan. Where lies the honour saved?" (Balakrishnan, 32). Draupadi's reflection shows her to be a mature person who looks back in time to decipher the real truths of life.

The discourse moves back many years to the time and circumstances of the birth of Karna. Kunti is given the chance to explain her past. She talks of the vow bestowed on her by Durvasav that she could summon any of the gods at her will and fulfil her desires. She summons the Sun God who visited her and gifted her with a son, whom she set afloat on a casket on the river Ganga, not having the courage to raise her son as a single mother. Soon after this narration, the discourse gets back to the present where Yudhistira watched young widows doing penance for their dead husbands and felt guilty that he was responsible for their misery. His mind was troubled by the thought of not having gained anything in spite of winning the Great War.

The narrator's focus now shifts to Krishna who clears Draupadi's confusions with his advice using many images like that of the passage of the sun during the day. He makes it clear that everyone is bound by destiny. He became the interpolated narrator by narrating his meeting with Karna. In a long discourse Krishna reveals to Karna that he is the eldest born of Kunti and the elder brother of the Pandavas, so he must join the Pandavas side and forsake Suyodhan. The narration of this meeting is again revisioned in Draupadi's mind where she sees Karna being offered the kingdom of the Pandavas and the royal throne with Draupadi as his consort. There is another analepsis soon after this where Kunti recounts to her the meeting she had with Karna on a fateful day in the presence of the midday sun. As she stood behind her son in his shadow her mind goes back to

the time when he was a baby she placed on the river in a casket which was floating away from her at high speed. This simultaneous prior and present narration highlights the turbulence of her mind at that moment.

Most part of *And Now Let Me Sleep* is in the form of such analysis of past incidents or moral issues in the form of discussions among the characters. The narrator here does not present a linear flow of the events, but rather brings the past into the present. Sanjaya as the extra-diegetic narrator explains about the conflicts in the mind of Bheeshma as he fought against his grandchildren. Being a righteous man he could not transgress his duties as a Kshatriya, but he also could not lay down his weapons and accept defeat easily. He explains to Draupadi that both these heroes Bheeshma and Drona who were fighting for Suyodhan feared the defeat of the Pandavas more than their death. They knew that the war would ruin their race. Though they fought against the Pandavas in their heart they prayed for their victory. “The great heroes entangled in the chain of obligations considered Kurukshetra as a sacrificial altar. Knowingly they surrendered their souls on that altar” (Balakrishnan, 146).

Draupadi notices the pain on the face of Yudhistira as he relives that scene in his mind. When he contemplates that scene of the killing of Karna in the battlefield and hears the description of the other details related to the incident from Sanjaya, he experiences the pain and fear he had not felt at the time of the incident.

When one hears the description of that act from another person even in the eyes of the doer, the incident gets transformed. Fears that were not experienced when he was actually writhing in the whirlpool of action- the pains that were not precipitated in the consciousness at that moment, all

these are experienced by the subject when the actions are revived by somebody's description (Balakrishnan, 164).

In the given quote we notice how the descriptions of incidents by different persons in different circumstances give a different colouring to the same incident. This is why many revisionist works give a different shade to the same story. P.K.

Balakrishnan uses a narrator who expounds the reason and motives of the actions of the characters more than just stating the facts or introducing the events quickly.

Similarly, here the death of Karna has been dealt with many times and is an example of 'iteration', a concept introduced by Genette. Yudhistira's mind goes back several times to this incident and each time the agony of his mind increases.

In the same manner Draupadi's mind too is stuck with the ideal of love.

From the time of her *swayamvar* she craved for being loved by her husband. Instead of one she is married to five husbands. She has a nightmare in which a lofty figure approaches her and asks her if she was a chaste woman. In reply her mind produces another question: "Have you ever got love? ...Draupadi, have you ever had a protector even while you possess five husbands alive?" (Balakrishnan, 171). In this psychological exposition of Draupadi's mind P.K. Balakrishnan tries to underscore all the latent burdens in her unconscious which do not allow her to rest peacefully.

Balakrishnan has done a selective presentation of the characters in his revisionist version. Here Sanjaya is the explicator who justifies the actions of everyone in the epic. He has three listeners who also actively participate in the discussion with their doubts too. They are Draupadi, Kunti and Yudhistira. Though Kunti's four other sons are part of the story, they appear here only in the descriptions made by these three characters. Similarly Karna is given great

importance in this version. His life and actions are minutely analyzed by these four. He has been given his due as the eldest Pandava. He does not participate directly in the story, but appears in the discussions and remembrances of these three characters.

The scene and time of action keeps shifting here from the present to the time of the archery contest between Arjuna and Karna at Hastinapur and Kunti fainting at the gallery seeing her sons confronting each other. From here the scene shifts to the seventeenth day of battle at Kurukshetra. The discourse time and story time match for a while because we hear the dialogues exchanged by Salya and Karna as they proceed to meet Arjuna for the battle. Sanjaya continues to be the narrator for the last portion of the battle between Karna and Arjun. Every minute act and word is mentioned here by Sanjaya, he stops narrating soon after the fall of Karna. He sees that his narratees are no more mentally present before him, though physically present. Balakrishnan thus chose to focus on this aspect in his narration. He decides not to deal with the rest of the epic in this novel. He sticks to the relationship between Yudhistira, Karna and Draupadi alone. Unlike other novels we see a prologue and a conclusion as chapters in the text which is not found in the other three novels selected for study here.

Sanjaya's narration is a contemporary one with the events happening during his life time. He has the authority of being the narrator who witnessed things first hand owing to his divine vision. P.K.Balakrishnan picks out some incidents from the epic to portray what happened after the war. Though the Pandavas won the war, they were grief-stricken and guilt-ridden at the end and were at a loss to see their loved ones dead. Their minds, especially, that of Yudhistira and Draupadi, are the

spaces where another moral battle happens as the struggle to find answers for their bewildered questions.

The treatment of the epic *Mahabharata* in P.K.Balakrishnan's version is varies considerably from that of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Palace of Illusions*. It is the viewpoint of Draupadi on the events of the epic that gets emphasized here. Divakaruni had this aim in mind even before she started writing the novel, as she has pointed out in the author's note:

I was left unsatisfied by the portrayal of the women...they remain shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious, their emotions portrayed only when they affected the lives of the male heroes, their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If I ever wrote a book...I would place the women in the forefront of the action. I would uncover the story that lay invisible between the lines of the men's exploits (xiv-xv)

Her protagonist Draupadi asserts herself saying that she would be the chronicler of her own destiny. She becomes the agent and decides to say things from her angle. Drawing her identity based on the prophecy during the time of her birth from fire, she finds the apt name for herself as the 'offspring of vengeance'. She doubts whether the prophecy that she would change the course of history would ever come true. She wonders whether she has the courage and capacity to be the heroine of history. She even goes to the extent of thinking "And shut up as I was inside this mausoleum of a palace, how would history even find me?" (Divakaruni, 5). She wants to present an authentic account of her life different from all that has been said about her in the past. She thinks of her life like a story which can be retold as many

times as different versions. She coaxes her nurse Dhai Ma to narrate the story of her birth often as a past time. The siblings told each other the same story and tried to give a different angle at each telling. She was dissatisfied with the previous constructions of her life. She wishes the narrative to focus only on her by playing the lead role in the story. She felt many restrictions in the earlier versions so she wants an independent presentation. The space for such a presentation has an impact on her narrative. In the beginning she stays in her father's palace which was like a fortress, without trees. Her father had ordered the cutting of all trees in the vicinity of the palace as they would obstruct the view of any approaching enemy's army. In the palace she imagines she would own one day, by contrast, there would be innumerable trees with "birds singing in mango and custard apple orchards, butterflies flitting among jasmines..." (Divakaruni, 7). The contrast between the place she wishes to dwell in and the place she is forced to occupy now is evident and it emphasizes the concept of space being an active force rather than being passive background.

Another unique aspect of Divakaruni's retelling is the strong desire in Draupadi to emphasize her role in bringing together the five brothers whom she was forced to wed. While the epic gives a mythical explanation to her quandary as a blessing from her previous birth, she takes it as her credit that it was due to her that they stayed together as observed from her own words:

I'd played a crucial role in bringing them to their destiny. I'd shared their hardship in Khandav. I'd helped them design this unique palace which so many longed to see. If they were pearls, I was the gold wire on which they

were strung. Alone, they would have scattered, each to his dusty corner
(Divakaruni, 151)

Divakaruni's version is found to be at variance with the epic at many points which are not much familiar to most people. She even brings in the oracle Sage Vyasa to play a role in her life. There is a comment by the narrator here that the sage was composing her story as she was living it. She wanted to know the ending. But he does not give away the climax of his composition. So there is little authorial intrusion in her version. While bringing Vyasa into the narrative she seems to propose that there is not just one authentic or reliable version but many more.

Perhaps this was the reason why Divakaruni uses three different narrators to narrate the same occasion of the siblings' birth. Of the three, Dhri, Draupadi and Dhai Ma, it is Draupadi alone who is anxious to give an undistorted representation of her part. She even doubts if any one of them would be able to give the right view: "Were the stories we told each other true? Who knows? At the best of times, a story is a slippery thing... perhaps that was why it changed with each telling. Or is that the nature of all stories... the reason for their power?" (Divakaruni, 15). During one instance she records her condescending to Dhri to let him have his say in justifying their father's actions. Even after that she doubts the reliability of his version: "Having shaped our father's motivations the way he wished them to be, he was willing to let me tell the rest" (Divakaruni, 17). These words seem to echo the current trend in retellings to shape the discourse to suit the individual author's particular viewpoint.

In *Palace of Illusions* one notices at the outset that the narrative gives a summary of

“the long lonely years” of Draupadi’s childhood right at the beginning (Divakaruni, 1). It is an analepsis of the early part of her life filled with memories of Dhai Ma telling her the story of her birth many times over, which was the only means of entertainment for her. Soon after this the narrator specifically mentions the discourse time, “This winter afternoon, sitting cross - legged in the meager sunlight that managed to find its way through my slit of a window...” (Divakaruni, 1). The story time moves into another analepsis in the form of a reminiscence of the incidents on the day she was born. From this point of her birth the narration in Dhai Ma’s analepsis goes further back to those thirty days of the yajna (the fire ceremony), in which all the members of the royal family and the servants participated. Dhai Ma takes up the narration here and the story time is paused for more descriptions. The discourse time is longer than the story time here as many descriptions are included to elaborate on how the yajna resulted in King Drupad begetting the son he had prayed for, and the daughter who comes unasked for. “It was the thirtieth day...when your royal father poured that last pot of ghee into the flames, we all held our breath” (Divakaruni 3). These are the anticipatory moments before the momentous birth of the siblings which is considered the starting point of the story time. This is how Divakaruni establishes her focus on Draupadi right at the beginning.

This kind of opening finds a contrast in Rajagopalachari’s *Mahabharata* beginning by stating the original intention for composing this huge epic and the plan to include a scribe as amanuensis for Vyasa the composer. As Lord Brahma appears before him he requests him to provide a scribe as he felt the task was too huge to be done by him alone. The opening lines of this version are as follows:

BHAGAVAN VYASA, the celebrated compiler of the Vedas, was the son of the great sage Parasara. It was he who gave to the world the divine epic of the Mahabharata.

Having conceived the Mahabharata he thought of the means of giving the sacred story to the world. He meditated on Brahma, the Creator, who manifested himself before him. Vyasa saluted him with bowed head and folded hands and prayed:

“Lord, I have conceived an excellent work, but cannot think of one who can take it down to my dictation”

Brahma extolled Vyasa and said: “O sage, invoke Ganapati and beg him to be your amanuensis” (Rajagopalachari, 4-5)

As a contrast to these opening lines of Rajaji, Divakaruni directly fixes her focus on Draupadi, after which there is a pause to mention the place of her birth. She describes it as one of the richest kingdoms in Bharat (Ancient India). The story time is paused here as the narrator describes the dull grey fortress of a palace where they live, and contrasts it with her vision of the palace which she hopes to possess someday. The space she imagines that would be hers sometime in future proves to be too good to be true: “I closed my eyes and imagined a riot of colour and sound, birds singing in mango and custard apple orchards, butterflies flitting among jasmines and in the midst of it – but I could not imagine yet the shape that my future home would take” (Divakaruni, 7). Divakaruni uses space as a dimension that affects the emotions and feelings of the characters as in the description of her Palace as imagined by Draupadi. The space of the *yajna* where the life of the protagonist begins is also an important one that gets scenically depicted in *Palace*

of Illusions. The space filled with fire and smoke where nothing is visible clearly with a divine voice echoing the prophecy of the siblings is an important heterotope in the early part of the novel. Divakaruni's choice of events here suggests her motives in restricting the story time to compress the large picture of the epic into the small canvas of the discourse time. Buildings function as heterotopes in novels that can set in motion events and trigger emotions in characters. Events sometimes can only be narrated after their setting is established to be effective. Just as Bakhtin has stated that space in novels become "charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Divakaruni, 84). This is an important point with regard to the disrobing of Draupadi in all the four novels as the space for this action is an assembly of the Kingdom where all the chief characters of the story are in view of the event. This is a moment of cultural shock where a woman becomes the object of the male gaze of her own family and the enemies of her family.

Divakaruni's take on the epic deviates from the standard or established versions here as she has provided more space and freedom to her heroine, something that is not found in the canon. She uses the narrative past tense throughout to create an impression of the distance between the narrator's present and the events that she narrates. As there is a shift in her thought process, she uses the free indirect speech to vocalize her doubt regarding the character of Krishna though she is often fascinated by his character. Divakaruni makes an attempt to humanize the divine mythical figure of Krishna here. As we get into the thick of action here she introduces a story within this story. It is the story of how Drona's wife cheated her son into believing her trick of mixing flour with jaggery to make him believe that it was milk when he expressed his desire to drink milk. Those days

milk was something that they could not afford to buy owing to their poverty. This short retrospection has been introduced into the narrative as a heterodiegetic analepsis, which means that this is a flashback that is not part of the main plot of the narrative. Chatman considers these as “internal anachronies ... which do not interfere with the interrupted story” (3). The function of this analepsis is to reveal the past of a character that is not part of the main narrative. Many more such analepses follow in which the friendship between Drona and Drupad during their childhood and the incidents that later led to their fierce rivalry get scenically depicted. Finally the siblings who were narrating this story taking turns come to the point where they talk about the insult and burning desire to seek revenge compelled King Drupad to perform the yajna to beget a son for this purpose. This retelling of the anecdote made Draupadi wonder if “a story gains power with retelling” because everytime it was narrated it reminded her brother about purpose of his birth which was to kill Drona (Divakaruni, 20). It is to be noted that whenever Divakaruni introduces such analepsis it appears in italics. She also makes Dristadyumna the narratee of this part: “*And then you were called into the world, Dhri. So that what started with milk could end one day in blood*” (Divakaruni, 20)

Some sections of the novel have been stretched to include descriptions of landscape or memories because the incidents do not contribute much to the development of the story and the emphasis is on the thought process of the narrator. There are times when Draupadi reflects on her position in the palace and the kinds of people with whom she interacts. This point leads to further clarification on the impact of time on everyone, as Krishna replies: “As for being pawns...aren't we all pawns in the hands of Time, the greatest player of them all?”(Divakaruni, 58).

Another significant twist in Divakaruni's retelling is the sensitive portrayal of the mutual attraction between Draupadi and Karna. But the relationship does not turn out to be a romantic one because both of them cause much pain to each other through their behavior. Though both of them face insult and neglect from everyone, the embers of a romantic relationship remains in them till the last moments of their life. It started the moment Draupadi's eyes fell on the portrait of Karna among the portraits of the suitors vying for her hand in the swayamvar. That moment is significant for the rest of the story because that was when she realizes that there was some unseen force that pulls her towards him. Hence this moment is elaborated well in the words of Panchali:

Older than the prince and austere – faced, the man sat upright, his lean body wary, as though he knew the world to be a dangerous place. Though in the midst of a court, he seemed utterly lonely. His only ornaments were a pair of gold earrings and a curiously patterned gold armour unlike anything I had seen. His eyes were filled with an ancient sadness. They pulled me into them. (Divakaruni, 69)

With this quote Divakaruni introduces the romantic attraction between Karna and Draupadi, which will lead to many more twists later in the novel. She uses many more episodes to show their attraction flourish. She goes to the extent of introducing the episode where Karna's soul on leaving his mortal body pauses over Draupadi taking the form of a glow radiating all over her. On seeing him die on the battlefield she was ready to forgive him for the insults he had inflicted on her in the past. In the end she seems to be satisfied that at least Karna's spirit could realize what she had not been able to tell him.

The space of the *swayamvar* of Panchali is a space of struggle and also the place where her wedded life began. A very hard –to –win contest was used as a standard for choosing the winner to take her hand in marriage. Even after the winner was declared for the contest there is a fight among the contestants over the difficulty and unfairness of the contest. Thus the wedded life of Draupadi is among the first struggles she encounters before facing many others throughout her life. This is the space that adds more uncalled for struggles into her life. She says in this context:

Later, long after a forest was razed and a palace filled with wonders built in its place, after the game of dice, after treachery and loss, banishment and return, after the war with its blinding mountains of bones, bards would immortalize the *swayamvar* where, some claim, it all began (Divakaruni, 93).

Again the narrator reverses the chronology of the incidents – she begins by saying how she followed her husband barefoot in the hot mid-day sun and then reverts to the *swayamvar* and how she happened to marry him. The way Arjun contested and won the competition and all the chaos that followed is summarized quickly because it all happened in a hurry. They escaped from the other contestants who were furious and wanted to kill him. Arjun very quickly subdues them and hurriedly takes her along to his home without even taking part in the wedding feast. They walked miles into the forest where Arjun’s family was waiting. The time taken to sum up Arjun’s victory and the hastily arranged marriage ceremony is very short. The contrast between the elaborate description of Karna’s past and the quick summary of the result of the *swayamvar* shows how this novel deviates from

traditional narratives. It also shows the shift in importance from the male heroes to the heroine Panchali.

On their way to Hastinapur the narrator's imagination is fired again as she had imagined the result of the contest earlier— imagining the home she would step into very soon. It brings us back to the topic of space here. This quote emphasizes her preference for open spaces in the homes she inhabits and contrasts it with the congested, prison –like palace built by her father:

I fantasized about a structure that would, in every way, be the opposite of my father's fortress: airy and effulgent, with windows everywhere and doors opening onto generous balconies. Its walls would be simmering shimmering red sandstone. Its gardens would be a celebration of colour and birdsong (Divakaruni, 126).

This is a pause in the discourse to describe the beautiful palace of Hastinapur Draupadi imagines to be. But the narrator's imaginary palace is far from the reality of the palace at Hastinapur. On her arrival, the Narrator had a feeling that some unknown terror awaited to strike her any moment. Though outwardly there was splendor inside the grandeur there seems to be something rotten. She notes, "beneath the gay pomp crouched something ominous and slaving that wished my husbands ill...I felt it approaching, though I could not guess from which direction. It made me long to tunnel underground and hide" (Divakaruni, 127).

In the selected novels buildings function as heterotopes and are crucial for the topochronic dimension of the narrative. The main spaces in focus here are forests and palaces. In Draupadi's narrative it is her father King Drupada's palace that makes her confinement there feel like a prison. The only place she feels at

home is the Indraprastha built by the magic of Maya. She is warned by Krishna not to identify herself with the palace because it may cause her sorrow. This outstanding building, perfect in every sense, is meant to cause further cleavage in the relations between the cousins. The will to possess this space is one of the earliest reasons for the disastrous war between them. The Palace of Draupadi plays a crucial role in the fate of the Pandavas and Draupadi. It was the enticing structure and facilities of the palace that provoked Duryodhan to try to possess it along with its beautiful mistress Draupadi. The dimensions and appearance of this structure was deliberately conditioned to evoke specific reactions from the onlookers. It had all the materialistic embellishments that the architect was capable of providing. The space in the palace is highlighted and described by Bannerjee to press into the minds of the reader the ethereal and illusionary nature of the palace. Panchali and the Palace- the space she wanted to occupy are both given prominence in the novel. Hence she is given the chance to find an appropriate name for it. She says, "This creation of yours that's going to be the envy of every king on Bharat – we'll call it the Palace of Illusions" (146). Divakaruni has chosen to elucidate in detail the intricate design and architecture of the palace at Indraprastha. Just as Draupadi's life is inextricably linked to the prophecy here the spaces where she spends her life are also linked to her fate. While the palaces are spaces of confinement, the huts in the forests where they spend half of their lives are open spaces where the different castes could mingle easily. Draupadi emerges as the protector of the tribes and she tries to bring conciliation between the Aryan and non- Aryan races in *Palace of Illusions*.

