

**RECASTING THE EPICAL CHARACTERS IN THE POST-
MODERNIST WORLD; KUNTĪ AS EARTHLY CHARACTER
IN BHRAPPA'S PARVA**

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Abstract-

The Mahābhārata portrays the women characters from the patriarchal perspectives and more so the women from the mainstream Sanskrit society. Generally they are idolized as caring mother and loving wives bereft of any carnal desires. The epic, with all its complexities however leaves many open ends in the narrations, which are often picked up by the writers/poets for creative literary expressions. S.L. Bhrappa's Kannada retelling of the epic 'Parva' tries to extrapolate the divine agencies and remold the events and characters with all human flaws. He unpacks the episode of the divine birth of the Pāṇḍavas from the human perspectives. Kuntī, who otherwise a desexualized character in the epic, comes out as a woman of flesh and blood with all her carnal desires, frustration, meanness as well as resilient mother, conscious of her duty towards her fatherless children. Pāṇḍu was impotent and as a means of producing sons, he urges Kuntī to go for *Nīyoga* i.e. to produce sons from other men. Though ideally speaking it should be a union to produce child sans any pleasure. Bhrappa explores this impossibility and Kuntī is excited with anticipation of carnal pleasure. One after another she produces three sons from three different men and these episodes are used by the writer to give vent to his erotic creativity. The novel is however not celebration of the promiscuous behavior, but genuine acknowledgement of women's desires.

Key words- Desire, *Dharma*, Flesh, Impotency, *Nīyoga*, Pleasure, Self-deception.

Introduction-

“Whether we realize it or not, it remains a fact that we in India still stand under the spell of the Mahābhārata” (Sukthankar, 1998:32)

Indian epic the Mahābhārata is believed have acquired a written form from 400 B.C. to 400 A.D. (Thapar, 2018:7), but the stories and legends that have found place in the epic must have been in circulation much before. Having contributed by many and developed over the long period of time, it has lot of heterogeneity(Sukthankar, 1998:10). During the course of its growth the epic had undergone lot of changes and patriarchal influence on it is obvious in the portrayal of the women characters. The women representing the mainstream Sanskrit-Brahminical society are mostly defied in the *Pativrata* stereotype, with their predetermined role as devoted wife who give births to the male children. They generally lead passive, desexualized lives as if respectability and sexuality (especially for a woman) cannot go together. Kuntī, an important character in the epic leads a miserable existence. She was forced to abandon her first born, which was the result of some pre-marital sexual adventure and her paramour in the epic is divinized as Sun god (Dutt, Volume 1, 2013:329). She was married to impotent Pāṇḍu and on the demand of her husband produced three sons with three different gods; *Dharma*, *Vyāu* and *Indra* (ibid :355-359). But this divine intervention was obviously a mist that was created by the author/interpolators of the Mahābhārata to camouflage the circumstances that led to the birth of the Pāṇḍavas. Probably, the Pāṇḍavas were born of the ‘*Nīyoga*’ i.e. the practice of producing a son by a woman from a man other than her husband (Khangai 2015:14-24). But with the changes in the values, this practice was begin to be looked down upon and the epic struggles to hide it in the mist of myth. Taking clue from this, S.L. Bhyrappa, the noted Kannada novelist had tried to reconstruct this episode of the Pāṇḍavas mysterious birth by extrapolating the divine agency in his Kannada novel ‘*Parva*’ and along with it also explored the sexuality of Kuntī and Mādrī, which remains a taboo in the epic. In contrast to the desexualized, supposedly respectful mother in the epic and in the popular imagination, Bhyrappa’s Kuntī is an earthly woman. Her thwarted carnal desires, her struggle to cope up with a life with an impotent husband, her short lived joys that she gets when she unites with different men for getting progenies are very artistically and boldly portrayed. Kuntī and Mādrī, both wives of the impotent Pāṇḍu shares a unique bond of friendship in the novel as they both suffers the denial of humanly pleasure. Bhyrappa, though a man appears to be getting very effectively under the skin of a woman. The women characters in his novels are generally portrayed as strong independent characters. By his own admission he finds more potential in the female characters to explore and develop as they are emotionally richer (Surendran& others, 2010:20). The novel is translated in English by K. Raghavendra Rao and published by Sahitya Academy in 2009. In order to have the better understanding, Bhyrappa not only read Vyāsa’s epic but also toured to the different places described in the epic(Bhyrappa: v). This makes his description lively. Though he took nearly one and half year to write *Parva*, he

was preparing for it for more than ten years. (Bhyrappa and Deshkulkarni,1998:10, Chandrasekar1983: 92).