As with all other revisionists, Divakaruni too does not try to include all the incidents in the fabula of the epic. Instead she quickly sums up large chunks of the time line of the epic as in this quote: “A decade passed thus, as in a dream. And as in a dream, I recall those years only faintly, the way one remembers the colors of a serene sunset” (Divakaruni, 153-54). Thus the passage of time, i.e, a decade is being summed up as the remembrance of ‘the colors of a serene sunset’. The narrator leaves dark hints on the catastrophe which would unfold in her life very soon in her remarks: “The current of destiny seemed to have flung us ashore and receded. Not knowing that it was gathering in a tidal wave, we chafed in our calmness, wondering if it would ever claim us again” (Divakaruni, 155). Later in the novel Krishna compares time to a lotus flower whose petals open one at a time, revealing the mystery of that moment. As she was thinking of this striking comparison, Draupadi was unaware of what was soon to be revealed to her of the gambling of her honour taking place at that moment in the Kaurava court and says, “I had no idea of the petal that had opened a few hours earlier in Duryodhan’s new hall” (Divakaruni, 188). The narrator refers to the bygone times as petals that unfurled earlier and all of them connected to the same flower in this amazing metaphor. The petal that unfolded when Yudhistir started waging everything he possessed on the game was the first one of the series. Sadly she notes: “And this game connected to all those earlier petals, shriveled now, those games played in Indraprastha, luring my husband in – Sakuni had taken Duryodhan’s place as Yudhisthir’s opponent. The petal unfurled, revealing the skill he’d hidden until now” (Divakaruni, 188-89). The passage of time and the events happening during

that time are thus compared to a natural phenomenon such as the unfurling of the petals of a flower.

All these events lead finally to the inevitable eighteen –day war at Kurukshetra. Divakaruni again deviates from the epic by making Draupadi witness the war first hand through the divine sight bestowed on her by Vyasa. It is through her eyes that the readers are able to picture the battle. “Thus the war went on, the physical battle outside matching the conflicts within each warrior” (Divakaruni, 266), she says summing up entire episodes of the war. The battle and the killings of important persons in Draupadi’s life are summarized by her. The purpose of Divakaruni’s version is not to present the details of the battle or on the grounds of righteousness on which the battle was fought. Rather, it was to show how these events had affected Draupadi personally which is why she treats the battle summarily here. Draupadi’s description of the war ends exactly the moment Karna gets killed in the battle. After that she loses interest in witnessing the battle and says:

After the death of Karna, I didn’t want to climb the hill again. I was no longer interested in the war. I didn’t want anyone to realize this, so I continued to go up there. But once there I would lie on the ground and close my eyes and try to send my mind far away. I realized now that the main reason I’d accepted the sight from Vyasa was for the opportunity to watch Karna the way I never could in real life, to decipher the enigma that he was (Divakaruni, 299).

From this quote it is clear how Divakaruni develops her subject on the impressions of the fabula of the epic on Draupadi’s mind. That is why Draupadi is not interested in describing the war further from the point of the death of Karna.

The treatment of time in *Palace of Illusions* shows how Divakaruni selects and edits most part of the epic to suit her purpose to make the story appealing to her modern audience. She chooses to elaborate on some portions while leaving out many other incidents. Some parts of the narrative also appear to be drawn out of the imagination of the novelist. While giving the novel its compact form, Divakaruni, like many others who drew from the poetic form of the epic, made many changes in the treatment of time – elaborating some incidents while condensing many others. In terms of space too this divergence is observed. The last space to be mentioned in the novel is the Himavan Mountains where the five Pandavas ascend to Heaven. Though Panchali accompanies them in the beginning, her foot slips and she falls. Yudhstira reasons that her sin was to have loved only one of her husbands, and not all of them equally. Her pain upon her husbands' desertion is soon replaced by joy as she finds her soul letting go of her body and rising to meet all the people she loved in her life in an empty white space: "We rise; the shapes cluster around us in welcome, dissolving and forming and dissolving again like fireflies in a summer evening" (Divakaruni, 360). The novel does not move the extremities of gloom and despair as in P.K.Balakrishnan's *And Now Let Me Sleep* by depicting the murder of the sons and brother of Draupadi on the night of the victory of the Pandavas. Instead, she chooses to wind up her novel on a positive note.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, in a similar vein, attempts to go deep into the psychological plane of its protagonist Draupadi as she has stated in the Afterword to her novel, "Draupadi is a challenge to womanhood, the embodied form of action, devotion and power" (400). The novel written in the form of a letter to her benefactor, Krishna can be taken as her interior monologue on the unusual

circumstances of her life and her reactions to them. Ray begins *Yajnaseni* with the word '*finis*' written at the end of a letter she writes to Krishna where she discusses about her strange life of being a woman married to five husbands:

But after writing *finis* it seems as though I have not been able to write anything at all. The long drawn tale of life brimming with tears and laughter lies fluttering like a blank scroll on the breast of inexorable time ...After all has ended the auspicious beginning remains. Beginning of what, and whose end? That which is creation is annihilation. Inauguration is itself dissolution – that is mighty Time, eternal and infinite (Ray, 1)

Here the narrative voice sums up the concept of time – “eternal and infinite” – no beginning and no end. In the beginning of the novel the narrator philosophizes about beginnings and endings. The narrator is disappointed at being left alone to die on Mount Meru as evident from her words: “They are gone, those people, who knows where, following whom throughout life these tender feet shed blood bore pain” (Ray,1). Though it is actually the end of her life, this is where she realizes the mystery of her life.

The story time starts at a point where Draupadi followed her husbands to ascend Mount Meru towards heaven, but her feet slips and she falls down. She is shocked to notice that none of her husbands turn back or wait for her. While she awaits her death there she writes this blood – drenched letter to lord Krishna telling everything about her past. After all the incidents of the fabula if the epic have taken place, this point where the protagonist is about to leave her mortal frame for heavenly abode is where the novel *Yajnaseni* is set to begin. This starting point is different from the one Divakaruni chooses to open her novel, where she starts with

the description of the palace of King Drupad and the story of the birth of the protagonist from fire. It is only at the end of the first chapter that the narrator reveals who she was. She identifies herself as the wife of five husbands, who has been counted as a sati and pauses here to reflect on her life: “This is why despite the varied experience of life it remains shrouded in the mystery of joy and sorrow, prosperity and poverty, love and loss, life and death” (Ray, 2). The time is identified as a *Dwaparyug* and she is about to set down the story of her life in indelible letters at the moment of her death.

Mount Meru is an important space in the narrative where the narrator begins her narration. The foothills of the Himalayas where ends the last worldly journey of the Pandavas and their wife is another heterotope in the novel where nature seems to be in control and will decide who should proceed to heaven and who should stay back. Here Draupadi falls on her way up and sadly notes: “Yet, I had but touched the golden dust of Himalaya’s foothills when my feet slipped and I fell!” (Ray, 3). This is the space where she pens her letter to her beloved Krishna telling of her life and times in *Yajnaseni*. Here it is not just the outer landscape but the inner landscape of the protagonists that gets attention. This is the virtual space of the mind of Draupadi that is presented by Pratibha Ray here.

In *Yajnaseni*, it is important to note the time of narration, because the time when she is writing her letter, the last stage in her life allows her to have a mature view of things and examine her life as a spectator rather than a participant. She has a greater understanding of herself and the actions of others. To show the cyclic process of life she begins and ends the letter with the word ‘finis’: “It seems that my story remains incomplete. Having finished the letter, I am going through it. Having

read it, I am wondering if I should begin the letter all over again. Begin from the end, end from the beginning...what is this that I am doing?" (Ray, 398). Draupadi's life narrated in the end part of her life in this painful letter to Krishna is a reminder that every tale could be narrated in a different way from all the earlier ones. Her life is open ended like the letter she begins at the end. She seems to suggest that there are many more versions of her story to be written that challenge or become counter – narratives with subversive voices. Draupadi was forced to reconsider her life the moment she fell off the Himalaya on her last journey with her husbands when she was shocked by the callous disregard of her husbands, none of whom turned back to help her:

What agonies did I not suffer for preserving dharma? I had thought that on the strength of my adherence to dharma and infidelity as a wife I would be able to accompany my husbands to heaven. Yet, I had but touched the golden dust of Himalaya's foothills when my feet slipped and I fell! ...If man suffers the consequences of his own deeds, then offering myself at the feet of five husbands for the sake of preserving Yudhishtir's dharma, why did I have to bear the whole world's mockery, sneers, innuendos, abuse, scorn and slander?(Ray,2-3)

These words of Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* show how she has evolved and has come to question all that has transpired between her and her husbands. She wants to show the truth from her side. Her pre-ordained life beginning with her divine birth from fire should not have caused much worry to her. Instead she finds herself in emotional turmoil often. Her agonized search for peace is poured out in her own words: "Only a life of peace and quiet, a world filled with husband and children

was what I wanted – which is every woman’s desire –not a jot more than that. But why was my life growing so very dramatic?”(Ray, 148). In this novel we often encounter Draupadi in a melancholic tone ruminating on the peculiarities of her life, especially her polygamous marriage to five men taking turns for being her husband.

Similarly in the concept of time, the narratives do not meticulously follow the characters moment by moment to report everything that happens to them. There cannot be any strictly chronological sequence of events in any narrative. The issue of time in sequencing events in narratives has been problematized by Rimmon - Kenan:

The notion of story-time involves a convention which identifies it with an ideal chronological order, or what is sometimes called ‘natural chronology’.

In fact strict chronological succession can only be found in stories with a single line or even with a single character. The minute there is more than one character, events may become simultaneous and the story is often multilinear rather than unilinear. (17)

Further, it is to be noted that every narrative is mediated by the consciousness of the writer so that all types of sequencing is done with a purpose to narrate from a particular angle. Much of the narrative time is reduced to only important sections that get told. Such vital events and the spaces in which they are performed form the subject of discussion in this chapter.

Mahabharata is one such narrative whose story time deals with many generations of the Kurus spanning over centuries that are not accurately accounted for. Some events are elaborated, while some get skipped. There is no linear flow in the narrative. There are deviations, interruptions, gaps, digressions etc. The original

version itself is not a fixed text with a series of versions getting produced from time to time. The flexibility allowed to the revisionists has helped in shaping each of the versions to become noteworthy. Each version's specific needs of perspective require their authors' to resort to changes in time line and sequential order and spatial parameters.

This kind of shift in sequential order is observed in *Yajnaseni* where a large sequence of events of the growing up years of the narrator has been quickly summed up so as to reach the point of her *swayamvar*. The narrative starting with the event of her birth from fire cuts short to the end result of her *swayamvar* when the greatest archer of the whole nation would win her in the contest. This reference to later events in the narrative has been termed *prolepsis* by Genette which he designates as, "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (40). This *prolepsis* is followed by Krishna providing an *analepsis* going long back to the ancestors of both Arjun and himself. As quickly the story jumps forward to anticipate the wedding of Arjun and Draupadi when Krishna mentions that Arjun would be the right one to win the hand of Draupadi in the *swayamvar*. Ironically, King Drupad's thoughts go further when he thinks of the *proleptic* dialogue he would deliver to his rival Drona after the marriage: "Drona! Till today you laboured to make my son – in – law adept. If you had known that your best student would become my son- in – law, perhaps you would not have taught him all the arts of warfare" (Ray, 23). Thus the time line in the plot of *Yajnaseni* shift from past to present and back again in quick succession producing in turn a unique fabula of the epic.

When the next chapter opens the same incident of Draupadi's swayamvar mentioned cursorily in the previous chapter is treated more elaborately describing in many pages the arrangements made for it. First about the impossible task set for the archery contest so that none other than the finest of archers could win, then about the pageantry and pomp throughout the kingdom. Since there is no forward movement of the plot here, this can be considered a pause. This part can also be considered as an example of iteration, whereby the same incident is referred to many times in the fabula. Most of the actions in the narrative are summarized in the dialogues of the characters. There is also concrete reference to time –“Spring was in the air. In the month of Phagun...” (Ray, 26). As her *sakhi* Nitambini decorates her bridal bed for her night with Arjun according to the taste of Draupadi- using only fragrant flowers instead of pearls and gems she says forebodingly: “Despite being a princess why was my taste thus? Perhaps there was a fateful purpose behind this! For years this queen of a kingdom would have to remain a queen of the forest – this I did not know, but my fate was not unaware of that.” (Ray, 79). Draupadi mentions this as a proleptic comment on the future events in her life.

While Divakaruni in *Palace of Illusions* has conveyed her discourse without much stretches, Pratibha Ray uses many such pauses where the narrator not only describes the setting, but also philosophizes about life. Every time she depicts the scene of Draupadi meeting Karna she dedicates much time and space to elaborate on this tragic hero. The dramatic irony is evident in the words, “Oh! Why was he not a Kshatriya! Why was he not son of Kunti?” (Ray, 109). These words highlight the hard hitting reality that he was indeed the first born of Kunti which will be revealed later in the plot. When Draupadi goes to Hastinapur along with her

husbands as they were invited, the narrator first describes the welcome accorded to Krishna and Balram, and quickly goes back to Karna wondering whom he was waiting to welcome. There are more such scenes in *Yajnaseni* where the narrator deems it more important to focus on the actions of Karna than on the important events in the plot of the epic. In this particular scene describing the welcome accorded to the Pandavas and Draupadi the narrative is focused on showing Karna's reaction, not the one hundred Kaurava brothers or the five Pandavas. Once the narrator completed mentioning the part concerning Karna she leaves out the rest as ellipsis. There are many instances of ellipses whereby many major incidents are treated scantily and some minor incidents are elaborated to highlight a certain slant of the story.

Even the eighteen day war is quickly narrated in this manner: "Time was invincible, infinite. Eighteen days were so insignificant in it, so ordinary. Like the blinking of an eye, how swiftly was the horror of the eighteen day war swept away in the current of time!" (Ray, 371). The narrator uses a metaphorical comparison of the eighteen-day war to a wave that rose to the surface and then was not seen anymore: "The eighteen – day current of the time – ocean obliterated everything. Everything was destroyed. In the ocean of great Time, a small wave, the battle of Kurukshetra, rose and disappeared. The war was over" (Ray, 371). Thus the crucial battle of Kurukshetra is which decided the fate of the lineage of the Kurus is treated as of no consequence in Draupadi's narrative. Hence most part of the battle scenes praising the valour and might of the Pandavas and the day-wise account of the battle enumerated in twenty – nine chapters in Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* are treated summarily here.

The episode of Arjun's *swargarohan* or his stay in swarg (heaven) in Indraloka learning dance and music is not mentioned by Divakaruni because she has tried to present a contemporary and realistic rendering of the epic in *Palace of Illusions*. In *Yajnaseni* Pratibha Ray has tried to retain the mythological elements in the epic and presented the same episode in such a way that it appears natural for a person to stay in heaven for some days and then return to this world. All those years of exile of the Pandavas and Draupadi are described in a very elaborate manner. At many places the discussion among the characters is presented as scenes that have the same discourse time and story time.

The next novel to be discussed in this context is *Bhima: Lone Warrior* by M.T. which rewrites the *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Bhima, the second Pandava brother. This new perspective shows Bhima having a divided personality – a muscular superhero who is also a very soft - natured and sensitive person. Despite his physical prowess he is deemed to be dull-witted even by his brothers and wife. Bhima's mind seethes in anger and pain when he is always treated as inferior to the other brothers, especially Arjuna. Bhima's personality and peculiarity find mention in the preface to the earlier translation of *Rendamoozham*, titled *Second Turn* where M.T. remarks, "Bhima was not only large in size but also large hearted. The Bhima of the *Mahabharata* is human, archetypal. A classic example of a man with human weaknesses and strengths" (xvi). M.T.'s genius in characterization, technique, form and structure is distinctly perceived in his version of the *Mahabharata*.

The narrator invokes the *soothas* and *magathas* before beginning the story telling and thus identifies himself with the traditional story-tellers. The soothas and magathas were the first collaborators who contributed immensely to the

construction of the epic through their additions. The frame narrative dwells on the last part of the life of the Pandavas and their wife Draupadi. The narratorial voice gives graphic details of the disintegration of the Yadava clan of Dwaraka and shows each of the Pandavas' reaction to the sight just before they begin their journey towards the Himalayas. The duration of the episode is roughly the time taken by them to witness the destruction. The narrator introduces one by one the five Pandavas in the descending order of their ages leaving out Bhima, the second Pandava. Along with describing their actions at that moment the narrator also throws a hint on their basic instinct that had lasted so long in their life. For instance, this is his comment on Nakula's posture: "He had not given up the habit of standing with his head tilted slightly back and his right fist firmly planted on his waist" (V.Nair, 9). The protagonists are introduced in the narrative when they are already in the last stage of their lives and on their path to salvation.

It is only after describing all the four brothers that the narrator mentions about Bhima, the second Pandava, in a summary recollecting the days he spent in Dwaraka to learn the strategies of waging war with a mace. After Bhima is placed centerstage, the frame narrative is paused at the moment Bhima sits down near the fallen Draupadi on the slopes of Himavan and his mind goes back to their youthful days and the time they returned from Shatasringa to Hastinapur with their mother Kunti. The narrative thus goes on an analepsis mode to connect the rest of the story with the present. In the chapter titled, "The Murmurs of a Cyclone", M.T makes this episode of the travel from Shatasringa to Hastinapur the first in the sequential order of narration in the *sjuzhet*. The opening scene of the novel is totally different from the other three retellings discussed in this chapter earlier. Divakaruni begins her

novel with the birth of Draupadi from fire; P.K.Balakrishnan renders the horrifying picture of the burning tents and the blood swathed battlefield of Kurukshetra; and Pratibha Ray dwells on the last moments of Yajanseni's life on earth when she fell down on the slopes of Himavan and is left behind by her husbands. These opening scenes of each of the retelling are a device that helps them to fix their particular perspective on the epic.

The first chapter of *Bhima Lone Warrior* consists of many descriptions of the people and the surroundings in Hastinapur as observed by the child narrator Bhima when he arrives there with his family after the death of his father Pandu. Here the narrator even mentions that he was a five –year old kid at that time. As he looks back at the early years of his life he was much impressed by the pomp and pageantry of his father's homeland. This was a very important moment in his life when he left the forest and came to live in the the royal palace. This was the first time that the Pandava Princes are introduced to the public in Hastinapur. To underscore the importance of this moment the narrator judiciously juxtaposes scenes as well as pauses in the narration. For example there is a scene where he introduces each of the brothers followed immediately by a pause to show the reaction of the person referred to.

When Gandhari and Dhritarastra are introduced, their history and appearance are also recounted. Dhritarastra's throne, jewels and even the look on his face are noted. For example the narrator observes in a hyperbole: "King Dhritarastra had the strength to subdue a thousand elephants in rut" (V.Nair, 24). In this way whenever new characters are introduced some amount of description is provided in pauses. The young narrator, Bhima also notices the jewels worn by his

cousins Duryodhan and Dussasan. He also keenly observes the actions and behavior of his brothers. At the end of this chapter the narrator again notes the time of narration to indicate that this time period of his early childhood has been dealt with and that he would now turn to his youthful years in Hastinapur.

In the next part of the narration interspersed with the account of their daily routine there is an analeptical summing up of how grandfather Bheeshma abducted the two princesses of Kasi as brides. After this initial pause with many descriptions there are some instances of ellipsis where the reader feels left out of much of the action. The narration soon skips over to the time when they began their studies and the narrator decides to introduce Krishnadwaipayana Vyasa, to whom the authorship of the epic is attributed. There is a smooth transition from the description of his present appearance and mental capacity to far back in the plot to the circumstances of his birth and parentage in many quick analepses. As quickly the narrative returns to the present when the Pandava princes are ordered to pay obeisance to the patriarch.

These frequent shifts between the past and present are used to draw a parallel between these times and show how the present is an outgrowth of the past. For example the rivalry between the Kuru cousins in their childhood over silly issues later grown to get them involved in a full-blown war. This can be seen in the scene wherein the narrator Bhima takes us back to a time when he was faced with a challenge by Duryodhana, Karna and Dussasana. He then explains what had actually happened between the cousins. Bhima is addressed as Vikrodhara, which pushes his mind back to the time when his mother had affectionately called him by his nick name. Later it became a scornful reference to him by the palace attendants.

In the midst of the action his mind goes back to a time in the forest as he plans his strategy of attack. He recollects the ground rules of a show of strength, “I realized that it was the rules of the forest that would serve me best here, not Sukracharya’s rules for archery or physical combat” (V.Nair, 35). Here M.T brings in another connection between the past and present in the midst of all this. Bhima notices the striking resemblance Karna bore to Yudhistira which shows his sharpness of observation: “I couldn’t help thinking that this Karna, some charioteer’s son who went around in Duryodhana’s gang, had an uncanny resemblance to Yudhistira” (V.Nair, 34). This observation made by Bhima is connected to a later point in the story when Kunti reveals that Karna is her own son and thereby the brother of Yudhistira.

Bhima being a person of imposing size and strength is easily drawn to events involving combats and challenges. So his narrative includes many descriptions of battles and physical prowess that hold his attention. Descriptions such as these are comparatively lesser in both the women-centric novels discussed earlier. Even as he recreates the time that he has been through he pauses to reflect on the impressions they left on his mind. He is shown to be craving for the love and attention of his divine father, the God of the Wind and often meditates upon this god.