Research Method and Sources- The paper is based on the hermeneutics of the texts. The Mahābhārata of Chicago University Press, of Parimal Publication, New Delhi, and the novel ‘*Parva*’ are the main texts used apart from secondary sources listed in the reference section.

Desire and Frustration-

Kuntī in *Parva* comes off an age and a *Swyamvaras* organized for her. Many kings came as a suitor for her. Pointing out to strongly built Pāṇḍu, Kuntī’s female friend teases her,

“Pritha, his body answers to your height and size. A male should be like a hungry loin, ready to rush and crush woman’s body.....the very first night he will squeeze your body dry” (Bhyrappa,2009:49)

Kuntī, also called Prīthā, the large one due to her oversized body also feels that Pāṇḍu with his healthy built is only suitable man among the prospective suitors gathered for the *Swyamvara*. She garlands him, marriage is celebrated with pomp and the first night comes. Kuntī recollects,

“His powerful chest and arms crushed me. It was middle-aged chest filled with sweaty hair.....He had raved, ‘Kuntī, you have a lovely face.....Your large bosom is beautiful’. All words, only words, meant to compensate for what could not and did not happen. Yes, what my friend had hinted and what I had intensely wanted, did not come to pass. Soon he had gone to sleep like a defeated bull. He said that he had been exhausted by the long journey, was sleepy.....” (Bhyrappa,2009:51)

Kuntī kept Pāṇḍu’s impotency secret. She told lies to her friends about the sexual potency of Pāṇḍu. Kuntī feels that destiny had cheated her and her frustration results in despising Pāṇḍu,

“What a specimen of a male for outward appearance!” (Bhyrappa,2009:51)

Pāṇḍu was strong but impotent! Bhīṣma, the family elder was eager to perpetuate the Kuru lineage and blames Kuntī for being infertile. Kuntī keeps quiet and later recollects that she had been a lifelong victim of self deception. When most wives enjoyed their husbands in the first year of marriage, she suffered husband’s cruelty. Pāṇḍu in his eagerness to unite with her will try different ways. He would pounce on her, trying to show his maleness. He would abuse her body, asking her to bend in different ways and move in a different ways. At the end of such unnatural exercise, he would pant with exhaustion, like a bull that cannot mount. He would direct his frustration towards Kuntī as she recollects,

“Humiliated by demonstrated impotence, he would cook up some excuse to get angry with me, abuse me and assault me, shouting that I was unfit to be his wife” (Bhyrappa,2009 :52)

Kuntī narrates her own sexual frustration,

“What was I to do? My sex was excited by his acts but its urge left unfulfilled, was I to suffer the pangs of the frustrated body or burn to cinders in the flames of his unjustified accusations? I dreaded the coming of night, the night of relentless violence to my flesh and spirit. Dumbly I would wish that this impotent fellow should sleep elsewhere” (Bhyrappa, 2009: 53)

One day Kuntī gathers enough courage and tells Pāṇḍu on his face that he does not have power to satisfy a woman. In return Pāṇḍu slaps her and the abuse of every night continues. Later, while recollecting all these memories of her youthful years, Kuntī also remember the plight of Draupadī, but she also feels that her misery is greater than Draupadī because Draupadī had not one but five husbands and each one of them with the semen-power to satisfy not one but four wives.

“All that a woman really wants is a husband who can quench the basic thrust of her flesh. If that is there, a woman would accept the worst plight in other respects” (Bhyrappa,2009: 55)

Kuntī later finds out that Pāṇḍu in not born as impotent. During his adolescent days he indulged in excessive love making with the maids in the palace and lost his virility. As she did not conceive, a preparation for another marriage of Pāṇḍu with Mādrī was under way. Kuntī implores him to stop it as it will also be of no use. But Pāṇḍu refuses to accept his impotency and boast that he had slept with hundred maids. Mādrī joins Pāṇḍu as a second wife but she also does not conceive. This denial of carnal pleasure becomes a bond which brings both of them together as they consol each other. Angry at the haughtiness of Pāṇḍu, Kuntī insults him and says that even if he marries four more wives, he is incapable of stopping the flow of menstrual blood and ashamed Pāṇḍu goes on long expedition. Loneliness further brings Kuntī and Mādrī closure to each other. Mādrī confides to Kuntī that before her marriage she was trained in the art of lovemaking by the elder women in her parental house and women in her region knew how to arouse a most reluctant male as she says,