In their own way each of the novels discussed here treats the same incidents in different modes of time. While some incidents have been elaborated on, some have been condensed into a sentence or two. For example the incident where Bhima is poisoned and thrown into the river by his wicked cousins has been treated in an elaborate manner upto the way he escaped from death. The same incident does not

find mention in *Yajnaseni* and *And Now Let Me Sleep*, whereas in *Palace of Illusions* it is just referred to summarily by the narrator Draupadi. Similarly M.T selectively presents those incidents which explore the physical prowess of Bhima and those that create a sense of adventure and challenge in the narrator such as the tournament to select the best prince in the country, the narrow escape from death when their house was set fire in the forest of Varnavat. As he said in the epilogue to *Bhima Lone Warrior*, “I have not added any new character...All I did was to look more closely at people whose image remains blurred in the general perspective” (V.Nair, 366). Thus *Bhima Love Warrior* weaves in all the major incidents of the *Mahabharata* in a different perspective to recreate a sjuzet that appears totally new and appealing to the contemporary readers.

In this chapter the four selected revisionist narratives have been analyzed how time and space have been linked together to present a fictional universe. Just as there is a difference of perspective in each of these novels, the way time has been dealt with is also very different. The temporality of the *Mahabharata* has been distorted by the multiple narrators in these versions. Since space and time form the background for all narratives that have ample perspectives, voices, focalization etc and they coordinate all forms of story – telling. These two concepts have been applied for the narrative analysis here. The *Mahabharata* begins with the enumeration of the circumstances of its creation and of how it was conceived and transmitted. Except in a few portions in it, Draupadi gets scant attention. The temporal overlapping instead of linear narration assist the readers rather than confuse them in understanding the train of thought of the protagonist. The readers follow the transformation of the narratorial self from an overawed person to a

person who was aware of himself/ herself. A temporal manipulation achieves the possibility of exposing the nature of the characters. Here there is no requirement for authorial intrusion to expose the characters.

In all these narratives, space and time exist only in relation to each other. But the discursive form of the narrative foregrounds spatiality. The buildings and spaces constitute an undeniable influence on the plot. Structurally the discourse relies on the spatiality than on temporality for the final impact of the fiction. They move the narrative forward and emphasize the space of action. These sites are not just the background where time unfolds the plot, but these are involved in creating the story too. Stories and characters move in and out of locations and these spaces have borders and border crossings that continually shape the narrative.

To sum up, the sequential ordering of the *sjuzet* of each of the four narratives depends on the motive behind the retelling. Each in its own way adds new layers of significance and contexts. The two feminist retellings provide the much needed textual space to their heroine Draupadi. In *And Now Let Me Sleep* the past is ruminated on to give a detailed analysis of the events in Karna's life posthumously. It also focuses on the thought processes in the mind of a sleep-deprived Draupadi. There are frequent shifts in time sequence in all of these retellings where the past is juxtaposed with the present and to make sense of it. In *Yajnaseni* and *Bhima Lone Warrior* the beginning is at the end, i.e, they begin with the last stage of their protagonists' lives and then render a narrative about their lives through analepsis and prolepsis. *Palace of Illusions*, on the other hand, begins with the birth of Draupadi from the fire of the *yanja* and proceeds to give an authentic account of the trials and tribulations in her life. It does not create an atmosphere of

gloom and dread as in *And Now Let Me Sleep*, instead the approach is a more joyful and positive one. *Bhima Lone Warrior* explores the sensitivity and physical prowess of the protagonist Bhima. Each of these narratives has presented the epic in their particular viewpoint by choosing not to include all the incidents in the fabula of the epic. The chapter that follows next will be a discussion on the narrative levels and focalization in the selected revisionist works on the epic.

Chapter III

Narrative levels and Focalization in the Epic Reworked

In a world where communication has become one of the major activities people engage everyday, we find ourselves surround by narratives of all kinds. The narrating act itself has gained much importance because it can hide or reveal the truth. Since the same story can be narrated in different ways, the construction of narratives has become a vast area of research now. The foremost element in such a formal study of narratives is the narrator figure in the discourse. Based on the kind of narrator used in the text the narrative can incorporate different levels of narrative. Narrative levels are employed to relate the several instances of narration and for various other purposes. The primary discourse or the matrix narrative is where the main incidents of the story are presented. This forms the diegetic level or intradiegetic level of the text, as identified by Genette in *Narrative Discourse* (228). The second instance, as he says, is the extradiegetic level where the narrator is not involved in the story he is narrating, but provides a frame narrative to the text. The best example for the use of a framing device can be seen in *One Thousand and One Nights*, popularly known as *Arabian Nights*, a well known collection of folk tales from the Middle East. It uses the frame of the Scheherazade narrating a story every night to her husband King Shahryar and postpones her narration at a climatic moment to continue the next night to protect herself from being executed. Such framing devices provide the context for the main narrative.

The shifts in narrative levels provide a different perspective and reading experience. For creating varied levels of narrative, the author often uses embedded narratives written from another perspective within the primary narrative. This level

can be considered as a second - level of narration or the meta-diegetic level that adds variety and complexity to the narrative. The story of many characters like Karna, Shikandi and others are the embedded narratives in the *Mahabharata*. In contemporary novels the main plot / sub- plot distinction is not strictly adhered to. Instead they have several sub-plots running simultaneously, interpolated and embedded in them. There are also cases like *The Great Indian Novel* where the sub-plot is used to mock at the main plot.

Perspectives on everything keep changing with time. Perspectives in fiction are also not something stable. Hence the approaches adopted by many writers on some of the established cultural texts have changed over time. Sometimes a neglected character may be brought to the center or given a new dimension. The revision might also challenge the authority of the source text. Perspectives may also change according to the gender of the narrator, ie, men and women differ in their perspectives. Every reader perceives the text according to their level of understanding and cultural conditioning. The technical term used to refer to perspective in fiction is 'Focalization', which was introduced by Gerard Genette in his work *Narrative Discourse*. He used the term as a replacement for the earlier term, 'Point of View' (189). This introduction of a new term in narratology led to a controversy on typography. There were many academic debates on the issue. One such instance is the opinion of Niederhoff who feels that both the terms are valid and complement each other as seen in the quote below:

There is room for both because each highlights different aspects of a complex and elusive phenomenon. *Point of view* seems to be the more powerful metaphor when it comes to narratives that attempt to render the

subjective experience of a character; stating that a story is told from the point of view of the character makes more sense than to claim that there is an internal focalization on the character. *Focalization* is a more fitting term when one analyzes sections of narrative information that are not designed to render the subjective experience of a character but to create other effects such as suspense, mystery, puzzlement etc. (84).

As Niederhoff states here though the two terms seem to be similar there are subtle variations in their application to a text. Genette uses the term focalization instead of narrative perspective because he felt that the latter term was insufficient to represent the concept. The narrative agent in narratives decides the focal point of the story so that the story gets oriented from his/her perspective. Perspectives do not shift as much as focalization in a text. Focalization is not constant throughout the text; instead there are instances of internal and external focalization occurring alternately. Genette also mentions this fact: “Any single formula of focalization, does not, therefore, always bear on an entire work, but rather on a definite narrative section, which can be very short” (191). The levels of focalization do not concern the narrator, as the narrative always gets filtered through the consciousness of the narrator.

Genette defines internal focalization as the situation where the entire story is presented from the perception of a particular character. The events here sometimes get clarified or distorted as per the perception of this character. In contrast, an externally focalized narrative presents everything observable from outside the consciousness of the character. In the case of a zero focalized narrative, the perspective is that of an omniscient narrator who presents the narrative from a

distant perspective and does not perceive the thoughts in the minds of characters.

David Lodge in his *The Art of Fiction* has also analyzed point of view in fiction:

The choice of the point of view from which a story is told, is arguably the most important single decision that the novelist has to make, for it fundamentally affects the way the readers will respond, emotionally and morally, to the fictional characters and their actions. A real event is experienced by more than one person at the same time. Therefore a novel can provide different perspective on the same event – but only one at a time.

(26)

A novel written with a particular character's perspective will tell us what the character perceives, experiences and how he/ she interprets the events. All the novels dealt with in this study are internally focalized as here we get to know everything that passes through the mind of the protagonists. Even then the author chooses to present certain information and leave out many others in view of focusing on a particular character.

Genette has also dealt further with the concept of focalization and identified the alterations that seem possible in narratives. Anything that has been included in the narrative that is different from the established focalization has been termed '*paralepsis*'. There are also events that are omitted which he calls '*paralipsis*' (195). This is very much evident in the novels selected for study where many of the events and characters are altered in this manner to make it suitable for the point of view of each of these novels. Sometimes there are zero focalizers who have been defined as who can see and feel everything the characters experience. They can move in and out of the characters minds freely in terms of time and space. There is

no trace of the narrator here as he appears to be a non-entity. In internal focalization the character may have an unlimited view of the events and other characters or may be given a restricted or limited view, without any explanation. The focalizer may not be able to give an explanation of the motives behind others actions. While authorial external focalization is the best way to convey details of the plot, internal focalization is used strategically through characters to dissociate what is outwardly represented and what is meant to be conveyed.

The role of a narrator is a moot point of discussion in critical circles. Often the need for a narrative voice has been negated in theoretical discussions. Theorists argue that the story in literature as in film would emerge on its own and doesn't need an intermediary or interpreter. On the contrary, there are theorists like Mieke Bal who feels the necessity for a narrator in a discourse: "The narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts. The identity of the narrator, the degree to which and the manner in which that identity is indicated in the text, and the choices that are implied, lend the text its particular character" (120). The narrator who reports of his/her own past self is a homo-diegetic narrator. Such a narrator experiences a distance from his/her own persona as the protagonist. This idea is made clear by Zuzana Finiokova in her article on the focalizing self in autobiographical fiction:

This opening foreshadows a recurring theme in the entire narrative: the gap between the narrator and the protagonist, as perceived by the narrator. In narratological terms, such a gap in homodiegetic narratives corresponds to the distinction between the narrating I and the narrated, or experiencing, I.

This split also raises the question of who perceives the depicted events – that is, the question of the narrative’s point of view or focalization (113)

A different perspective emerges when the past is seen through the present with its superior knowledge. Finiokova further elaborates on the distance between the protagonist and the narrator and remarks: “Perception of the present self continuously interferes in the depiction of the past.... The superior knowledge available to the narrator at the time of narration leads to an interpretation of the depicted events that the experiencing self could not provide” (114)

This viewpoint suggests that if a different narrative perspective had been used by the narrator its effects on the reader would have been substantially different. Through the lens of focalization the retrospective self of the narrator can provide an interpretation of the past which was not possible for the narrator while he/she experienced those events. When viewed from a distance of many years, the entire turn of events take a different appearance. Memory of the past is affected by the narrator’s current viewpoint, and consequently the narrative too is affected by it. As one recounts the events many times the narrative stays in the mind more than the experience itself. A narrative is a selective rendering of some experience and hence many of the details are left out to make it effective and present the intended viewpoint.

When these concepts are applied to the study of Indian fiction that emerged as part of the mythological wave in this century, a new narrative unfolds. This is because stories like the *Mahabharata* have vast scope for interpretation. The *Mahabharata* seems to be negotiating the cultural space and in turn gets reshaped by time. That is the reason for its retaining its flavor even after ages have passed

since its creation with so many writers reworking its grand narrative. Different narratives focus on different aspects of the story with each version building upon the same plot and filling the gaps in the earlier versions. Some of these have been written from the perspective of sidelined characters. For instance, the novels, *Palace of Illusions* and *Yajnaseni* have been written from the perspective of Draupadi. When a novel is written from the perspective of a particular character, the character serves as the focalizer. The reader gets the story through the thoughts and perceptions of the focalizer. Stanzel calls these focalizers, ‘Reflector Figures’ who reflect upon the incidents and we get to know their perspective. Such narratives are called figural/ reflector mode narratives by Stanzel. In these works one gets the feeling that there is no narrator as a mediator. Monika Fludernik defines Reflector mode narratives as: “Narratives which convey an illusion of immediate access to the fictional world through the medium of a reflector’s consciousness” (90).

The aim of this chapter is to examine the various perspectives in which the same narrative is presented in different novels and see how it has contributed to the reception and interpretation of these works. This chapter will attempt to explore the narrative levels and voices employed in the novels selected here. It will examine the narrative point of view used here to identify the effects of different focalization strategies on various narratives. When the modes of presentation differ, multiple perspectives are produced out of the same core narrative. An important aspect of mode of presentation is focalization. A mere structuralist – narratological framework will be insufficient for this. This frame will be applied on the selected novels based on the *Mahabharata*. The analytical tools of Genette and others have

been used here to examine the revisionist narratives on the Mahabharata, ie, *And Now Let Me Sleep*, *Bhima: Lone Warrior*, *Yajnaseni*, and *Palace of Illusions*. Apart from being revised versions of the *Mahabharata*, the first three of the works given here are translated from Indian languages. Translated narratives have the interference of the translator's voice apart from the original narrator to make clear the concerns of the novel that differ in various cultures. The *Mahabharata* consists of an elaborately constructed system of discourse with several narrators. Most of the revisionist works of the Mahabharata do not situate their plot within the outer frame of the narration by the Bard Ugrasravas and Sage Vaisampayana, Vyasa's pupil.

Many innovative narrative techniques can be found in the novels of Divakaruni who seeks to dig out the hidden facets of femininity in the epic *The Palace of Illusions* (2008). Here we see the events unfolding through Panchali's eyes and hear her voice. She speaks to us, not as the mythical heroine of the ageless *adiparva* period but just like any modern woman with her cravings and ambitions. She wrote in the introductory chapter about her thoughts on the women in the *Mahabharata* which led her to write this novel:

I was left unsatisfied by the portrayal of the women...they remain shadowy figures, their thoughts and motives mysterious...their roles ultimately subservient to those of their fathers or husbands, brothers or sons. If ever I wrote a book...I would place the women in the forefront of the action...I would have one of them tell it herself, with all her joys and doubts, her struggle and triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, the unique female

way in which she sees her world and her place in it. And who could be better suited for this than Panchali? (xiv-xv)

By making Draupadi the narrator as well as heroine of the novel, Divakaruni tries to make up for this lapse. She bestows on the Panchala Princess the voice that takes the readers through her birth from fire, her *swayamvar*, her marriage to the Pandavas, her humiliation at the Kaurava court, her years of exile, the actual war and finally her ascent towards heaven through Mount Meru, thereby giving her the treatment she rightly deserves. Though in many versions she is depicted as the unfortunate victim of her circumstances, here she overcomes all her hurdles to achieve the revenge she craved for. She also takes initiative to help the widows of her land lead a dignified life and becomes a role model for other women in such circumstances.

Born of the sacred fire of King Drupad's *yajna* to beget children, Draupadi aspires to be regarded as someone great and knowledgeable. She likes to dwell upon the idea of the prophecy, during her birth, that she would be the cause of a great war that would change the course of history. From this she concludes that she is someone special who is not born to lead the normal life of a woman in a patriarchal society. Right from the beginning of her narration we observe Panchali obsessed with the unusual story of her birth from the sacrificial fire. She compels her nurse, Dhai Ma to recount it for her many times over to make her feel special and superior to her peers. This highlights her desire for attention which she was never accustomed to in her life. The prophesy that she would be the cause of a great war which could usher in an enormous change in the world is an obsession with her, and reveals her cravings for being recognized as a unique individual. These are

some of the qualities of her personality which Divakaruni chooses to highlight in her version of the *Mahabharata*.

The one great ambition of her life was to have a palace of her own. She felt that it should reflect her personality. She always felt suffocated in her father's palace and likens it to a prison house which "seemed to tighten its grip around me until I couldn't breathe" (Divakaruni, 1). Just as the luxurious palace of Panchali's father leaves her deeply dissatisfied, her troubled marriage to five husbands disturbed her peace. She enjoys no spiritual bond with any of her husbands. She recounts their relationship in these words: "If they were pearls, I was the gold wire on which they were strung. Alone, they would have scattered, each to his dusty corner" (Divakaruni, 151).

It is not just Draupadi's perspective which is new here but the perspective of many others too is carefully dealt with. Almost all the novels dealing with *Mahabharata* have presented Kunti only as the wife of Pandu and the mother of the Pandavas, but here she is looked at as a mother –in – law. Banerjee makes it a point to explore Panchali's relation with two men she loved the most – Krishna and Karna. Although in some of the earlier versions of the Mahabharata, including *Second Turn* we find Draupadi hopelessly in love with the third Pandav prince Arjuna, Divakaruni's Panchali falls in love with the unsung hero Karna, with whom she is united spiritually by the end of the novel. She is deeply attracted to the sad and longing eyes of Karna....

Austere faced, the man sat upright, his lean body wary, as though he knew the world to be a dangerous place. Though in the midst of a court he seemed utterly alone.... His eyes were filled with an ancient sadness. They pulled

me into them.... I wanted to know how those eyes would look if the man smiled. Absurdly I wanted to be the reason for his smile (Divakaruni, 69)

Divakaruni's perspective on Lord Krishna too varies from the norm. She felt that he was just another human being like her but with something unusual about him. She says that the stories about the God are just exaggerations by the people who recounted them. To her, he was just a ruler of Dwaraka with many wives. Divakaruni has adapted the postmodern technique to humanize the divine characters of the epic here.

Divakaruni's revisionist narrative also deviates from the epic by making her protagonist more of a rebel. From her young age Draupadi displayed an eagerness to learn the lessons taught exclusively to male warriors. So she fights for her right to study along with her brother, wanting to learn all the secrets of statesmanship. On becoming a wife too she uses her cunning and manipulates her husbands to satisfy her wishes. Unlike the original epic which focuses on the valour of the great heroes during the epic war, here it is mostly Draupadi's inner turmoil and obsessions that retain the focus. Here we have not an omniscient narrator, but one who is very conscious of what goes on inside her own mind. The style of narration is first person account of her impression of the events taking place.

The chapters have been divided based on the thought processes of Draupadi with unusual single word titles such as blue, milk etc. Divakaruni also uses free indirect speech in many places. Here Draupadi serves as the focalizer and the reader sees things from the point of view of this particular character. The story is put across in the words of the narrator and not just through the mind of the reflector figure. Panchali professes her love for her brother Dhri, with whom she was born

out of fire. Soon after she says “I didn’t know then how sorely that love would be tested, or how much it would cost both of us.” (Divakaruni, 7) Thus the narrator draws the reader into a prophecy of the future in the form of this prolepsis, which means, dialogues in anticipation of future events. The major past time for the siblings as they grew up in their lackluster palace was sharing stories. They had a set of stories which they told each other, each one picking up the thread where the other left. They were interested in relating the story of their birth from fire and the enmity between their father and Drona, who were thick friends when they were children. Panchali was conscious of the fact that the stories were getting altered each time they were being told. She ruminates on the validity of their stories:

Were the stories we told each other true? Who knows? At the best of times, a story is a slippery thing. We’d had to cobble it together from rumours and lies, dark hints... and our own agitated imaginings. Perhaps that was why it changed with every telling (Divakaruni, 15).

These words can also be considered as Bannerjee’s Meta-Narrative comment on the nature of storytelling itself. She admits to herself the possibility of deception and unreliability in stories. She demonstrates it through the different versions of the same story of their birth from fire through the three narrators she has used – Panchali, her brother and her nurse.

The technique of metafiction combined with analepsis informs the chapter titled ‘Milk’. Beginning with the story of how a poor mother satisfied her son’s curiosity about milk by mixing flour in water and jaggery and ending with the capture of Drupada’s kingdom by Arjun for Drona. It recounts a past incident as well as narrates a story within a story. Divakaruni then picks up the mimetic mode

of narration in the following chapter where Panchali talks about how she seeks the knowledge that only male children were privileged to receive. Even Dhari Ma discourages her from attending those classes. She had to fight with her father in order to be permitted to attend the class. It is only after Krishna supports her that she gets her father's consent. Dhari's tutor denounces her presence during one of those study sessions. The narration in this part of the novel is presented in the form of dialogues between the pupil and the teacher in the mimetic mode.

Panchali meets the sage Vyasa who was writing her life story to hear his prophesy about her future. Vyasa warns her about some unbecoming incidents about to happen in her life. Soon she becomes the reflector figure in the novel in which her thoughts are presented when she contemplates on his prophesy. The narration turns to prolepsis, what is to come is summarized when she thinks about her wedding ceremony and the gifts she would receive. Divakaruni also uses another diegetic narrator to narrate a sub-plot of the epic. This is noticeable in the episode where Shikhandi returns to avenge Amba's destruction. This part is mostly narrated by Shikhandi himself to reveal his past to the readers. The following chapter deals with Draupadi's swayamvar. As soon as she starts romanticizing about the coming event, Krishna brings her back to reality by telling her indirectly that she was just a pawn in the hands of her father, who was after power and was scheming to get her married to Arjun, the greatest warrior of that time. Soon after the incident the narrative turns to free indirect speech presenting Draupadi's thoughts on the incident.

Just before her swayamvar a sorceress comes to her to teach a few lessons for life. As a parting gift she told her the story of Kunti and then again Panchali has

a foreboding analepsis: “Only when we met would I realize how different she was from my imaginings. And how much more dangerous” (Divakaruni, 65). Thus at many such points in the story Divakaruni leaves dark hints foreboding the calamities to come. *The Palace of Illusions* can thus be considered a homodiegetic as well as autodiegetic narrative because the narrator is present as a character in the story she tells as well as being the protagonist of the story. Divakaruni also uses a form of interpolated narration, which, according to Genette, combines prior and simultaneous narration. The narrator tells about what he experienced during the day and also includes his current impression about the event. Divakaruni reports the comments and questions running through Panchali’s mind in the form of transposed speech in free indirect style. For example when she is shown the portrait of the princes who were going to attend her *swayamvar*, just as she was getting drawn towards the sad eyes of Karna, she was chastised by Krishna saying that he would be there on that day not as a suitor but to keep her from making the wrong choice of bridegroom. Immediately many thoughts rush to her mind asking herself whether Krishna had read her mind, or was he talking directly into her mind. Thus Divakaruni very subtly uses transposed free indirect speech here while reporting Panchali’s thoughts.

The autodiegetic narrator uses simultaneous narration and internal focalization and often presents his speech in reported form. This produces an effect of realism and credibility. As the narrative proceeds towards Panchali’s *swayamvar* there is a pause where the reader is introduced to Karna. Dhri takes up the narration from here to mention Karna’s birth and upbringing and the way he learnt the use of weapons. This is another instance of Meta diegetic narration. As she continues the

narration of the *swayamvar*, Panchali reaches a point where her heart breaks when she sees Karna aiming his bow at Dhri's heart. She makes up her mind to save her brother by questioning Karna about his parentage, which she knew would strike at his heart. At this point she pauses and narrates the incident from the point of view of a bard who composed a song on this incident. The bard thus becomes the extra-diegetic narrator of the event which Panchali would have felt as much hurt in narrating as Karna would have felt humiliated. Here there is a deviation from the other versions of the Mahabharata. The episode where Arjun succeeds in the challenge is glorified in most of the traditional narratives, but here it is Karna's defeat viewed through Panchali's eyes which is given prominence. Hence Divakaruni adopts a different angle of narration for this particular episode.

There is also a deviation from the original epic in the way the Kurukshetra war is handled. Traditionally it is accepted that Sanjaya was bestowed with divine sight to witness the battle and report it to Dhritarashtra, but here Panchali is able to witness the war first –hand with her special powers. Divakaruni draws attention to this through a meta-narrative comment when Karna's death is reported as follows: “But here's something Vyasa didn't put down in his Mahabharata: leaving the field, the glow travelled to a nearby hill, where it paused for a moment over a weeping woman” (Divakaruni, 298). Divakaruni thus brings in many such alterations in the plot of her novel.

Just as the act of story – telling is in the form of dialogic negotiation, there is also an emphasis on plurality of identity. Soon after Panchali was disrobed in the Kaurava court, she sadly realizes her own unstable identity. Her words are worth quoting here:

It seemed that everything I'd lived until now had been a role. The Princess who longed for acceptance, the guilty girl whose heart wouldn't listen, the wife who balanced her five – fold role precariously, the rebellious daughter – in – law, the queen who ruled the most magical of palaces...the woman obsessed with vengeance – none of them were the true Panchaali. If not, who was I? (Divakaruni, 229)

Though the narrative tries to establish Draupadi's identity and distinct perspective, Draupadi herself is doubtful of her role in the epic because of the strange experiences she went through in her life. She knows that she was not destined to lead a 'normal' life. Even in the concluding part of her life Panchali retains the rebellious spirit in her by deciding to follow her husbands on their final journey. No woman before her had attempted to climb the Himalayan Mountain. Divakaruni makes a precise judgement of the character of Panchaali in the way she breaks the norms of society and follows her heart. Her only regret was being unable to get closer to Karna. Hence Divakaruni adopts a different form of narration for this particular episode, especially by including many Meta-Narrative comments on the nature of story - telling. Smriti Singh too notes that this shift in perspective makes a huge difference in the narrative:

Changes in perspective highlight the importance and illusionary nature of perception and narrative transmission. There is always the possibility of deception, just as there is always another angle to the story. The novel opens with three narrators (Panchaali, her brother, and her nurse), presenting different versions of the tale of Panchaali's birth and destiny. While trying to gain power over the narration, Panchaali's reflections, her dialogic

engagement with her implied listeners, also includes meta – narrative comments on the nature of truth and narration (128).

As stated above there are instances in *Palace of Illusions* where the narrator Draupadi admits that she herself was not sure about the veracity of the stories she and her brother were telling each other. She thus suggests that there are many other possibilities for narration of the stories.

Thus Divakaruni gives a unique presentation of the age – old epic to present Draupadi not as a victim of the patriarchal society, but as one who rises above the other women to find a place of her own in her country. She was destined to be one who would change the course of history through her actions, and so she has been dealt in the manner as she deserved. The author uses different levels of narration in this novel. Most part of it is homodiegetic narration by her, but only in places where she finds it emotionally draining to report things that affected her, she uses other narrators like the bard or her nurse Dhai Ma to complete the story for her.

In *Palace of Illusions*, Chitra Divakaruni Bannerjee has chosen the familiar story of the *Mahabharata* from a different perspective and put forth the tragic tale of Panchali's life in her own voice. This change in perspective brings in drastic changes in the presentation and interpretation of the work. We have a network of stories here, such as the stories that make up the colossal *Mahabharata* appear as digressions with various narrators like Dhai Ma, the Nurse and Drishtadyumna, her brother. There are also interpolated tales of other pivotal characters like Krishna too. Divakaruni makes it a point to focus entirely on the character of Draupadi and sideline the other characters. The reports of the valour of her husbands are told in a matter-of fact tone without much embellishment. The events at Kurkshetra and the

other important incidents are interpreted just to give a time frame for Panchali's lifetime.

We are introduced to Karna as a character who attracts or deserves our sympathy throughout. From the time he is introduced, we see Draupadi's longing for him and the desire to know his past. We are told the details of Karna's life and training and the curses that befell him. From various narrators Panchali is given different versions of his background. For example, Dhai Ma's story is like gossip, whereas her brother's terse account comes with a warning: not to choose him. The omniscient narrator here hints at the inevitable events about to happen in Draupadi's life but still builds up suspense. There is a long description of the swayamvar, moment by moment whereby the setting is recreated and then the narrator just says: "A trumpet sounded. The contest had begun." (Divakaruni, 93) This is an example of the terse style of the narrator. The events that are elaborated upon in the original work are just mentioned or with passing reference without much ado.

The humiliation of Karna by Draupadi is told as reported by a bard who sang of this incident, years later about the humiliating question asked by Draupadi to Karna about his parents and silenced him. Explanations offered by these bards were not satisfactory so she herself explains her conduct and why she had to do so. Divakaruni has given great importance to what goes on inside the head of her heroine, much more than the events themselves. Right at the beginning of the novel we hear the voice of the protagonist expressing her feelings and opinions over all that was happening around her. Until the end of the first paragraph we are not told about the name or gender of the narrator. The first character introduced here is Dhai

Ma and we come to know of the warmth between her and the narrator. Slowly she reveals that she was the daughter of the ruler of Panchaal. From then on the story takes us through her past. The recollection of the birth of the protagonist and her brother is narrated by Dhai Ma as she speaks to the protagonist. The arrangements and the austerities done by King Drupad for begetting a son is narrated from the angle of a maid servant, who is more interested in details of the feast to be held later, than in the momentous prophecy at the time of the birth of the protagonist. On the other hand the narrator is interested in the prophecy and her fears and anxiety regarding it. Thus Divakaruni establishes Panchali as the narrative consciousness right at the beginning of the novel.

Divakaruni slowly introduces the vengeance and the all – consuming passion of the woman with five husbands. In the beginning it is her innocence and anxiety about her future that strikes us. Later she raises some serious questions demanding her readers to notice the injustice underlying many events in her life. Throughout the novel the focus is entirely on Draupadi even as it digresses from one story to another in the chapters. This modern rendering shows Draupadi to be strong and pre-dominant. She is not presented as a woman of the Vedic period, but is shown to have the characteristics of a modern woman with her cravings and ambitions. She seems to be easily swayed by emotions like anger, desire and passion. Divakaruni has tried to humanize her characters. Even Lord Krishna is treated as a ruler of Dwaraka with some amazing abilities who could easily sway the hearts of women. She has also given special emphasis to women and the underprivileged persons like Karna and Ekalavya. In her attempt to include every single detail of the plot, Divakaruni struggles to develop her protagonist and

explore her consciousness in detail. She also devises an innovative strategy to get her protagonist witness all the dramatic scenes on the warfront firsthand. She does it by making Vyasa bless her with divine sight for this period alone. Draupadi's debate with Yudhistira in the original *Mahabharata* while they were in exile has also been excluded in this version. In many places she is shown to be enjoying privileges that are not granted to other princesses. These could be considered some of the shortcomings of her version.

There is an interpolated narration of the story of Prabhasa, one of the eight *vasus* which was the previous birth of Bheeshma. From this interpolated narrative it becomes clear as to how stories are connected. The narrator gets to know why Krishna had addressed Bheeshma as Vasu and also the theft that he was talking about. The narrator winds up this part with her comment on the nature of stories: "Perhaps that is the miracle of stories. They make us realize that we're not alone in our folly and suffering" (Divakaruni, 278). She dreamt of a web of life in which everyone was entangled, which made her philosophize about life itself: "our puny struggles only entangled us further" (Divakaruni, 282). Once when she heard the story of Shikandi, she wanted to confirm the truth of it. So she asks Krishna to clarify this. Krishna responds, "He believes it to be so. Isn't that what truth is? The force of a person's believing seeps into those around him—into the very earth and air and water—until there's nothing else" (Divakaruni, 49). This matter of fact explanation of truth as 'the force of a person's belief' can be aligned with the credibility of perspectives in narratives.

Divakaruni's Panchali presents a contemporary perspective on the epic with her as the focalizer. The woman's perspective shows the incidents in it are the

outcome of vengeance associated with betrayal. When there is a clash between righteousness and unrighteousness, justice prevails though some become the victims of the assault and this point of view is presented here. During their banishment in the forest, Dhri gently chastises Panchaali, asking her where his sweet sister has gone. She thinks to herself we see Panchali as the focalizer of the story:

I kept my thoughts hidden in the dark cave that had opened within me. *She's dead. Half of her died the day when everyone she had loved and counted on to save her sat without protest and watched her being shamed. The other half perished with her beloved home. But never fear. The woman who has taken her place will gouge a deeper mark into history than that naïve girl ever imagined* (Divakaruni, 2006).

Even as she is proud of being able to present her version of the events, she seems overwhelmed by the trials she had to face throughout her life and so she felt that the circumstances made her the person she has become now.

The strange birth of Draupadi and the prediction at the time of her birth that she could change the course of history make her believe that there was something special about her. The identity of the focalizer is in question here. The nubile birth from fire and her unusual polyandrous marriage to five husbands make her distinct from other women populating mythology in Indian culture. This role is thrust upon her by her mother-in law Kunti, which her obedient husbands abide by. She has to break herself free from the shackles of this identity to present herself as a normal woman who has all the passions and cravings of a contemporary woman. This is the attempt made by Divakaruni here as her Draupadi is one who actively intervenes in

all the events in her life not just passively accepting things as they are in this homodiegetic narrative.

Most narratives have a narrative voice belonging to the narrator, which in the beginning may seem to be objective, but later turns out to be a subjective I Narrator. This can be observed in the next novel to be analyzed here, *Yajnaseni*. Here we can discern a narrative voice belonging to a person who is able to look at the action from a distance and is able to make out the connections between events. After living her entire life, what is left in the last stage is to retrospect the past. This elevated insight into things fetches her valuable ideas that validate her version of the *Mahabharata*. While writing the letter she relives every moment of her life and experiences everything anew. She comes to realize that “What is emptiness is really fullness; creation is really destruction; the beginning is really the end” (Ray, 399). This way she longs for Karna throughout her life. The triangle of attraction between Karna, Draupadi and Krishna has been carefully crafted into the narrative.

Pratibha Ray begins her epistolary novel with the word ‘finis’ and ends it with the word ‘beginning’. This is the unusual structure she has adopted for her novel. Though the life of the protagonist has come to a close, Ray gives her life an infinite open space where it can be rewritten to suit her personality, which has the scope to be re-written as many times. She tries to give meaning to her own life with a new perspective. Alf Hiltebeitel has also written about the uniquely prolonged after life of Indian epics as the result of having “deep structures whose continuities and transformations through time, space and different social contexts” (xix). The many revisionist works being produced frequently are a testimony to this fact.

Ray's Krishnaa has lived her life full and from a distance, at the point of her death she is able to view things differently. Her epistle written at the last moments of her life to her spiritual mentor Krishna is an attempt to get a deeper understanding of her life and his principal role in it. When she comes to the end of her letter, she comes back to the same point suggesting the cyclical process of life:

Sakha, I began this letter to tell you of my grief. And I have come close to the pain and suffering of the world. I have set down before you that play of which you are the hero. It seems that my story remains incomplete. Having finished the letter, I am going through it. Having read it, I am wondering if I should begin the letter all over again. Begin from the end, end from the beginning...what is this that I am doing? (Ray, 398).

Ray is thus able to identify the dreams and aspirations, as well as feel the pain Draupadi experienced in her life and is effectively able to convey these to her readers. Ray's recreation of Draupadi is as a person with poise, clarity in thought and action too. Even her role as a wife for the five brothers is gracefully performed by her, considering it one among the many roles she has to perform. At the end of her first night with Yudhisthir she remarks, "The first night of acting was about to end" (Ray, 74). Further she acknowledges the future that awaited her: "I became the subtle thread for keeping the five flowers bound together, whom no one would see; whose pain and anguish no one would know; word of whose torment would reach none" (Ray, 68). In this respect the narrative of Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* is unique for the outpouring of her heart.

Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* is crafted as a diegetic narrator who does not recede into the background but her voice can be distinctly felt. This is in contrast to a

mimetic narrator, who imitates the voice of the characters. In mimesis the presence of the narrator is rarely felt, except when closely observed. The narrator seems to be less intrusive here. The diegetic function is performed by Panchali in the novel when she narrates some event in indirect speech. In most novels we find the constant shift between diegesis and mimesis, but here the narrative throughout is in diegetic mode.

A recurrent narrative device is the presence of digressions in the plot. These may take the reader's attention from the main plot for a short while and also interrupt the events in the plot. The narrator may dwell on some interesting anecdote that may only be remotely connected to the plot. Interpolated stories or inset stories are another device often used in modern fiction. This includes any narrative that borrows the conventions of other genres. The song that has been included as part of the narrative of the *Mahabharata* that is a piece of advice from lord Krishna to Arjuna on the battle fields of the Kurukshetra is an example of this.

The narrative of *Yanaseni* very soon comes to the point where Draupadi is to garland the victor of a contest to find the sharpest archer in the country during her *swayamvar*. Ray gives elaborate descriptions of the arrangements for this with all the festivities and the dress worn by her protagonist. Both in *Yanaseni* and in *The Palace of Illusions* the performance and brilliant appearance of Karna at the venue of the *swayamvar* and the subsequent insult are highlighted to weave their love- hate relationship into the narrative sub-plot. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata* Draupadi rejects the attempt of Karna to participate, but here it is Dristadyumna who voices this for her as she stands struck by the beauty and grace of this hero. To top it all she feels deep empathy for this fallen hero who was insulted in front of an

assembly and guilty of being the cause for it. She notices some similarity between them in finding their parents rejecting them in the beginning of their lives.

Ray deviates from Vyasa's epic here to portray Karna and Draupadi in a different light here by giving Draupadi's words to Dristadyumna and it shows her intention to move away from the epic and make her own contribution here. From the level of her protagonist she wants to prove the hatred that Karna felt towards her as baseless with this deviation. There are many other incidents that develop on their relationship oscillating between love and hatred when Ray lets their paths cross and meet each other often. Whenever they meet it brings more pain to Draupadi as they both exchange sharp words. The scene where she is welcomed as the Royal Bride at Hastinapur when Karna throws a bouquet of blue roses at her feet and thus hurts her. Karna even remarks that this physical pain she bore now was nothing compared to the mental agony he suffered at her *swayamvar*.

The perspective of Draupadi highlighted in *Yanaseni* presents her as a person who wants to bring harmony and integration between the Aryan and Non-Aryan races. She has the sensibility of a modern woman when she finds ways to improve the lot of women and uplift them. She even breast feeds two orphaned forest-dwellers Kambu and Jambu (Ray, 270). At many fights between Bhima and the rakshasas she is seen to save many lives. In one instance of the golden lotuses of Kubera she declares:

Consequently, it would be possible to establish integration between the Aryans and the non-Aryans, sages and hermits. Exchange of ideas, participating in festivals, marriages and celebrations of one another would

be possible. In this manner, among them bonds of friendship and even marriage could be forged. (Ray, 298-299)

This quote reveals her approach towards other communities and her envisaging a future that would bring equality of all the races. Ray thus brings in new episodes into Draupadi's life and also finds new explanations for those already in her life to expand the scope of her reworking. The narrative levels in *Yajnaseni* alternates between the homodiegetic level of the narrator Draupadi and the heterogeneous level of the omniscient narrator.

Yajnaseni is a novel written in epistolary form in which the protagonist is writing a letter to Krishna. The format gives her the freedom and space she needs to express herself. This is the intradiegetic level at which the novel begins. This gives a frame to the narrative. Although written in epistolary form the letter is self – reflexive at the outset itself it becomes clear that the Intradiegetic narrator is doubtful of being able to convey everything that she wished to express or about the letter to find its addressee. This is the doubtful voice of the woman born of a sacrificial fire. Her very birth was tragic as she came unasked for. Her father King Drupad performed a *Yajna* to beget a son who could avenge his insult at the hands of Drona. “From the sacred flames of the sacrificial fire a radiant son, my brother Dhrishtadyumna, was born and from the sacrificial altar I was born, like a blue lotus-coloured gem-Yajnaseni!” (Ray, 7). She turns out to be the protagonist of the novel. Draupadi's character is molded differently from that of Vyasa's creation so that she has many novelties that make her relatable to the present generation. While devoting much attention to Draupadi here, Ray chooses not to pay much attention to the Kurukshetra war or to the other major characters in the epic too. The novel

presents Draupadi as a victim of her husbands' irresponsible and thoughtless actions. The game of dice is the worst of many such acts. When she was put upon the stake in the game of dice by Yudhishtir, the eldest of her husbands, she mused in anguish and angry rebellion:

Was woman merely man's movable or immovable property? Was I part of Yudhishtir's movable or immovable property, male and female slaves, horses and elephants? Being a woman did I not have right even over myself, my own soul? If they had rights over this body of mine, did it mean they could do as they wished with me? (Ray, 235)

Unlike in the original version, Draupadi is shown to be very bold and outspoken here. Ray makes her question the legality of the abuse she suffered in the Kaurava court. She expresses her suppressed anger when she questions all those who were silent, and had turned accomplices in the act of disgracing her: "He who insults another's wife is the worst of men. But he who silently supports such insult, encourages it, is a great sinner" (Ray, 183). The same episode finds mention in a different manner in R.K.Narayan's *The Indian Epics Retold* as follows:

Karna, Dussasana and Sakuni laughed at her and uttered jokes and also called her 'slave' several times. She looked at their family elder, Bhishma, pleadingly and he said, 'O daughter of Drupada, the question of morality is difficult to answer....a husband may have the absolute right to dispose of his wife in any manner he pleases, even if he has become a pauper and a slave...I am unable to decide this issue... (263).

In this retelling the omniscient perspective of the narrator does not include the thoughts of Draupadi, instead her actions as seen from the perspective of an

outsider is mentioned. This is the main difference between the two retellings mentioned above. In *Yajnaseni*, the anguish that Draupadi felt on being treated as a slave is put across through the questions passing through her mind at that moment. These do not become part of the narrative in R.K.Narayan's retelling. More than the issue of Draupadi's humiliation, here the focus is on the question of *dharma*, of what was right and what was wrong and the rightful authority to decide on this matter. In contrast, *Yajnaseni* gives the protagonist the space to express the rightful indignation she felt at that time. She is shown to be capable of defending her honour through her provocative and logical questions.

The novel begins with the word 'finis' and ends with the word 'beginning', giving it a cyclical structure. By uttering these words, the narrator invites her readers into the world of retellings that bring in vast change from what has been said earlier. Her last word 'beginning' also implies the rounds of discussions and debates that the retelling will set off. The techniques of flashback and flash forward punctuate the text intermittently. The dialogic consciousness of Draupadi records all the incidents in the life that left a deep impression on her mind.

Now, let us consider P.K.Balakrishnan's *And Now Let Me Sleep*, which deals the horrible dreams and nightmares Draupadi endures over the long excruciating period of her life. She longs for a restful night's sleep, but is deprived of it by the rising visions before her eyes. This work finally resolves itself as she unburdens her soul and accepts and acknowledges the true valour of Karna and is finally at peace with her.

The Prologue to *And Now Let Me Sleep* is narrated by a covert narrator of whom little is known. The narrator gives an overall picture of jubilation after the

great battle ended. But the celebrations are marred by the atrocious murders of Draupadi's sons, brothers and father. The novel focuses on the predicament of Draupadi who is unable to sleep and left her hair untied and unadorned for many years awaiting revenge for her public humiliation. Finally when her revenge is done she falls into deep sleep. But then is woken by loud cries of women and saw huge towers of fire rising from the tents that had sheltered her close family members including her sons, brothers and father.