“In our region they can tune any bow” (Bhyrappa,2009:59)

She also tells Kuntī that she had tried all her skills on Pāṇḍu but it did not yield desired result. Kuntī is alarmed at this. She fears that if Mādrī succeeds in arousing Pāṇḍu and delivers a son before Kuntī that will be the end of Kuntī’s status as chief queen. Kuntī successfully ferrets the secrets of lovemaking from her and Mādrī willingly teaches her all that she knew about the art. After learning the techniques of enhancing and prolonging sexual pleasure, the frustration of Kuntī increases further. She admits that she became sexually excited all the time. Forgetting Pāṇḍu, she recollects the pre-marital sexual experience that she had with the sage and fantasizes about using the techniques on him. She passionately wishes that the sage should pass her way again as she burns with desire.

Sublimation of Desires-

Pāṇḍu returns victorious from the expedition. Haughtily he boasts that he had been on expedition for six months. Kuntī feels repelled and unconsciously the words slip from her mouth that she had menstruated six times. This angers Pāṇḍu and he slaps her hard. But Kuntī does not weep and stares at Pāṇḍu. He starts sweating and finally breaks down. Sobbing he buries his face in Kuntī's breast and weeps like a child. As the barrier of haughtiness that Pāṇḍu was using to hide his shame of impotency breaks down, Kuntī no longer feels anger or contempt for Pāṇḍu as he no longer pretends to her. Pāṇḍu humbled, stays away from both the wives in a hut across the river. Few months after this, he comes to Kuntī and seeks her permission to spend rest of his life doing penance. Kuntī feels guilty that she had shattered her husband's self respect greatly. But now as the barrier of deception has gone, Kuntī feels that she cannot live without him and it is now that they have truly become husband and wife. Kuntī and Mādri both decide to go to the Himālayas along with Pāṇḍu. During their journey in the Himālayas Pāṇḍu and Kuntī felt the genuine bond of matrimony. Her desire for spiritual pursuit sublimates her mind away from carnal desire. Forgetting about her husband's sexual impotence she sleeps peacefully with Pāṇḍu on the same mattress. How can she hold something against the husband who had surrendered everything to her like a child?

Desire Rekindled-

In the Himālayas, Pāṇḍu revealed to Kuntī that the purpose of his coming here was to take treatment for impotency from the hill tribe. This shocks Kuntī! She believed that Pāṇḍu had come so far for penance and along with him she will also earn the spiritual merit. But Pāṇḍu once again turns her mind towards forgotten desires. Kuntī recollects the memory of the sage Durvāsa. As a young girl of fifteen, she was asked to look after the sage. It was the sage who first revealed the secret of man-woman relationship that led to the sprouting of a new life. Kuntī says to herself,

“How can one wipe out the memory of the person who first unriddled the secret? That too, when one was forced to live with a life partner who had no power to penetrate into the secret?” (Bhyrappa, 2009 :72).

The sage united with Kuntī and the son Karṇa was born, which Kuntī was forced to abandon.

In the mountain, Pāṇḍu started taking medicine from the physicians from the tribal clan called '*Devas*'. Pāṇḍu and Kuntī started dreaming about their own children. Six months had lapsed since the time Pāṇḍu and his two wives had left their kingdom. They received the news that Dhṛtarāṣṭra had married Gāndhārī. This makes Pāṇḍu very uncomfortable. Because if Gāndhārī delivers a male child first, the kingdom will pass into his hands! Though it was Pāṇḍu who made extensive conquest, he may rot in the mountain. As they came to the Himālayas with the proclaimed purpose of doing penance, he did not feel it proper to go back without accomplishing

anything. The medicine was not yielding any result, increasing Pāṇḍu's frustration. As there was urgency of having a son earliest possible, Pāṇḍu prepares Kuntī for 'Nīyoga'.

The Nīyoga-

Pāṇḍu calls Brahmin chief Yama from the *Deva* land to perform *Nīyoga* with Kuntī. Seeing him the old memories of union with sage Durvāsa were revived again. Kuntī recollects,

"I was on fire with desire. I was eager. I knew what I was after..... the desire, the passion" (Bhyrappa,2009 :84)

According to the *Nīyoga* practice prescribed by the scriptures, Pāṇḍu makes Kuntī to promise that she will not fall in love with the *Deva* priest, who was expected to sow his sperm in her womb. When he will be physically close to her, her mind will be totally oriented towards her husband. She had to divest herself of all desires excepting the desire for a child. She had to regard him as a parent immediately after he impregnated her and she will shun his company immediately after this. Though Kuntī made promise, she knew that the overall promise contained impossible. Which woman can regard the male who had performed *Nīyoga* as parent?

From the day *Nīyoga* operation commenced, king Pāṇḍu along with Mādrī lived in a separate hut nearby and the *Deva* priest took Pāṇḍu's place in Kuntī's hut. Kuntī started attending to his comfort and needs. She used to bath him in hot water and then dry his body and cloth it. She used to cook fabulous feasts and feed him with her own hands. Kuntī recollects,

"I had in the early days of married life entertained the idea of serving Pāṇḍu. But he failed to deserve it. For him, I could muster sympathy, compassion, piety.....Pāṇḍu never evoked in me any wish to surrender to him.....But with *DevaNīyoga*, I felt like serving him, surrendering to him" (Bhyrappa,2009:86)

When Kuntī conceived, it was a time for the priest to leave, but Kuntī begs the priest to keep the news of pregnancy secret as long as possible, so that his stay can be extended further. Mādrī; jealous of Kuntī keeps a secret watch over Kuntī. Though Kuntī manages to hide her pregnancy for few more days, one day the vomiting burst out violently! Mādrī rushes to Kuntī and expresses her happiness as they will not lose the kingdom. Kuntī recollects,

".....I could not be certain whether her heart was filled with pure joy at what had happened or whether it was filled with jealous desire to put an immediate end to my happiness with the *Deva* priest" (Bhyrappa,2009:87)

Pāṇḍu was jubilant as Kuntī recollects,

"The king came to my side, and began to fondle me with joy and affection.....who could fathom my pain, sorrow and even feeling of contempt?" (Bhyrappa,2009:88)

A child was born to Kuntī and was named as '*Dharma*'. But he was of peaceful disposition. Pāṇḍu desired another son who could be strong and able to fight a war. Pāṇḍu suggests another

Nīyoga and Kuntī feels happy with the anticipation that Pāṇḍu is providing her with another opportunity. Pāṇḍu solicits the help of Maruta, the army chief of the *Deva* clan as a sperm donor for his next child. Kuntī underwent the same ritual of taking oath of not to fall in love with Maruta. The army chief had a terrific physique. Kuntī fondly recollects her days with him,

“The splendor of Maruta’s body exceeded anything I could imagine. Even when I embraced him with both my arms, I could not hook my right fingers with my left fingers behind his back! He was solid and hard as stone.....as his love for me intensified, his strength manifested better. I developed a feeling of gratitude to king Pāṇḍu.....I longed to be pounded, my flesh squeezed, my bones crushed, all ready to be consumed with passion” (Bhyrappa,2009: 94)

Kuntī felt like surrendering totally to his body, to be his complete slave groveling at his mercy. She recalled all the skill of lovemaking that she had learned from Mādrī and gave great pleasure to Maruta. The heavenly pleasure that Maruta had got from Kuntī won his heart and he implore Kuntī to go with him and be his wife. Kuntī feels strongly tempted to go but finally decides to stay back. She bids farewell to Maruta with heavy heart. Bhīma, the strong child was born out of the union between Maruta and Kuntī. Even after the birth of two sons Pāṇḍu did not leave for Hāstinapur. He was hopeful that *Deva* doctors will cure him of his impotency and he will have his own children.

Meanwhile Indra, the king of *Deva* clan got information about the love making skill of Kuntī from Maruta and came down from the mountain. He meets Kuntī at the waterfall and requests her to receive him for *Nīyoga*. Kuntī is mesmerized by his look, she recollects,

“What handsome looks! Long and sharp nose, thin eye-brows, white as snow” (Bhyrappa, 2009:100)

Though pleased by the attention given by Indra, Kuntī was in a dilemma as her heart now pulls in different directions. She tells Indra that *Nīyoga* can only be performed with the consent of husband. Indra meets Pāṇḍu and convinces him that having one more sons will benefit him in the event of the war with the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra. It will also strengthen the bond of friendship between Pāṇḍu and the *Deva* clan. Kuntī eagerly listens the conversation by hiding outside the hut. Pāṇḍu was finally convinced about the need for third *Nīyoga*. Kuntī again gives promise that she will not fall in love with Indra and their cohabitation begins. Kuntī fondly recollects her days with Indra.