P.K.Balakrishnan delves deep into the psyche of his characters in this novel. He gives a very pathetic picture of the war ground right at the beginning: "And Kurukshetra lay barren and benumbed like the drained depths of the ocean stretching dreadfully afar" (3). The novel begins with the description of the erasure of the Pandava military camp by Aswathama taking his revenge for the defeat of Kauravas. The unbearable burden of the loss of kith and kin in the Kurukshetra war littered with corpses and vultures and jackals waiting to pounce on the meat permeate the novel. Arrangements were being made for the cremation rites.

Yudhishtira, who was shattered by the destruction all around, was further shocked by the revelation of his mother Kunti that his sworn enemy Karna was his own elder brother. He felt as helpless as a bird without wings. When there is a call for duty towards his family and country, when he is supposed to lead everyone during this dark hour, he decided to renounce everything and go into the forest. He feels his own family is unable to understand his predicament. Bhima in his forceful reproach of Yudhishtira blames him for not taking the right decision to table the war. After reaching the shore safely, he is now running away from his duty.

The focus then shifts to Draupadi and her consciousness. She recalls the mental agony of Yudhishtira: “Poor Yudhishtira – like his forefather he is also lying on a bed of arrows, but here on the sharp arrows of mental agony” (Balakrishnan, 18). At the beginning of this chapter there is a discussion on the moral and ethics behind the war. At the culmination of the war there is utter meaninglessness: “When viewed in the background of the tragedy, it is merely a question of evil pride that paved the way to the destruction of the Kuru race” (Balakrishnan, 18).

The narrator focuses on the thought process of Draupadi throughout this novel. The omniscient narrator here could decipher the thoughts of all the characters as well as describe the setting. Here is a sample of internal focalization in the novel where the mental state of the protagonist is elaborated:

While Draupadi was looking at that great puzzle turned sideways, her mind ruminated over past events. She felt that her intellect is a wild animal giving birth to doubts alone ...Her efforts to solve the problems never do away with the doubts, but only give birth to a new set of doubts. What is the way out? Where is an end to all this? (Balakrishnan, 18).

The name ‘Karna’ continued to scorch even after the namesake had died. She remembers the day of her swayamvara. That was the day on which he entered her life like an ill omen. She also recollects the day she was unrobed and was too scared to think further. She was stirred awake by the pitiful cries of Yudhishtira. The novel then goes into flashback mode narrating an incident in Hastinapur when the epic heroes were young, during an exhibition of their skill in the use of arms. The moment a duel between Karna and Arjuna begins, Kunti faints at the platform for the queens. In the great commotion that followed everyone forgot about the duel

that was to begin. Yudhishtira muses about that incident in the light of the revelation by Kunti which can be treated as an apt comment on the nature of epics:

Yudhishtira began to contemplate on the strong but strange relationship that binds the mind of man, time and incidents. The same incident is viewed by different people in different perspectives. The same person views it differently on different occasions. Not only the inner meaning but even the shape of things tends to change (Balakrishnan, 28).

When viewed at different times in different light everything appears different. Built into the narrative is the story of Kunti and her mysterious past. It deals with how she conceived Karna and endured the sad separation from him. This is an instance of meta-narration. The story of how Karna acquired his divine ornaments and the reason behind his destruction are explained by Sage Narada to Yudhishtira and Draupadi in the form of interpolated narration. Sage Narada thus becomes an extradiegetic narrator, not having any role in the story he is narrating. He tries to console Yudhistira and soothe his pricking conscience to accept the fact that fate was the reason behind the fall of Karna.

The present time and the past get juxtaposed in the narrative. As Draupadi remembers the cruelty of the Kauravas including Karna in the royal court where she was humiliated, she is unable to reconcile herself to the fact that none of her husbands seek revenge for her public shaming. Now Yudhishtira is in the grip of sorrow for his imagined fratricide. But he doesn't seem to notice her appalling state. Even after thirteen years she burns with anguish at her insult. She then recollects that day and the words uttered by each one involved in the crime.

There is objective correlative here as the atmosphere reflects the mindset of the protagonists. There are references to the darkness of the night that enveloped Draupadi as she sat contemplating her fate. Darkness and silence and disturbing thoughts are the recurrent motifs here: “The shadow of the night’s mental agitation lingered in the atmosphere. Underneath the sky looking for the arrival of dawn, flowed past the Ganges with its turbid water producing a tumultuous sound” (Balakrishnan, 67). Draupadi is filled with sorrow at the loss of her sons- she reminisces the last time she had seen each of them and is shocked to find that she recollects their image only as toddlers or as young boys, not as grown up warriors going to the warfront. She is filled with remorse at her negligence of her sons while focusing on serving her husbands. In the end she feels utterly dejected and lonely. Questions that arise in the mind of Draupadi: “Who is that Vasudeva always appearing in front of you providing consolation whenever you are desperate?” (Balakrishnan, 74) appear as free indirect speech in the text. Krishna consoles Draupadi regarding her feeling of alienation and philosophizes: “It is equally meaningless when individuals reduced to mere seashells show offence towards the vast sea of life due to their feeling of alienation...Gazing at this fume of dense philosophic discourse, Draupadi stood motionless” (Balakrishnan, 75-76).

Krishna’s meeting with Karna to reveal his mysterious past is another interpolated metanarrative in the text. Hence the text is a series of discussions on moral dilemmas in the minds of Yudhishtira and Draupadi. They turn to great seers to explain the mystery for them. The frame for one such narrative is when they both sit on the root of a giant tree lying uprooted with its leaves in the water. In this setting they try to solve the mystery behind Bhima’s contempt and ill- treatment of

Karna. Sanjaya takes up the narration of this part where he explains the reason for this. Draupadi also ponders on the ironic fate of Gandhari, the noble ascetic queen who delivered a hundred sons not deserving of her. On the other hand the noblest of souls, Karna, delivered of the womb of Kunti being brought up bereft of all royalty and luxury.

This setting is found in the two chapters used to explain this mysterious relation between Karna and Bheeshma, sworn enemies to each other. Sanjaya, bestowed with divine sight is able to witness their secret meeting in the battlefield where Bhishma was lying on his bed of arrows. He starts doubting his own power of sight on witnessing that scene:

I have seen it from beginning to end suspecting my own eyes and doubting even the reality of my consciousness. I who could not disbelieve the spectacle could not believe my own eyes. Yudhshtira, in which aspect of life can we believe firmly? Do we possess a permanent consciousness and a constant intelligence? (Balakrishnan, 130)

In the narration by Sanjaya of the battle that ensued he reminds them of the sacrifice made by Karna who repeatedly saved the Pandava brothers from death in spite of getting many opportunities to kill them. At each incident reported Yudhishtira's mind bleeds in pain and remorse to think of how they treated their own elder brother Karna:

When one hears the description of that act from another person even in the eyes of the doer, the incident gets transformed. Fears that were not experienced when he was actually writhing in the whirlpool of action, the pains that were not precipitated in the consciousness at that moment. All

these are experienced by the subject when the actions are revived by somebody's description (Balakrishnan, 164).

While the mind of Yudhishtira oscillates between self – reproach and guilty conscience about the fratricide of his elder brother, Draupadi's mind is filled with sympathy for both the heroes. She now acknowledges the fact that her sorrows and miseries are nothing compared to the great grief encompassing the heart of Yudhishtira. If the whole battle began as a sort of revenge to reinstate her wounded pride, now she felt that her dishonor at the court and humiliation are nothing compared to the affliction of Yudhishtira's mind. She felt as if she had reached the point where she had vindicated her right, but also is left empty-handed after all the struggle.

In the sleepless night of anguish Draupadi hears and sees a strange creature questioning her about the worth of her life. "Did she ever experience love in spite of having five husbands? Who was her protector during the time of distress?" and the last question: "Are you a chaste woman?" (Balakrishnan, 174). These thoughts make her laugh out loud which astonished even her. She arose anxious that she might have woken the sleeping Yudhishtira. In the meantime a large portion of the remaining part of the novel is dedicated to her thoughts on love. Her heart finally convinces her that love is the darkness that envelops her soul. In the dedication shown towards her husbands, she forgot to care for her children. She then wonders about a mother who could bestow differing amounts of love on her children. It was Kunti she was talking about. She asks herself, how Kunti could throw away her new born baby to just float over the river waters, while giving up everything for the sake

of her other sons. “Fate created a single wife for all the sons of a mother by different husbands” (Balakrishnan, 174), she muses.

Thus, we see that the novel *And Now Let Me Sleep* the level of narration alternates between Extradiegetic and diegetic levels. There is a narrator who is not part of the plot. The narrative focuses on the internal conflicts of the protagonist Panchali, more than the external conflicts which are an extremely crucial part of the plot. Panchali becomes the reflector figure here along with her husband Yudhistira. The entire plot revolves around her perspective. It is her cognitive impressions of the events and the things happening to her that drives the plot. She as the narrator has the capacity to perceive even the conflicts raging in the mind of her eldest husband too.

Now, moving on to the next retelling by M.T., a literary giant in Malayalam literature whose works has been widely translated into many languages and is now reckoned as a major literary figure in Indian English literature too. *Rendamoozham*, which is considered to be his masterpiece, is a retelling of the *Mahabharata* from the view point of Bhima, the second Pandava Prince. The novel opens on a poignant note of the description of the destruction of Dwaraka by an omniscient narrator. The lead characters are introduced, not with many epithets as expected, their being great warriors, but by the mere mention of their names. This is a sample of the sparse style he adopts.

The novel begins on a poignant note on the destruction of Dwaraka by the waves and by bandits from other kingdoms. The Pandavas, as we see, are on their way to salvation and walking towards the Himalayas. Arjuna recollects the days of the disaster. Here we notice the omniscient narration by a person who seems to

know the emotions passing through the minds of the characters: 'Arjuna could still hear the haughty laughter of the waves that had wiped out the history of the Yadava clan' (V. Nair, 2). The questions in the characters minds appear as free indirect speech, 'Had Krishna who died by an arrow from an unknown hunter known of his impending death?' (V. Nair, 2)

M T' s construct of the mythical Bhima as the focalizer is one of superhuman powers as well as ineptitude, all his might going unrecognized in addition to being mocked at for being fat and stupid. Not only his enemies but his own elder brother Yudhistira constantly makes fun of him deeming him incapable of performing wise deeds such as governance. His strength is a source of fear for his foes which they counter with ridicule. This ridiculing is a form of dominance and control over Bhima for meeting his own targets.

Many times Bhima mentions how he is always treated as inferior and second rate by his own family though in reality he is their savior in critical times. His mind rebels against this injustice though he abides by all the regulations of his mother and brother. In his mind he mocks at the false pride of Yudhistira who in reality is incapable of bold acts. He is never given a chance even by his wife Draupadi and is in turn dominated by her. Hence Nair takes up the case of Bhima who needs to be given a chance to express himself and what comes forth is a poignant story that touches the hearts of his readers as they feel pity for the unsung hero. His Bhima rises above his physicality and presents himself as a man of substance, feeling and emotions. His hyper - masculinity is tempered by humaneness. Most of the time he is much like a pawn in the hands of his elders and wife who manipulate him to their devious ends.

In *Bhima Lone Warrior* the opening lines are significant because they reflect the mind of the narrator: “The sea was black in colour. The waves dashed against the shore, screaming, as if devouring the palace and the great city of Dwaraka had not sated their hunger” (V. Nair,5). The waves were screaming as if they had not sated their hunger even after so much of destruction.

The focalizer here is a heterodiegetic one who notices the thing happening and conveys them to the readers not part of the action. The present in the narrative is the destruction of the sea-ravaged kingdom of Dwaraka with its entire splendor gone. Now the time lapses further back when Arjun had witnessed the destruction beforehand. Those moments as the five Pandavas and their wife stood there, the narrator precisely sums up all the emotions running through the mind of Arjun and the others. It was as if he was privy to all their thoughts and emotions. First he focusses on Arjun, and then he looks at all the others, finally coming up with the perspective of Bhima, whose face lit up with a smile when he noticed a huge ruby lying in the water. The narrator here is able to penetrate the mind of the characters, especially Bhima and is able to read his thoughts. Twice he mentions about what Bhima remembers as he saw something before him. A few passages are dedicated to explaining all the past moments Bhima recollects from his stay in Dwaraka earlier. The flow of thoughts is broken when Yudhistira began to move forward as they had begun their ‘great journey’. When bhima recalls the place in the forest where he had grown up the narrator uses free indirect thought “Shatasringa, our foster-mother, do you see Bhimasena, do you see the Pandavas as they go on their final journey?” (V. Nair, 11)

We also notice the open ended frame of narrative in the novel as the opening chapter titled ‘The Journey’ is like a prologue in which the main characters and the scene of action are introduced. Here the protagonist Bhima is introduced with all his tender feelings towards Draupadi. Though the novel is mainly about the second Pandava prince, Bhima, he is the last one to be introduced by the narrator after the other brothers have been introduced. From the next chapter onwards, we see and hear Bhima unravel the mysteries of his heart. The first chapter titled ‘The Murmur of the Hurricane’ depicts the scene through the eyes of the child Bhima, who had come along with his mother and siblings to Hastinapur from Shatasringa, seventeen days after their father Pandu had died. Right from this point we see how different is the view of the oft – repeated epic through the eyes of the under-rated Pandava Prince. He gives a different dimension and perspective to the epic by his role as a narrator.

As the narrator has a point to make regarding his own status in the epic, he concentrates on the things which are of interest to him. For example, he relishes in the blood and thunder of warfare. It can be seen in the way he narrates the scene of the murder of Keechaka, who had tried to outrage the modesty of Draupadi. Although he is a symbol of masculine strength who could tackle any number of people at the same time, he is overshadowed by Yudhistira and Arjuna. He feels that he has not been given due consideration even by his own mother. Hence M.T. brings out this injustice by making Bhima the leading figure in the novel.

Most often the tale is told with Arjuna as the protagonist with Krishna as his divine friend. The other retellings also focus on the great advice given to Arjuna in the form of the *Bhagavad Gita*. But in *Bhima Lone Warrior*, the focus is entirely on

Bhima whose main pursuit seems to be to gain the approval of Draupadi, a hard one to please. He struggles to win the acceptance of his teachers and other warriors. He could feel the lack of importance shown to him despite being the strongest and mightiest warrior among them. From his childhood Bhima is often disgusted on seeing a special place reserved for Arjuna in everyone's heart. He compares the reaction among his family members when Arjuna killed his first target, a deer. Yudhishthir congratulates him and says that he must offer a sacrifice. At the same time when Bhima killed a wild boar for the first time no one took notice of it. It was not an easy task at his age, but again he feels neglected by everyone. Bhima's main preoccupation here seems to attract the attention of his elders and to show them how Duryodhan and his brothers pester him to no end. The way he overcame them forms a major part of the story.

A technique which M.T. frequently returns to is that of demystification. All the characters are brought down to the level of ordinary mortals. Even Lord Krishna, Arjuna and their divine activities are no more than part of folklore. Another stylistic technique used here is that the narrative starts with the final state of affairs and then traces back all the events leading up to it. Here M.T. starts the prologue with a description of the final journey of the Pandavas to the Himalayas and thence towards heaven. On the way Draupadi falls down unable to bear the hardship of the journey. The omniscient narrator here focuses on Bhima alone who turns back to help her while all his brothers move unflinchingly towards their destination. This reveals the soft corner he had for Draupadi in his heart within his mighty muscular body. The prologue ends with Bhima waiting for his wife to open her eyes and see that it was him alone who had stopped for her while all her other

husbands walked away. He expected a grateful smile from her on opening her eyes. But again he is disappointed seeing Draupadi's eyes follow longingly after Arjuna, her favourite husband.

Monika Fludernik in her book *An Introduction to Narratology* states, 'an overt narrator is one who articulates his/her own views, making his presence felt... taking an active part in the story' (21). Bhima narrates his own story and becomes such an 'overt narrator'. He is physically present during the occurrence of the events. He not only narrates his own personal views but also the tales he has heard second hand. For example when he tells us about the marriage of his aunt Gandhari he almost becomes an omniscient narrator by getting to know facts from overheard conversations.

M.T's *Bhima Lone Warrior* functions as a revisionist rendering of the Hindu epic by demystification. Here Bhima and his brothers are presented as ordinary persons with all their strengths and weaknesses. Bhima is not the super human macho personality but a person who could joke and do funny things to entertain his wife. He even laughs at the myths regarding his mighty powers as just stories created by *sutas* and palace maids. When his perspective is highlighted here the real picture of what had happened emerges in contrast to the hearsay incidents. For example he talks of the story that when he was a kid he had fallen off from his mother's hip and shattered the rock on which he fell. But the truth was that he had just escaped unhurt after the fall. There are many such incidents where Bhima's presence of mind and strength are crucial to saves the lives of the others, but does not like to be seen as an extraordinary person.

The Mahabharata is an epic that has several layers of narration embedded in it. There is an outer framework or narration by the sage Ugrasrava to his disciples about Sage Vyasa's creation. Later it comes in the voice of Sage Vaisampayana, a disciple of Vyasa, who has received the corpus of the story from his teacher beforehand. The outer narration level is the Extradiegetic level, whereas the secondary level is the diegetic one which speaks about the actions of the characters in the text which forms the matrix narrative. Here the matrix narrative consists of the actions of the lineages of the Kuru dynasty who ruled ancient Bharath.

Such complex divisions of narrative levels are left alone by the revisionist narratives of the Mahabharata, where they have chosen to focus on one main character in each version. These narratives are analyzed here to see the connection among them in terms of their narrative levels. Incidentally, these narrative levels also serve to distinguish them from each other as they choose to focus on one particular character or segment of the huge bulk of the *Mahabharata*.

Narrative levels in a text are an analytical tool to establish the relation between instances of narration. There are different levels of narration within a text. There is usually a primary discourse in which the main course of events is narrated. Mostly it is regarded as the intradiegetic or diegetic level where the narrator is also the protagonist of his story. The second instance is that of a narrator who is far removed from the story he is narrating. This is extradiegetic narration. There is also a metadiegetic level in which a narrative is embedded within the primary narrative.

To sum up, the two modes of focalization in fiction, namely, external and internal are held in conjunction with the two modes of presentation, namely, narrator mode and reflector mode. Whereas external focalization describes the

character's outward appearance and existence, internal focalization describes the inner feelings and thoughts of the characters. Further, a zero- focalized narrative is a combination of both these types of narratives. Reflector mode narratives at a homodiegetic level have the interference of the narrator's perspectives that affect the reader's perception. On the other hand, an omniscient narrator at the extradiegetic level perceives only the outwardly observable events and hence cannot be considered a reflector figure.

Narrative technique plays a distinctive role in disrupting our habitual perception of the world, enabling us to see things in a different light. Modern novels making use of these techniques of narrative have brought in a vast change in the whole conception of the novel. The message that the postmodern and postcolonial novels seem to give is that technique is not secondary to the plot but a primary operation in the text.

In all the four novels discussed from the perspective of narrativel levels and focalization in this chapter, we notice that each one of these is written from the perspective of a unique focalizer. *Yajnaseni* and *Palace of Illusions* are written from the perspective of Draupadi as a homodiegetic narrator who is the protagonist of the story she narrates. Narrative is presented in the form of internal focalization, which means that she is aware only of what goes on in her own mind, not that of other characters which an omniscient narrator would know. Along with her own story Draupadi narrates the background of other characters such as Krishna and Karna too.

And Now Let Me Sleep, on the other hand is presented from the angle of a covert narrator who knows all that is happening in the story, but little is revealed

about the person. The narrator is not part of the action here. In *Bhima Lone Warrior* too the perspective of Bhima is the focus although it is a heterodiegetic narrator here who again is not part of the story he narrates. This narrator is able to sense all that crosses the mind of Bhima and how he felt at certain moments. Moving on to the next chapter, it would deal with the revisionist techniques found in the retellings of the *Mahabharata*.

Chapter IV

Revisionist Narrative Techniques in Retellings of the *Mahabharata*

Revisionism is a phenomenon that has reached multiple realms such as philosophy, architecture, politics, economics, culture and the arts. Writers often revert to this technique to retell established narratives from a divergent perspective so as to highlight or reinforce alternate views that do not conform to the dominant ideology. This practice has become so widespread especially in Indian Literature that authors have created a niche audience for their works on mythology.

Revisionism has come to be treated as a sub- genre of postmodern literature.

Retelling of well-known texts is a different text altogether in which the elements of the plot gets refined and filtered through the perspective of another character different from the protagonist of the earlier version. It involves different processes such as reimagining, rearranging, omitting, transforming and recreating.

Another feature of revisionism is the blending of the sublime and the subverted as seen in revisionist narratives of the *Mahabharata*. The new wave of Mythological fiction was fuelled by retellings that subverted the ancient epic, the best known of these being *The Great Indian Novel*. It was critically acclaimed and its publication became a watershed event in Indian English Fiction and continues to be regarded unique for its mode of retelling. Most revisionists focus on the complexity of their narrative rather than a stark good versus evil struggle as assumed by the traditionalists. In contrast to a simple narrative here we find an array of works that interrogate and deliberate moral dilemmas of not only the

protagonists but even the marginalized. Through their aesthetic choices the modernist re-tellers create alternate narratives for the canon and seek to re-articulate the characters and highlight their specific position with regard to the epic. In fact, the modern edition of C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata Retold* served as the source text or a point of reference instead of the supposedly 'original' Sanskrit source text for many of these revisionists.

Typical revisionist narratives on the epics transform their characters to show them as possessing a kind of vision about the world. Viewed from the revisionist angle the characters and events of the epic bring in a new perception in the readers' minds. While some of the events in the epic are adapted into totally unrecognizable forms, others juxtapose different sets of events to draw a connection between them. Even well-known incidents and characters are sometimes marginalized to give way to other events and characters brought into focus. The epic *Mahabharata* is populated by characters in grey shades, which means they have both positive and negative traits in them. To suit their particular viewpoint, revisionists tend to remove unacceptable traits in their protagonists and emphasize the positive qualities in their protagonists. This is possible because these writers control the lives and thoughts of their individual protagonists and they need to be in an acceptable mode for their contemporary readers. Often these protagonists exhibit features of a modern rational individual who rebels against inequalities and mark their protest against several issues in society. They are sometimes even projected as the champions of the downtrodden section. More than narrating the story, their focus is on foregrounding the issues that confront the marginalized in society as well as provide a different perspective on the epic as a whole and its events.

Intertextuality is a constant feature of revisionist narratives. There are references to texts within every text. Julia Kristeva has spoken of the concept expanding on Bakhtin's notion of 'Dialogic Interaction'. According to her there is constant interaction among texts which gives the later texts new meanings. There are allusions to previous texts, so that no text can be considered unique or original by itself. Sometimes the epic even gets metamorphosed into different genres as vastly different as cartoon, plays, movies, and even television serials.

Discontinuous narration is also a feature of revisionist fiction. Multiple narrators and multiple viewpoints add to the complexity of the texts. Historical personages are seen to be interacting with fictional characters. This is especially observed in *The Great Indian Novel* where Tharoor makes historical figures from Indian Freedom struggle interact with mythological personages. These modern retellings of the Mahabharata can well be regarded as 'copies of copies' as Pramod K Nayar puts it:

Our only access to these great works is through the copy or imitation where we will never see the original. In other words, for us the copy is, serves as, becomes the original. Copies and further reproductions of the great works are made from these copies. What we thus have are copies of copies...Postmodernity is characterized by the endless circulation of copies (48-49).

The retellings are being translated and further circulated so that these turn out to be as authentic and the original, and the most authentic Sanskrit original has become out of bounds for common readers. Revisionism can thus be regarded a technique that tries to reimagine, reinvent and recast well known narratives to narrate from

alternate angles, broaden the spectrum to include many other facets, and challenge and subvert traditional narratives. It involves various techniques which can deepen the knowledge base of the reader's by introducing unknown features of the texts so that the text itself takes on a new guise.

Revisionist writings employ parody and dark humour to a large extent in their anxiety to build a fresh narrative and to outdo what has already been done to death. In these narratives one notices a self- reflexive narrator giving a circular narration often in an incoherent manner, as in *The Great Indian Novel*. Tharoor presents the narrative through a humorous and irreverent narrator. The bitter satire comes through camouflaged as dark humour. The aesthetic choices made by the authors in terms of plot and character realization are also much influenced by the milieu in which the works were produced. Here the amount of space to delineate a character depends on their requirement in the retelling. Modernist writers require a deep psychological analysis of their character's motivations. Hence they expand on even the minor characters in the epic and sometimes even push to the margins central characters like the Pandavas or Krishna in their retellings. Pattanaik and Rajagopalachari on the other hand, do not focus on any one particular character. Instead they produce a narrative in simple plain English that has a wide reach.

In Indian English Fiction there are different genres of adaptations of the Mahabharata starting from the past century. There are parodies of the epic as in Tharoor's work. There are also graphic fictional works, like Amrutha Patil's graphic novel *Adi Parva* as part of the boom in mythological fiction in the Indian publishing industry. This epic has been a readily accessible source for drawing

different stories for the vast arena of mythological adaptations in Indian Literature in English.

Many of the recently published works in Indian Fiction used the strategy of revisionist mythmaking as an attempt to rewrite the role of women in patriarchy and even subverting them. When there are re-renderings of ancient texts different modes of narration is applied. Old texts are reinterpreted in new critical dimensions evolving multiple layers of meaning. Marginalized voices emerge raising issues that were never taken into account. Myths tend to be re-rendered in these revisions that also enrich the original texts as well as their own version. These fictional landscapes are attuned to the perspective of the focalizer in the narrative. Most of these revisionist narratives are women-centric. The protagonists are free to deliver a gynocentric view, and have the mettle to make informed choices, transcend their marginalization. The epics usually celebrate wars and warriors at the same time imposing notions of chastity and purity on women. Women in these narratives resist such impositions and assert their identity.

It makes use of reference texts to facilitate a better focus on the deviations and variations in the revisionist works. Many of these revisionists are so obsessed with mythology that they reimagine these epics as showcasing the best of humanity and the ideal nation with a supreme sovereignty. Kavitha Kane, one of the revisionists points out in an interview: “Mythology can be a huge canvas for contemporary thought. It is not telling us some old tales, as so carelessly assumed, of Gods and Goddesses, but of man and his follies and fallacies” (Kaushik). She admits that she was more fascinated by the secondary characters than the primary ones in mythology.

In the postmodern world one rarely finds such perfect and idealistic beings as Arjuna and Krishna have been projected. The present scenario accommodates imperfection and sub-standard condition as the new normal. So we find the roles of warriors reversed to show their negative side. Arjuna in the beginning of *Bhima Lone Warrior* is shown to be lacking nerve to resist the attack of plunderers of Dwaraka. Similarly Krishna is presented as a vile schemer and opportunist in his determination to lead the Pandavas to victory in the Great War. So these revisionist writers do not hesitate from presenting their protagonists with shades of grey or even negative shades even if these mythological characters are regarded as sacrosanct in their culture.

The original Sanskrit Mahabharata has been de-centered from its venerable position by the many newer retellings in many media such as movies, T V serials, graphic novels, comics, podcasts etc. *Palace of Illusions* is a contemporary retelling of the epic. In every aspect it differs from the epic. Draupadi is given plenty of space to establish her peculiarities and character. She appears curious and skeptical about everything around her. From the beginning Divakaruni designs the novel in the postmodern concept. Her protagonist is never tired of questioning the logic in everything. Even Krishna remarks mockingly in the last part of her life in the novel, “Skeptical to the last! ...Will you never be done with questioning?” (Divakaruni, 359). Addressing her twenty-first century audience Divakaruni says “where for the first time she becomes truly Panchali”, giving her protagonist the characteristic main role to articulate herself and emphasize that this was the version of herself she truly desired. This may be intentionally done to reflect on the inexhaustible

possibilities of research available on the *Mahabharata*, which no single study can encompass fully.

Research is still done on the conflict of moral integrity and the struggle for survival showcased in the epic. The need to survive is one of the reasons for violating the code of integrity by even the virtuous Pandavas. The epic continues to be the subject of debates on Gender issues, especially during the infamous episode of the disrobing of Draupadi at the end of the gambling game. J Fitzgerald's *The Great Epic of India as Religious Rhetoric: A Fresh Look at The Mahabharata* and E.W. Hawpkins' *The Great Epic of India* are some such readings that focus on these issues.

In *Yajnaseni*, Ray presents a counter narrative where women try to emphasize their role and presence in a culture where women were not allowed to even choose their life partners. Though in the beginning Draupadi wanted to make Krishna her life partner, she was rejected by Krishna himself saying that she was meant to be married to his dearest Sakha Arjun. "First I was offered to Krishna. Krishna did not accept me and ordained that I was for his Sakha, Arjun...Arjun had been born a portion of Krishna himself" (Ray, 33). In *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi reverts to the marginal – dominant hierarchy by arguing for and securing the release of her husbands from slavery after the disastrous game of dice that happens later in the novel. Instead of her husbands releasing her from confinement, it is she who secures their freedom. Thus Pratibha Ray turns her calamity into a greater opportunity for gaining her the central position in the narrative unlike the epic where she has been marginalized.

In this self-reflexive narrative that can be read as a postmodern revisionist text, Ray makes Draupadi introspect on all aspects of her life and position in society. It is a relook at the myth of Draupadi as the common wife of the five Pandavas. Ray tries to explore the myth of Draupadi not as has been presented so far, but to examine her inner life and consciousness in such a way that the recipient generation is able to relate to her thoughts. In her version we notice that the focus is not on the great Kurukshetra war as with earlier works. In contrast this becomes a psychological exploration of Draupadi as the protagonist. In her re-vision of Draupadi Ray adds more aspects to her multidimensional personality. For example she is presented chiefly as a sensitive poet who observes keenly the subtleties of the nature around her. Her assertive nature is evident right at the beginning. Despite being forced into a polyandrous marriage and such similar critical situations, her decisions and choices leave a mark on the fate of the Kuru dynasty. She not only wishes to get to know the reasons behind such peculiar circumstances in her life in her deliberations with Krishna, but also expects the active involvement of her readers in understanding her situations.

Yajnaseni begins at the end with the novel opening with the scene of Draupadi who has slipped and fallen in notice with disappointment that none of her husbands has waited or turned around towards her on their journey towards heaven on Mount Meru. Fragmented narrative is another feature of the revisionist novel, which can be seen in the way Ray here selects incidents from the life of Draupadi with the sole aim of presenting the epic from her perspective. In the postmodern novel fragmented sections are juxtaposed to contrast with each other. Here we also notice the presence of an unreliable narrator who deliberately is biased by default

towards her heroine. Since there are many versions of the epic in retellings available now, the modern reader does not just depend on the narrator to know the plot. Not only that, the reader doubts the authenticity of the narrator in this narrative. Draupadi's life narrated in the end part of her life in the painful letter to Krishna is a reminder that every tale could be narrated different from the earlier one. Her life is open ended like the letter she begins at the end. So there are more versions to come that challenge or become counter – narratives. They may take up subversive voices.

The meta-fictional elements in it scrutinized and re-examined even the process of writing. Along with this postmodernism harbours distrust towards universally accepted ideologies and 'truths'. It is a construct that comes into existence only in discourses about it. Everything could now be viewed from a different perspective. There are multiple narrators and multiple viewpoints. Genres were mixed up, fragmentation and collage became accepted as forms of narrative.

In contrast to the grand narratives, metafiction is a type of writing that is aware of its nature of being an artefact or a construct. This awareness is also flaunted in these works as if it needs to be celebrated and is of consequence. Metafiction thus examines critically its own self, analyzing the distinction between reality and fiction. Hutcheon considers metafiction to be "fiction about fiction- that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity" (1). The metafictional technique enables the narrative to create a fictional world and also be aware of its own fictional nature, thus undermining the illusion it has created in the narrative. Such writings subvert the earlier literary conventions such as literary realism.

A similar technique is historiographic metafiction, which erases the distinction between historical and literary pieces. Traditionally it is assumed that literature is a mere fictional presentation, whereas history is a realistic presentation of actual facts. In postmodernism such distinctions are done away with and replaced with the idea that any kind of writing, whether literary or historical is only an interpretation, and not real. It re-evaluates the past by making the familiar unfamiliar by selective presentation of facts. Historiographic metafiction also suggests that truth is plural and questions the validity of historical truth. Thus it finds newer means of articulation to enunciate the past events.

Revisionism being an outgrowth of postmodernism, writers often use the technique of breaking the dichotomy between fact and fiction. This in turn leads to the breaking of frames for making sense of the reality. These narratives question even the existence of such frames, because there is hardly any noticeable distinction between reality and fiction in them. One method to break this frame is by using an intrusive author who comments on his own fiction making style and questions the actions of his characters. But the fault in this particular method is that the frame is expanded to include the author as a character in it but the frame still remains. Once the author enters his own text, he is no more connected to the outside world in a paradoxical situation. When he comments on the plot turns or the nature of the characters, he deviates from the plot and sometimes digresses from it to comment on the social conditions. Using such techniques emphasizes the fact that the reality of the text and that of the author differs vastly from each other. Various such discourses make up the postmodern novel. These conflicting views are left as such without an attempt to resolve them.

A revisionist novel tends to use multiple narrators. Sometimes the narrator meets a character in the story who takes up the narration and starts narrating another plot that becomes the embedded narrative. This process continues like a chain of fragmented narratives embedded in the text. Some narrative techniques call the attention of the reader to the fact that he is reading a book through the innovative use of format or layout. This may consist of even the use of coloured fonts, different font sizes, graphics and images. Such discursive practices deliberately disturb the reading process and force the reader to take note of the changes he encounters and the effect of these on the reading process.

Geographical space is reconfigured in revisionist narratives. In the attempt to break the notion of fixed boundaries, including that of nation, often these narratives take as their protagonists, travellers or explorers. Intertextuality, cinematic narrative techniques, multiple narrators, mixing –up of genres, disordered presentation, variations in temporality, reworking of myths etc are some of the other postmodern techniques used in recent fiction. Apart from these the use of parody, pastiche, and bricolage is also done. All of these are amply found in the postmodern presentation of the *Mahabharata* by Shashi Tharoor in *The Great Indian Novel*.

The postmodern Indian novel in English deeply imbues the native Indian culture. The retelling of myths in contemporary colloquial language is also a kind of postmodern retelling. In *Palace of Illusions* the *Mahabharata* is presented through the mouthpiece of Draupadi. In her reworking of the epic Divakaruni acknowledges in the beginning that her presentation would be different from that of Vyasa. She says, “It was my turn to play storyteller. So I began” (13). She thus consciously avoids the invocation of the muse and gives the reins to her protagonist. In place

of the lofty language of the epic, she uses the ordinary language of her contemporary readers, so that they are able to identify with her. She takes the central role in the events and everything that happens here is in some way connected to her, whereas in the epic she had been sidelined and passively received the result of others actions. She is so sure of her part that she makes a strong decision on her kind of narrative: “she does not want either a sanitized version or distorted version of the past but a factual one” (Kavitha Nair, 155). As a variation, she also adds Dhai Ma, Dristadhyumna and even Shikandi as narrators using the postmodern technique of multiple narrators. Hybrid genre has been used multiple times in the novel, for instance, Draupadi as the homodiegetic narrator uses colloquial speech, songs, and other discourse. Divakaruni has also used the dramatic technique of the aside. In the aside she presents the thoughts of Draupadi in single brackets to show her views on all that happened around her. She uses this technique when the Kaurava patriarch Dhritarashtra blesses Draupadi with the words: “May- you- be-the-mother-of-a-hundred-sons, or May-your-wedding-sindur-forever-shine-on-your-forehead (I knew, of course, that he’d like nothing better than to have the entire Pandavas lineage perish)” (Divakaruni,129).

As a typical revisionist novel, the *Palace of Illusions* starts *in media res*, unlike the epic on which it is based. Here the novel opens at a time when the narrator is a grown up woman with an independent mind and views. Divakaruni also does away with the habit of epic authors who present their heroes as absolutely infallible and macho. Here she brings down each of the Pandavas from their status and highlights the fact that all of them have flaws. For instance she doesn’t mince words in declaring that her suffering and disrobing at the Hastinapur court was due

to the obsession of Yudhistira towards the game of dice. Arjuna, similarly is shown to be obsessed with his honour.

In the modern retellings the succession of events remains the same, but the perspective changes. In postmodern fiction, the narrator and the novel itself become the subject of discussion, as in self-reflexive fiction. These artworks are noted for their decentralizing the main events and characters in line with their postmodern perspective. These works provide alternative possibilities for narration. The voice in the text foregrounds the alternative perspective too. Michail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism too can be applied to the study of this novel. In dialogism there is scope for individual view rather than the universal truth. This is relevant because in this novel rather than a universally accepted notion of the epic, it is the individual viewpoint that is presented.

Even the original Sanskrit epic in one thousand verse lines consists of numerous characters, which in turn represent opposing views that are in conflict with each other. There are also innumerable digressions that easily distract the reader from the main plot and do not contribute much to the development of the plot. *The Mahabharata* is also something that continues to be rewritten or retold by every generation of writers. Shashi Tharoor explains *Bookless in Baghdad* about the uniqueness of the *Mahabharata* tradition in these words:

The Mahabharata had so many accretions over the years in constant retellings that there is practically no subject it does not cover. Its characters and personalities still march triumphantly in Indian minds, its myths and legends still inspire the Indian imagination, its events, still speak to Indians with a contemporary resonance rare in many twentieth century

works... Whenever a particular social or political message was sought to be imparted to Indians at large, it was simply inserted into a retelling of the Mahabharata. (21)

Since it basically deals with the life of the Pandavas, they are presented as the idealized version of the best men in Indian tradition. The epic being part of a national tradition is generally regarded as the absolute past that cannot be interrogated. The characters here are the first among men in that culture, cherry picked and exhibiting behavior that is exemplary.

Connected to the concept of 'dialogism' is Julia Kristeva's term, 'Intertextuality' and is an extension of the former. Her concept provides a framework for the proper study of the interconnections and relations among texts. The Sanskrit epic forming the basis of the retellings that are the subject of study here is itself an amalgam of ancient philosophy and wisdom distilled into verse by a divine author. Not only does the novel resist the authority of the ancient epic text, but also rejoices in the female script of this mammoth work, as is evident in the words of Kavitha Nair:

Draupadi in Divakaruni's novel does not want to play "some role" but rather the leading role whose presence determines the action of the story, thereby demanding an unwavering attention and focus on her. In other words, she does not want to play a role in someone else's script which will cripple her movement and diminish her impact..., Draupadi does not want to be a mere character in somebody else's script. She considers all the previous versions of the story as scripts which denied her freedom and progress (11).

Draupadi can thus be read even as a ‘postmodern woman’ who takes control of herself and then even interprets something that was imposed on her, in her own fashion. Instead of the divine authorship of Vyasa, he is presented as a forest dweller or a ‘fortune-teller’ (Divakaruni, 30) as he is first introduced by one of Draupadi’s maids. The maid’s description further indicates how she meant to sideline his authorship: “Truth to tell, he scared me, with a beard that covered his whole face and glittery red eyes. He looked like he could put a curse on you if you made him angry” (Divakaruni, 35). In the novel there are many references to Vyasa as the chronicler and a mystic. He is made to admit that he was the playwright who already knows the direction his play would take even as he was at it. He even tells her directly that he was writing “The story of your life, if only you’d stop interrupting it. And of your five husbands. And of the great and terrible war of Kurukshetra that will end the Third age of Man” (Divakaruni, 41).

Divakaruni gives agency to the princess to take decisions in her life. This is evident from the way her birth is described. In her narrative, the birth of Panchali is of central import, and is repeated many times too, by different narrators. By contrast, in the epic and other retellings, her birth is not of much consequence and is just mentioned casually. Here even the placing of the event is of importance, which seems to suggest that the birth of the female protagonist is of as much importance as the male. Later in the novel, not only does she make Dhairya Ma relate the story to her, but also interrupts the narrative and intervenes to have her say or her view expressed. Her power over the narrative flow here is a sign of her ability and agency.

The prophecies at the time of the birth of the siblings also show her superiority. About Dristadyumna, it is prophesied that he will bring the ‘vengeance’ that his father desired. At the same moment the prophecy about Draupadi is that she “would change the course of history” (Divakaruni, 4). The prophecies indicate that the son would please the father, but the daughter would go on to leave a distinct mark on the world. Draupadi critically analyzes the story of her own birth, as well as the stories related to other characters. In a similar vein, she ponders over the stories circulated about Krishna, and says:

I didn’t pay too much attention to the stories, some of which claimed that he was a god, descended from celestial realms to save the faithful. People loved to exaggerate, and there was nothing like a dose of the supernatural to spice up the drudgery of facts. But I admitted this much: there was something unusual about him (Divakaruni, 10).

Draupadi’s relationship with the other men in her life- Krishna and Karna is a deviation from the epic narrative. She is shown to develop a close bond with Krishna as her mentor and friend. She also felt that the ultimate aim of men’s life is not that of sacrificing their lives on the battlefield gloriously but to live a long life happily. She also thought of the futility of wars though she herself is deemed to be a catalyst for the Great War:

I thought of the husband and sons that everyone assumed I would have someday. The husband I couldn’t visualize, but the sons I imagined as miniature versions of Dhri, with the same straight, serious eyebrows. I promised myself I’d never pray for their deaths. I’d teach them, instead, to

be survivors. And why was a battle necessary? Surely there were other ways to glory, even for men? I'd teach them to search for those (Divakaruni, 26).

She thus challenges the centrality of the Kurukshetra war in the epic. Her postmodern approach enables her to think sensitively about nature, beauty and the finer aspects of life than just about honour and pride of the clan. She also deviates from the epic's preoccupation with dharma in developing the romantic relationship between Draupadi and Karna. Her first glance at his portrait just before her swayamvar created a huge impression on her. She makes up her mind immediately to marry him. This choice of her life partner that she decides right at the beginning indicates her wish to distance her version from the earlier ones that imposed the culture's expectations from her. She attempts to assert her right to choose her partner. The more she comes to know of further details about Karna's past she was the more obsessed with him. "Each painful detail of Karna's story became a hook in my flesh, binding me to him, making me wish a happier life for him" (Divakaruni, 87), she notes. She felt some affinity towards him and it was her preoccupation with the similarity in the way their parents initially rejected them. She was disturbed by the cruel turn of fate for such a noble being.

This longing for his love reminds her constantly of the noble way she would have been treated by him if she was married to him until the last moments of her life. Although the reality was that he treated her harshly whenever they encountered each other. She is deeply troubled by but also excited of the relationship that is in conflict with her allegiances to her husbands. She even confesses once:

In spite of the vows I made each day to forget Karna, to be a better wife to the Pandavas, I longed to see him again. Each time I entered a room, I

glanced up under my veil—I couldn't stop myself—hoping he was there. (It was foolish. If he'd been present, surely he'd have turned away, my insult still a fresh gash in his mind.) I eavesdropped shamelessly on the maids, trying to discover his whereabouts. On the verge of asking Dhai Ma to find out where he'd disappeared to (for she had her ways of unearthing secrets), I bit back my tongue a hundred times. If she'd heard me pronounce his name, she would have known how I felt. And even to her who loved me as she loved no one else, I didn't dare reveal this dark flower that refused to be uprooted from my heart (Divakaruni, 163).

The same feelings are reciprocated in Karna too. But both of them strongly adhere to the norms of society and give up their romantic attraction and hide it behind a mask of haughtiness. Even at the most dishonoured state when Draupadi was being disrobed at the Hastinapur court, she knew that if she pleaded with Karna, she would have been rescued from her dire straits. Instead she remained firm and did not beg or bow before him. “But I wouldn't lower myself to that, not if I died” (Divakaruni, 192), she says. This was the most unexpected reaction from her and Karna was stupefied by her attitude. Similarly when Karna was offered the status of the elder brother of the Pandavas and the hand of Draupadi as his consort, he found it impossible to resist, but overcame it with all his will power to resist the temptation.

Panchali's relation with her husbands is a detached one. She either criticizes them or was angry and indifferent to them. They too maintained a careful distance from her rather than provoke her anger. In their race for honour and power they ignored her desires. Arjun is the one she blames for her unusual fate of being

married to five husbands at a time. She is well aware of the fact that they were not concerned of her wishes. Even during a crisis like getting the news of their being burnt alive, Draupadi seems more concerned of her fate of having no one to win her in the *swayamvar*. “My head whirled. Part of me was aghast at the terrible thing that had happened to the Pandavas and their mother, but a large part could think only of myself. Fear makes us selfish. If Arjun was dead, what would happen to me?” (Divakaruni, 72). Hence in her concern to mainstream the thoughts and voice of Draupadi, Divakaruni has reduced the space for the portrayal of the heroic Pandavas. Their presence in the narrative is reduced to the title role of being her husbands and their exploits and superhuman abilities are left unexplored in her postmodern narrative.

Divakaruni’s treatment of the sage Vyasa is similarly an attempt to side line him. At many places in the narrative he comes across as a patriarch who vehemently subordinates the other gender. As a fortune teller he is shown to be well aware of Panchali’s destiny and encourages her to accept her fate unquestioningly. She is taken as the catalyst for the turn of many events without any control over what happens to her. His piece of advice to her is to restrict herself further:

But I’ll give you some advice. Three dangerous moments will come to you. The first will be just before your wedding: at that time, hold back your question. The second will be when your husbands are at the height of their power: at that time, hold back your laughter. The third will be when you’re shamed as you’d never imagined possible: at that time, hold back your curse. Maybe it will mitigate the catastrophes to come (Divakaruni, 40)

These instructions from the reverend sage emphasises the patriarchal authority and seem to justify the actions of the male characters that traumatize Draupadi, doing nothing to prevent such dominance but instead trying to control the reaction of the female protagonist to the injustice. In the novel, instead of being submissive and obedient to his authority, Draupadi is seen to reject his advice and face the consequences of the disobedience. All along she also notes how nonchalantly he witnesses her making those very mistakes he had predicted long back. This is to show how patriarchy nonchalantly views the disrespect women face in society.

Draupadi's relationship with Krishna is also explored well in this novel. It is shown to be that between close friends, the *Sakha* and *Sakhi*. "He asked me what I thought of my place in the world as a woman and a princess – and then challenged my rather traditional beliefs" (Divakaruni, 12), she recollects. This way view point and conceptions get moulded through his interventions. He thus becomes someone more than just a friend, someone like a mentor or teacher. This goes on until it dawns on her that he was "the air I breathed – indispensable and unconsidered (Divakaruni, 70). Her final realization comes at the very end of the novel:

It's only now I see that he's always been there, sometimes in the forefront, sometimes blended into the shadows of my life. When I thought myself abandoned, he was busy supporting me—but so subtly that I often didn't notice. He loved me even when I behaved in a most unlovable manner. And his love was totally different from every other love in my life. Unlike them, it didn't expect me to behave in a certain way. It didn't change into displeasure or anger or even hatred if I didn't comply. It healed me. If what

I felt for Karna was a singeing fire, Krishna's love was a balm, moonlight over a parched landscape. How blind I'd been not to recognize it for the precious gift it was! (Divakaruni, 356)

Thus retaining the traditional values embedded in the epic, Divakaruni also seeks to give space and voice to her protagonist Draupadi to express her concern on matters that directly or indirectly affect her. She accommodates into her postmodern narrative space the original author of the epic and gives credit to his efforts while trying to deviate even slightly to incorporate her view. She does all this and gives a different reading to the epic without changing the main narrative structure of the epic.

In the changing scenario writers found scope to explore unknown heroes who faced neglect in the prime narrative and gave them roles of protagonists. This reflected the change in the society itself which became inclusive and empowered the marginalized. Hence contemporary revisionist works chose to focus on individual characters and themes rather than the entire plot of the epic. The familiar terrain of the epic gets transformed in their hands due to their selection of events and articulating the silent aspects of the epic.

When the material of the epic gets rewritten as a novel, it has many advantages and disadvantages too. The epic is embedded in the cultural consciousness of the nation and hence its reach is immense, whereas the novel is set in the cultural and social milieu of the time of its publication and so is much limited in its reach. The advantage this provides the novelist is that the author can bring the character and situate him in his own times and create a contemporary appeal in the attitude and way of thinking of his character. The protagonist's consciousness is

presented in a selective string of incidents and memories. In addition, the novelist is responsible for bringing in diverse modes of thinking in his readers to sensitize them on marginalization and on women's issues.

The revisionist novel also provides deep psychological insight into the minds of their characters to explore their motives and rationale behind their actions. Such in depth analytical revelations broaden the canvas of the novel to sketch them in detail. This also helps in the development of the plot. Modern revisits adopt a particular lens for their perspective that has to be different from the presentations done so far. It has to be in the contemporary mode, and hence they select an appropriate character and focus on them, also making them the author's mouthpiece.

These characters are shown to undergo a transformation; hence there is scope for the development of character. They are projected as a fresh piece that does not have the past associations. It doesn't seem as if they have already lived their life and their life has been the subject of umpteen studies. Starting from the childhood experiences and impressions, all the protagonists of the chosen novels have many similarities. They question the authority and judgement of the hitherto unquestioned authority of the patriarchal head of their families, thus exposing their shortcomings.

Bhima in *Bhima Lone Warrior* challenges in a similar manner, the patriarchal value system. His masculinity is weighed against his intellectual sensitivity on many issues. He too observes keenly the way he is treated as inferior even by his own brothers, who are considered the pinnacles of manhood and

intellect. His invoking the suthas and Magadhas in the beginning “invoke once again” suggests his reattempt at narrating the epic.

In the episode of the killing of Ghatotkacha, M.T shows how the under-privileged like him are perceived in the eyes of the higher classes as the other. In the words and thoughts of Krishna, he shows how crass their behaviour can be towards the tribal. Gatotkacha’s death and the response to it from Krishna are pointers on the marginalization of the tribes. While Bhima shook in grief, Krishna finds cause to celebrate the death as a victory of his stratagem. His aim solely being, the designing of the victory of the Pandava side in the war. Again, the scene receives sensitive portrayal by M.T:

I saw his corpse, a cluster of darkness stranded, denied a chance to retreat.

The weapon struck out of his chest pointing to the sky. A vulture perched on it, casting covetous eyes on the body below. A pyre need not be prepared for a forester who has no heroic heaven to go to (218-219).

In the last sentence here M T sums up the general feeling of his family in deciding not to conduct proper rites and cremate his body. The technique of stating very sensitive information in a casual way is unique for M T. His interior monologue highlights the issue of marginalization. He is shown to possess secular ideals that are important for the society. Bhima’s interaction with the tribes and soft corner towards them reveals M. T’s forward postmodern perspective of the need to assimilate them into the mainstream. He would attack them only when he finds a threat from them towards his family. M.T. even suggests that when the forests were erased to construct the Indraprastha for the Pandavas, Bhima would not have allowed that if he had been there.

M.T also presents a very unconventional image of the prince Yudhistira. When seen through the eyes of the protagonist Bhima, he is very insensitive, crude; dominating while also is shown to be a coward. The contrast between the brothers is evident and in this way he emphasises that Bhima has been denied his rightful position and fame in the society and minds of even his family. His unjust marginalization and relegation to the second place has been rightly questioned through the thought process of Bhima. When he looks at himself from others eyes, he accepts the abnormality of the size of his tummy and his big appetite. Throughout his life he faces derision from people who are absolutely nothing before his strength. If he had realized his power and been presented as being proud of his story would have been entirely different.

M T's Bhima, though a mythical hero, is contemporary and postmodern in his thinking. He is seen to be aware that all the marginalized sections have to be treated as equals. This idea is not found among the divine beings such as Krishna or even the celebrated heroes like Yudhistira. Krishna talks about the tribes as if they were entirely dispensable. They were only to be used by the higher castes. Bhima, on the other hand is like their protector and doesn't disturb them unless their lives are threatened. These are the ways in which M.T, who wanted to give what was due to Bhima, achieves it. He thus makes Bhima a superhero though possessing outward qualities of manliness as expected by patriarchy, inwardly he is shown to be humble and having genuine concern for the well-being of others, which are not the virtues emphasised by patriarchy.

The raging conflict in the mind of Yudhistira at the end of the war, when he has to rule the kingdom of Hastinapura mainly consisting of widows and children,

has been of great importance in Vyasa's epic. This conflict has been used to emphasize lessons on duty and Dharma in a person's life, revealing a great philosophy of life. This dilemma has been transposed on to Bhima, by M T. He is always troubled by the reality he senses and what others pretend to be. He sees through the mask apparently worn by his brothers, especially by Yudhistira. Inwardly he rebels against the injustice and is torn between what he wants to speak out and what is allowed to speak. He is bound by his duty of reverence towards his elders, even when he senses their mediocrity and realizes that they were undeserving of it.

One of the milestones achieved by M. T is to demythologize the protagonist and many of the mythological characters and incidents. He chose incidents where he would be able to give rational explanations and connections. This was something of an achievement that was unique among all the retellings. None have been able to equal his feat so far. His rationalist approach makes him question many of the values enshrined in the epic. He even does away with the myth of the divine pregnancy of his mother bearing him. He tries to give rational explanation for the fatherhood of the Pandavas. For instance, Bhima finds out that he was not the son of the God of Wind as presented in the epic, but the son of an exceptionally powerful forester. This he kept as suspense to be revealed in the end by Kunti herself.

M.T's approach to Bhima in *Bhima Lone Warrior* is to demystify all the myths attached to him in his own words. He laughs at those myths saying they were fabricated by the palace maids and the servants. He even recollects incidents that happened when he was an infant and compares it to the stories that have spread

about his superhuman strength. For instance he remembers the maids saying that he had once fallen off from his mother's hand and fell on the rocks and smashed the rocks. He corrects this story saying that he just happened to escape without getting hurt. All the other details were additions by the maids' imaginations.

There is a mythical digression of the time when Bhima is fed with alcohol, tied up and thrown into the river, where he is bitten by snakes. Again here the epic uses supernatural machinery of the *Nagaloka* in the epic to save him. Nair explains this escape in a logical and acceptable way, by calling the men who saved him as the Nagas with their "small eyes and yellow skin" (56). The grown up warrior often recollects the advice given by the Nagas of 'not to show mercy to the enemy': "You must never show an enemy kindness. He will acquire greater strength from your kindness and become invincible. This is our law: you can let an animal escape, but you must never give a human being a second chance" (V. Nair, 57).

Bhimasena's fights with the monsters in the forest while the Pandavas and their wife were staying in the forest are presented here as ordinary fights and not something that exhibits the superhuman strength of Bhima as found in the epic. His encounter with Hidimba, Baka, Kirmira are described as fights with foresters with extra strength. Here too M.T. tries to maintain the logic in the events rather than being subservient to the epic tradition.

Bhima provides rational explanation for incidents that involve actions by Gods or sages. Even Krishna is not treated as a divine incarnation, but as an ordinary ruler in the southern region. He is also deemed to possess some negative shades in his character. He is presented as a schemer who makes strategic moves to enable the Pandavas to win the war. When he is offered the crown of Hastinapur as

Yudhistira decides to retire to the forest, Bhima recognizes that the suggestion was not allowed to fructify through the intervention of Kunti and Draupadi. He shrugs away this insult as a result of his seeming insufficiency to be a ruler. M. T has attempted to analyze psychologically Bhima's actions and those of his close ones in *Bhima Lone Warrior*.

In *Yajnaseni*, Pratibha Ray presents all the moral dilemma the woman Draupadi faces apart from the scorn and ridicule for being the common wife of five men. She questions societal norms that sanction greater power for men over women. Written in the epistolary form, the reader gets a deep insight into the mind of the character Draupadi. Divakaruni also presents Draupadi as an independent, motivated woman who resists attempts from people to control her. During the last part of her life when she takes up the difficult journey, she is asked not to join her husbands, she declares, "...the more people dissuaded me the more determined I became. Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries society has prescribed for women" (Ray, 343)

Here Draupadi is shown to be sharp in intellect and is able to decipher the motives behind people's actions. She grasps that her marriage to the five brothers is her mother-in law's strategy to keep them united. She also feels deep affinity towards Karna 'as victims of parental rejection'. This relationship has been developed further by Divakaruni making them constantly cross paths and also making Draupadi often compare him with her husbands and convince herself at every juncture that Karna would never have let something bad befall her.

In the postmodern retellings the narrators made a convincing and realistic presentation of facts related to incidents in the epic with divine interventions. One

such incident involves the insult and disrobing of Draupadi at the Kaurava assembly. That incident also brings to the fore Draupadi's relationship with Krishna which is beyond human comprehension. That moment she heard Krishna's words spoken directly into her mind: "no one can shame you if you don't allow it" (Divakaruni, 193). She then thought about what was happening to her and remarks: "let them stare at my nakedness. Why should I care? They, and not I, should be ashamed of shattering the boundaries of decency. Was that not miracle enough?" (Divakaruni, 193). This move could be Divakaruni's attempt to give a rational explanation and also invest a modern outlook in Draupadi. In *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi's reaction to the same incident is stronger:

Wicked people, driven by perverted lust, are insulting the bride of Bharat dynasty and stripping her body naked in the assembly – hall! Such a gross outrage on womanhood will never be wiped out in history ... For this insult there is no forgiveness, for this sin there is no expiation (Ray, 241-42)

Similarly another powerful female character who is also actively involved in all the happenings is Kunti. She is shown to be proactive in the welfare of her sons. She takes strategic decisions that sometimes shock her sons. Her last attempt to save her sons was by offering Karna the hand of Draupadi as he would be treated as the eldest pandava, were he to join their side. Her firm will and steely resolve that her son Yudhistira rightfully deserves the kingship wins many hearts.

Thus the well-known tale has been rewritten by various authors by shedding light on incidents and characters that they feel deserved a better treatment. Their shift in focus creates a new episode or new perspective. The retake on the epic is a method followed by many and these retellings usually begin at the last stage of the

protagonists lives and present a long relook to examine their own actions. They get to distance themselves from their immediate present. In spite of the hurdles she faced in her life Draupadi is able to tide over tragedies and take decisive actions whereas her husbands are shown to be debilitated by the enormous loss they faced.

At one point Draupadi in *Palace of Illusions* questions many of the accepted notions about war and honour. She was taught that the men were expected to die a glorious death in war. Women were also expected to pray that their men are lucky to have such an end to their lives. Dhri's tutor explains this:

A Kshatriya woman's highest purpose in life is to support the warriors in her life: her father, brother, husband and sons. If they should be called to war, she must be happy that they have the opportunity to fulfill a heroic destiny. Instead of praying for their safe return, she must pray that they die with glory on the battlefield (Divakaruni, 26).

She asks why they should not pray that their men should lead happy and fulfilling lives instead of sacrificing themselves on the battlefield. This was the new perspective on war reflected in many other postmodern works.

The beauty of Draupadi seems to be the prize to be given away to the best archer among the Kshatriya clan during her *Swayamvar*. In this sense, her father treated her as a commodity to be staked for finding the best among the men in their clan to avenge his insult by Drona. The term *Swayamvara* appears to be a misnomer as she is given no choice in the selection of her groom. In *Yajnaseni*, Draupadi seems to recognize this and laments: "Did I have no wish of my own, no desire, no craving?" (Ray, 23). Further Arjuna who wins her in the contest is asked to share the 'prize' equally with his brothers. She is pained in being treated as no more than an

object when she hears Arjun declare that by the rules of dharma she is to be the common wife of the brothers: “Therefore, we shall all enjoy the princess equally. She will be the wife, according to dharma, of all of us” (Ray, 57).

In Divakaruni’s narrative Draupadi receives many traditional lessons and advice from Sage Vyasa, her maid Dhai Ma and even from Krishna, but her view is presented alongside these to give an insight into her way of modern thinking. By seeking to get a palace constructed for her that would reflect her aspirations and establish her forte, also being the narrator of her story, she tries to take control of her life and the way she wants others to perceive it. She notices the difference between how others perceive her and her own self-evaluation. While Panchali is presented here as impetuous, rebellious, and outspoken her husbands who were regarded as great warriors as shown to be patient and passive, incapable of retaliation. At the end of the battle, she realizes for the first time that her self-perception is contrary to that of the widows around her, who regard her as “the witch who might, with a wave of her hand, transform them into widows” (Divakaruni, 258).

During the war when Draupadi is blessed with divine sight by Sage Vyasa, she is no more a passive listener to the events of the day on the battlefield, but a reporter for the other women in her family and to her readers. She takes this to be her chance to add what has not been included in the Mahabharata: “But here’s something Vyasa didn’t put down in his Mahabharata: Leaving the field, the glow travelled to a nearby hill, where it paused for a moment over a weeping woman” (Divakaruni, 298). Here Draupadi decides to forcefully turn the narrative into her viewpoint by adding her own portions into the fabula of the epic.

With her modern perspective, Draupadi takes the initiative to transform the society fully of widows into one that provides safety and respect to women. When Yudhistira saw many women performing the ancient practice of sati he sat stumped, not knowing what to do: “If it had been a battle, he would have known what kind of command to give his men. But here he was at a loss, paralyzed by guilt and compassion and the ancient and terrible tradition the women had invoked” (Divakaruni, 312). This is where Draupadi acts and brings the situation under control. She wanted to be an emphatic feminist and so she introduces a court that exclusively dealt with the issues of women. Her interventions in the running of the state finally lead to a utopian state where women experienced complete freedom. Divakaruni also gives final twist to the tale as she modifies the plot to make the last remaining Heir of the Pandavas into a girl, who was actually a son born to Subhadra named Parikshit. Her plot modification in turning a woman the custodian of the heritage of the great Kuru dynasty was her ultimate victory as a feminist. Her final decision to accompany her husbands on their last journey to the Himalayas and her explanation for it reveals how rebellious she was because this had not been attempted by any woman before her. This may also be considered as part of her trait of being an attention seeker:

Perhaps that has always been my problem, to rebel against the boundaries society has prescribed for women. But what was the alternative? To sit among bent grandmothers, gossiping and complaining, chewing on mashed betel leaves with toothless gums as I waited for death? Intolerable! I would rather perish on the mountain. ... My last victory over the other wives How could I resist it? (Divakaruni, 343-44)

Draupadi is seen here to overcome the limitations of gender and the traditional portrayal of women as victims under patriarchy. She declares that being devoid of the trappings of gender made her 'truly Panchali'. Thus *Palace of Illusions* as a postmodern revisionist narrative experiments with temporality and voice. The play with voice, temporality and frame which are considered as the prime characteristic of postmodern writing is found in abundance in this text. In this regard the features of postmodernist writing are worth quoting here:

In many instances the ontological dislocation that brings about the temporal anomaly also causes related instabilities in narration, as well as other aspects of the text: when the act of representation collapses in on itself, a stable narrating voice is not to be expected. In other works it is a more general valourization of the decentered and a rejection of essence and totality that lead to (rather than directly entail) comparable ruptures in different components of the text. And the continuing literary impulse to "make it new" regularly brings forth types of narrators and narrational practices that hitherto were, I suspect, literally inconceivable (Richardson, 32).

The selected novels can thus be read as revisionist narratives because their mode of narration departs from the traditional mode of narrative and adopts self-reflexive and realistic narrative techniques. At the end of the discussion of postmodern techniques in Indian fiction, we ought to remember what Tharoor's V.V says at the end of *The Great Indian Novel*:

The 'end' was an idea that I suddenly realized meant nothing to me. I did not begin the story in order to end it, the essence of the tale lay in the telling. 'What happened next?' I could answer, but 'What happened in the end?' I

could not even understand... there is, in short, Ganapathi, no *end* to the story of life. There are merely pauses. The end is the arbitrary invention of the teller, but there can be no finality about his choice. Today's end is, after all, only tomorrow's beginning. (162-63)

V.V then realizes that he has no choice but to retell the story again, but from a completely different perspective. In these words he anticipates the coming of the different versions of the epic from the perspective of the various characters that people it. He often states, "...Stories never end, they just continue somewhere else." (418). These words of V.V present the accurate account of postmodern fiction which also gives a picture of the instability and restlessness characterizing modern life.

To conclude, this chapter of the thesis had been an analysis of the revisionist techniques in selected novels based on the *Mahabharata*. Based on the study it can be concluded that all of these novels have used some commonly observed revisionist techniques in them to make them a relevant and innovative reimagination of the epic. The character portrayal of Draupadi in *Palace of Illusions* and *Yajnaseni* is from a new perspective so that the mythical woman appears to hold modernist views on gender issues and role of women in society. Bhima in the hands of M.T in *Bhima Lone Warrior* has also been reworked to sensitize the readers on the issue of marginalization through his viewpoint. This novel also deconstructs the birth myth of the Pandava brothers in the epic and provides a rational explanation for their supposed divine births.

P.K.Balakrishnan too adopts an innovative approach in his revisionist retelling *And Now Let Me Sleep*. He presents the same incidents from the

perspective of different characters. For instance, the death of Karna in the battlefield and the subsequent revelation of his identity make Yudhishthira feel guilty of fratricide, whereas the same incident from the viewpoint of Sanjaya exposes the role of fate in the life of Karna, thus freeing Yudhishthira from guilt. This revisionist technique of multiple perspectives is also noticed in the other three novels discussed here. Divakaruni is especially adept in this technique whereby she makes three different narrators recount the story of the birth of the siblings from fire, and the insult of Karna during Draupadi's *swayamvar*. Hence, in their own way each of these retellings add complexity to their versions and exploring the possibilities of how things could have been different from what had been said earlier in the epic.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Retellings of epics are attempts at recreations with a contemporary outlook at very ancient texts. They serve the purpose of re-negotiating territories to widen the boundaries and include or mainstream marginalized sections and highlight hidden subtexts. Modern retellings also try to rationalize the myth regarding the characters, such as the divine births of the five Pandava brothers and their wife and her sibling. The modern revisionist writers also choose to focus on a particular character with a certain perspective that may not be compatible with the general approach of the epic. This alternate focus provides them with immense opportunities and creative liberty to deviate from the plot and to make additions to the characters and incidents. From this contemporary perspective the entire tale looks different.

In these retellings many characters find their voice and standpoint to speak for them. For instance, *Yajnaseni* is a narrative from Draupadi's perspective that brings out her agonies and joys with the entire focus of the plot on her thoughts. Her naiveté in the beginning is replaced by a mature understanding of all that happened in her life. Hence there is scope for the character to evolve, which is not found in the epic. She shows herself not as a warmonger thirsty for revenge but a person ready to forgive her enemies, even Aswathama, who murdered her sons and brother.

The second chapter of the thesis had been an analysis of the intersection of time and space in the selected novels based on the epic Mahabharata. In these novels buildings function as heterotopes, and the main spaces in focus are forests

and palaces. Space is a dimension that affects the feelings and emotions of the characters. The spaces where the characters spend their lives are linked to their fate. Palaces are presented as spaces of confinement, whereas, huts in forests are presented as open spaces where different castes could mingle. The space that the protagonist Draupadi was born into is her father's palace that appeared like a fortress to her with nothing beautiful or appealing to it. When compared to it the Palace of Illusion is a heterotope that can trigger positive emotions in her. The Palace is the space she often dreamt of and referred to in the narrative. It bore an imposing structure intended to create an image of it that was ethereal and illusory. The loss of her beloved palace is an irreparable loss for her.

The space of Draupadi's *swayamvar* is also significant for the conflicts it raised in her life beginning with her polygamous marriage to the five Pandava brothers. The quickness shown in summarizing the result of the contest is a deviation from the original which was tampered with to show the shift in importance from the winner of the contest Arjuna to the prize Draupadi. The Himavan Mountains that is the last stage of the Pandavas life too is an important space where the protagonist Draupadi fell and is left behind. The space turns into something magical where the souls of people meet each other in formless dissolute shapes. Divakaruni manages the fabula so well that she introduces scenes that are nowhere found in the epic. To recreate the mysterious unseen bond between Karna and Draupadi she brings in a scene in which Karna's soul, leaving his body pauses for some moments over Draupadi taking the form of a glow radiating all over her.

M.T. chooses to depict the destruction of Dwaraka right at the beginning of his novel *Bhima Lone Warrior*. This is the space where the five great Pandava

brothers come to realize their impotency in front of fate. The watch helplessly as the women are dragged and assaulted by the plunderers of Dwaraka. In this way Nair has tried to humanize these mythological characters shorn of their divinity. Further he makes his protagonist claim that he was the son of a forester and not that of any Gods.

Not only the outer landscapes in the novel are highlighted but the inner landscape of the protagonists, and virtual space of their minds is taken into account here. There are also changes in time line and sequential order in these revisionist texts as per the specific needs of perspective in each of them. Some incidents are condensed while others are newly introduced and elaborated on. The passage of time is referred to in a metaphor by Krishna as the petals of a lotus flower blooming. Each moment in the passage of time is connected to all those petals that bloomed earlier. In *The Palace of Illusions* Divakaruni frequently shifts between the past and the present using *analepsis* and *prolepsis*.

Several concepts of space and time have been utilized in the novel *Yajnaseni* too. Time is summed up as eternal and infinite marking no beginning and no end. Beginning with the space of Mount Meru where Draupadi falls during her ascent to heaven and composes a letter addressed to Krishna drenched in her blood. She chooses to begin the description of her life story from the time of her *swayamvar*. There are *proleptic* dialogues in anticipation of events. But a large portion of the *fabula* is left out of her narrative to give a certain slant to it. The crucial eighteen – day war on Kurukshetra too is treated lightly in a metaphor that compares it to a wave that broke on the beachside that rose and fell. The minor incidents are of more consequence to the narrative of *Yajnaseni*. The Himavan Mountains is the space

where Yajnaseni pens her letter to her *Sakha* Krishna. In the sad last part of her life she had fallen during her journey to attain heaven. This is the space that unraveled the mysteries of life to her. This space along with the space of the *yajna* becomes an important heterotope in both the novels with Draupadi as the protagonist. With the coming of postmodernism in fiction all the conventions and presuppositions are questioned and the grand narratives are subverted. The postmodern novelist often deviates from the main plot to include multiple viewpoints. So the plot becomes episodic. The text produces a lot of contradictions that are irresolvable. In the narratives of the revisionist works on the *Mahabharata* often there is a blending of the sublime and the subverted as is customary in postmodern fiction.

In the third chapter of this thesis the narrative levels and focalization are examined in these *Mahabharata* retellings. Focalization is the technical term for perspective in fiction introduced by Genette in his *Narrative Discourse*. During internal focalization, the events get clarified or distorted as per the perception of the characters. A zero – focalized narrative is presented by an omniscient narrator who perceives everything including the thoughts in the minds of his characters. This is because, when the narrator perceives the past and describes it, his narrative will be affected by his current viewpoint. It becomes a selective presentation of events in which many details are left out to make it effective and present the intended viewpoint. When a novel is written from the perspective of one character, he/she becomes the focalizer. The fourth chapter of the thesis has focused on examining the narrative point of view and identifying the effects of different focalization strategies in revisionist *Mahabharata* fiction.

In the novel *Palace of Illusions*, which is mostly written in first – person, a few times other narrators too appear. Here we see Vyasa appearing to remind Draupadi of the inevitability of her fate and the outcome of her tale. Though the perspective changes the final result would be the same. Divakaruni also adopts the technique of using multiple narrators here by making Dhai Ma, Dristadyumna and Shikhandi narrators. The temporality of *The Mahabharata* is distorted by these multiple narrators. The three narrators, Draupadi, her brother Dhri and Dhai Ma present different versions of the same event of her unnatural birth. This emphasises the idea of how any narrative cannot remain fixed. Her first- person account turns to third person when she describes the effect of her insult in the Kaurava court as seen from outside her.

The novel is presented in a hybrid genre in the use of songs, colloquial speech and the dramatic technique of the aside. It decentralizes the main events and characters in the epic. Not only does Panchali like to dwell on her divine birth from fire, but repeatedly makes her nurse to dramatically narrate the incident several times to her. This shows her agency to exert power over the flow of the narrative. Divakaruni uses a mode of homodiegetic and auto diegetic narration with internal focalization here. She uses a poet as an extradiegetic narrator for the humiliating experience of Karna during her Swayamvar. Similarly she challenges the centrality of the Kurukshetra war hereby arguing that glory by means of a war is totally unnecessary. Rather than dealing with the entire plot, these revisionist writers chose to focus on individual characters and explore their lives minutely. Draupadi in *Yajnaseni* is also crafted as a diegetic narrator whose presence and voice can be distinctly felt and heard. Ray brings in the episode of Draupadi's interaction with

forest –dwellers to show how she tried to bring in integrity and harmony between the Aryan and non-Aryan races.

Similarly M.T.'s retelling also picks up a character from the parent epic to make him the homo-diegetic narrator. His Bhima tries to be as humane as possible and does not believe in miracles and divine interventions. Wherever possible he also tries to rationalize his actions and when those become unavoidable they are confined to stories. He is shown to possess ample resourcefulness and strength to make divine interventions in his life unnecessary. He is not the dull headed super – macho mythical hero but an ordinary man with desire for worldly pleasures. Though advised by Yudhistira not to turn back on their heavenward journey, he makes a decisive turn to return to his fallen wife Draupadi, because taking care of her was much more important to him than attaining heaven.

In *And Now Let Me Sleep*, P.K.Balakrishnan presents the lament of Draupadi on losing her sons to death by the action of Awathama. She is aroused by loud wailings on the night after the Pandavas victory and sees huge flames engulfing the tents where her sons and brother had slept. This incident is reiterated in her conscience often as if she was unable to confront the reality. To give the epic a new interpretation, Balakrishnan uses four narrators. Draupadi and Yudhistir recollect the past incidents in their narration. Sanjaya and Sage Narada are able to narrate as omniscient narrators on account of their divine sight. All the four seem focused on analyzing and remembering the valiant warrior Karna, who remains an obsession with Yudhistira and Draupadi. Yudhistira's mind is racked with the guilt of committing fratricide and wishes to undo all that had happened. P.K.Balakrishnan uses internal focalization of Draupadi as well as an extra-diegetic

narrator in Sage Narada recounting the details of war after it had ended. He uses objective correlative in the atmosphere reflecting the mindset of the protagonist. The novel alternates between extradiegetic and diegetic levels of narration.

Through the narration of Sanjaya, Balakrishnan is able to present in close quarters all that happened on the battlefield between Karna and Arjuna and also bearing the taunts of others. As Yudhistir and Draupadi are able to visualize the scenes they become more guilt-ridden and sorrowful. Balakrishnan retains the myth of the bestowing of the divine sight on Sanjaya. Here he also makes Sanjaya narrate the incidents involving Karna on the battlefield to Draupadi and Yudhistira. Thus his emphasis is on the posthumous analysis of Karna's life and character along with the guilt and sorrow in the minds of these two characters. They are unable to reconcile to the fact that their own elder brother has been killed by them. Though the narration begins from the point of the victory of the Pandavas side in the war, the novel doesn't focus on the valour and sacrifice of the warriors in the battlefield. The whole atmosphere in the text is filled with gloom and renunciation and atonement for the past sins. From this point the narration goes back to several poignant moments when the young Pandavas had insulted their brother for being born a low caste. The other four brothers do not directly appear in the novel, except in the recollections of the protagonists.

In two of the novels selected for study, *Palace of Illusions* and *And Now Let Me Sleep* the protagonist Draupadi is shown to be obsessed with the hero Karna. While in the first one it is the attraction towards him that is highlighted, in the second one it is her guilt in remembering how much insult she heaped on his noble persona. Draupadi's narration is an emotional cornucopia in her recollections and

guilt. In the same novel we see the objective narration by Sanjaya and Sage Narada. They are able to make out the interventions of fate and know that everything was pre-determined. Their narration is free from the emotional complex, but is laced with rational and philosophical explanations for Karna's fate and actions.

Limited character space devoted to divine and hyper-masculine heroes, whereas expanded space is allocated to the sidelined ones like Draupadi in these texts. *Bhima Lone Warrior* is notable for its psychological realism, instead of the devotional aesthetic. All these revisionist works are part of the mythological wave that swept Indian fiction from the millenium. A noteworthy fact about this narrative is that the composer himself is a character in the story that dealt with his own grandchildren involved in a tussle on the kingdom of their forefathers. He appears in many of the recent reworking of the epic as a character composing the story at the time of the events happening in the narrative present. As the plot is a familiar one and common among the novels selected here, the only point of difference is the mode of presentation. This thesis argues for multiple perspectives in the four novels selected here.

The fourth chapter of the thesis had been a discussion on the revisionist narrative techniques in the modern retellings of the epic. The new wave of mythological Indian fiction signaled a change in the interpretation of the epics. They became a subject to be interrogated and deliberated on moral dilemmas. The modern retellings create alternate narratives that rearticulate the characters and specific events from a given angle. Postmodern revisionist fiction also features discontinuous narration along with a deep psychological analysis of their characters' motivations. Some of the central characters in the epic get marginalized

in the revisionist works; while the subordinated or hitherto insignificant characters enjoy the spotlight.

These marginalized voices raise issues that were not of concern until then. Many of these recent mythical fictions employ revisionist mythmaking. The roles of warriors are reversed so that imperfection and substandard conditions become normalized. The great heroes are presented with negative shades in their nature. They look closely at all aspects of the life of these marginalized beings to introspect hitherto unknown facets of their life. For instance, Ray presents Draupadi as a poet who is very observant and sensitive to the subtleties of nature around her.

M.T. has also dealt with the theme of marginalization through the interior monologues of Bhima in *Bhima Lone Warrior*. Bhima having a soft corner towards the tribes and sensitive to their needs has a secular outlook on society. His actions as a super masculine hero are justified by stating that he would attack his enemies only if they become a threat to his family. In contrast, the epitome of virtue, Yudhistira is shown to possess several flaws in his character. The marginalization of Bhima is noted in the evocative phrase used as the title of his novel *Second Turn*. It is more sensitive in the Malayalam title *Rendamoozham* to represent all the humiliation and neglect Bhima faced throughout his life. Since his focus is on his thoughts and vision, he is constantly evaluating and understanding himself. The seething rage in his tumultuous mind on the injustice of not being granted what was due to him on account of being the second-born of Kunti. Even Draupadi is shown to be so headstrong and independent that she does not beg for mercy when she was humiliated by Duryodhan in Hastinapur, instead, she argues and wins her freedom without any mythical colouring to the incident.

Bhima sees through the mask worn by others and grasps the reality quickly. He gives rational explanations to seemingly illogical events. He even rationalizes the divine fatherhood of the Pandavas which was of central importance in the building of a halo of divinity around them. These retellings being postmodern does away with divine interventions in the lives of its main characters, for example, the scene of the disrobing of Draupadi in Hastinapur assembly and her subsequent rescue by Krishna from being shamed has also been given a rational twist and a modern outlook on the incident.

Revisionist elements in Ray's *Yajnaseni* can be found in the inverted structure of the novel that begins at the end. It also presents fragmented sections of a letter addressed to her mentor Lord Krishna. Revisionism also celebrates playfulness, fragmentation and disorganized narratives. It dismantles the grand narratives to unmask the contradictions and instabilities to favour fragmented narratives. This technique is found in the other three revisionist works discussed earlier. They pick out the characters from the epic and situate them in the contemporary context of the writer and recreate that attitude and way of thinking in the characters which is appealing to the modern audience. The protagonist's consciousness is presented in a selective string of incidents and memories. They also come without past associations and question the authority of the patriarchal heads and expose their shortcomings. The protagonists of these novels usually begin their narration from the last stage of their lives. From this vantage point they are able to make out the connections between events. When they can detachedly examine their own lives from a distance, things appear different from what they

were earlier. All of these techniques are found in the revisionist works discussed in the thesis.

And Now Let Me Sleep is one such narrative that is mostly about Draupadi's thoughts on Karna. A major part of this novel deals with the complexity of her thoughts and confusion on the legitimacy of the victory of the Pandavas side. There are philosophical debates between Yudhistira, Sage Narad and Draupadi. As in the other two novels, here too there is a selective presentation of events that left deep scars on the minds of the protagonists. Most of these incidents involve Karna which gives the author scope to deal with the agony of Yudhistira and Draupadi. The narrative strives to record the narrative consciousness and scenic details of these incidents. The ordering of the events too differs here because the incident that took place by the Samantha Panchaka Lake at the end of the war is the first scene of this novel. More than the battle raging outside, it is the conflict raging in the mind of the protagonists that takes up much of the space in this Novel.

In works such as *The Great Indian Novel* there is a vast gap between the characters and the narrator that irony and sarcasm is abundantly found in such works. There is a metadiegetic level of narration where there is narration within a narrative. That is one of the characters in the story narrates another story. This trend is found in most fictional works. Such tales are embedded narratives in the diegetic level of the story. The ideologies the epic upheld are also discarded in favour of a more contemporary mode of thinking. Earlier the epic held the idea that the dharma of a wife or sibling of a warrior was to pray for the brave death of the warrior on the battlefield. This concept is questioned by Draupadi in *Palace of Illusions* pointing out that it was much better to pray for a long and healthy life for the warriors.

Yajnaseni follows a non-linear narrative structure, recounting Draupadi's life starting from her last moments on Mount Meru and then taking a distant viewpoint to examine her life to be written in a letter to her Sakha Krishna different from the presentation of events in the *Mahabharata*. The novel is written in first person perspective by Draupadi by making the choice of this narrative perspective to provide a minute and alternate view on the epic. The narrative voice here is introspective and reflective to present her thoughts, emotions and experiences and thus establishes a connection with her readers.

The novel *Palace of Illusions*, similarly focuses on Draupadi's perspective, presenting her as a complex and multifaceted character. Through her narration, readers gain insights into her feelings of love, anger, frustration and resilience. Though the novel generally maintains a linear narrative, there are instances of temporal shift where Draupadi reflects on past events, providing flashbacks that offer context and depth to her character and the story. The novel includes dialogues between characters as well as Draupadi's inner monologues. These elements contribute to character development and exploration of themes. Interplay of myth and reality. The novel weaves together the mythological world of the *Mahabharata* with a more human, emotional and relatable portrayal of its characters. It explores the tension between the grand epic and the personal human stories within it. The novel uses Draupadi's narrative to delve into themes of gender, identity, agency and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal society. Her voice challenges the traditional portrayal of women in the epic.

Similarly, these narratological techniques can be seen in *Bhima Lone Warrior* and in *And Now Let Me Sleep* too. Both these fiction employ highly

descriptive prose to evoke strong emotions in the readers on the dilemmas the protagonists in them faced. Many layers of significance are added through expansion and compression of the events in the epic in these narratives. They have the agency to skillfully recreate the epic from a vantage viewpoint and shed light on the personal stories of even minor characters. The readers are bound to understand the complexity of emotions of these characters and empathize with them.

Chapter VI

Recommendations

This thesis had been an examination of the various narrative techniques in contemporary revisionist Indian Fiction based on the *Mahabharata*. An attempt has been made here to analyze the four selected novels from the angle of Revisionist narrative techniques; focalization and the way time and space have been used in these novels. In spite of my earnest attempt here, there are many further possibilities of reseach in this area that could not be taken up in this thesis. As innumerable revisionist works continue to be produced that deal with the epic from various aspects and angles, more possibilities of reseach will also open up.

The *Mahabharata*, being a culturally significant text in our country, has been interpreted in innumerable ways and directions. There are some common factors and divergences among the many revisionist writings on the epic. In diverse languages and genres writers have explored the epic as a whole or as parts, elaborating on particular incidents. These retellings try to portray the epic characters in a domestic setup and explore their family ties as well as a deeper understanding of their psychology. With their fresh perspective the well-known heroes and heroines turn out to be entirely different beings. Many vernacular retellings of the epic that explore and situate the characters in different cultural contexts are found to be an emerging area of research. These works can be studied in the context using the theories in cultural studies in future.

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