“....Indra was not only incredibly handsome. He was immensely clever. He possessed more than physical prowess, he was expert in arts. In the night he made me experience not only the fusion of minds and bodies in darkness. But he also taught me the arts that could be enjoyed in the light of the lamp.” (Bhyrappa,2009 :105)

Though handsome and skillful, Indra lacked commitment that Maruta had. But he was creative in the art of love making. Sometimes Kuntī got angry and thought that he is a simple lecher. But she also admits,

“But that handsome fellow’s lechery would transport me beyond the mountain peaks, into the skies above them”(Bhyrappa,2009:106)

As soon as Kuntī conceived, he happily took leave. He did not ask her to be his wife, and did not put her in a moral dilemma. Arjuna was born after this.

Mādrī’s Twins-

Kuntī’s union with three different men and her delivering of three male children made Mādrī jealous and she begged to be permitted to have at least one child. Kuntī agreed and Pāṇḍu asked one of the doctor from the *Deva* clan to be sperm donor. The doctors were coming for treating Pāṇḍu. The doctors were twins and were accustomed to treat the patients together. They offered their service together. Mādrī also underwent the ritual of making promise of not to fall in love with the doctors. From the union of Mādrī with the twin doctors, Mādrī delivers twin children. This had raised the jealousy of Kuntī. Kuntī put full stop to the business of *Nīyoga* hereafter as she feared that if Mādrī is given one more chance, she will deliver two more children and thus overtake Kuntī.

The Fatal Craving-

Though now they had five sons, Pāṇḍu postponed his returning to Hāstinapur. He was showing sign of recovering his potency due to the medicine of *Deva* physicians. Kuntī also felt sympathy for him as she feels that she and Mādrī enjoyed the joy of love making through *Nīyoga*, but Pāṇḍu must be feeling very agonized having deprived of the pleasure. The king who was recovering his potency exerts himself when he unites with excited Mādrī and dies due to exhaustion. Mādrī decides to become *Sati*, i.e. to immolate herself with the corps of her husband. Kuntī tries to dissuade her. But she did not change her decision. Before embracing death, Mādrī confides to Kuntī that since last few months the king was recovering his potency and was used to make love to Mādrī in the forest away from Kuntī. Pāṇḍu was afraid of Kuntī as he still did not had power to satisfy her. Mādrī herself narrates the incident that led to the death of Pāṇḍu.

“.....I was highly excited, my body on fire. He could not last very long, tired soon, utterly defeated. He had earlier excited me to a high pitch. Now he could not satisfy me.....I embarrassed him fiercely, held him in a vice-grip, so that he could not get away. I went on, provoking him” (Bhyrappa,2009:116)

Mādrī provoked king to work vigorously as she said,

“Come on, king, I want more, it isn’t enough. Is this all the capacity you have?” (Bhyrappa, 2009:116)

Mādrī further admits that she tried all the skill of lovemaking on Pāṇḍu as she confides in Kuntī,

“....What bliss on his face, what flames of excitement lighted his face, he was mad with joy. I had reached at least the first step of happiness” (Bhyrappa,2009:116)

But suddenly king's face became contorted and knotted with incredible pain and his heart beat stopped.

Mādrī was firm on her decision of becoming *Sati* as she says,

“.....What point is there in living now. All these years I lived like a widow, suppressing all desires. Future will be the same” (Bhyrappa,2009 :117)

Mādrī's hunger for flesh remained unsatisfied. She confessed to Kuntī,

“Can you imagine the intensity of that hunger of the flesh for flesh? There is no more cruel punishment than to suffer it” (Bhyrappa,2009: 115)

She also curses Bhīṣma for being instrumental in marrying her to impotent Pāṇḍu.

Call for *Dharma*-

During the funeral of the king, all the people of *Deva* clan came down. All the three men who united with Kuntī pleaded with her to stay with them along with her children and children of Mādrī. The *Deva* clan as portrayed in the novel did not had the system of widowhood. They had the system of collective marriage. The women were married to the clan and all the male in the clan became her husbands. So had Kuntī stayed back, she would have had the life full of sensual pleasure and no burden of widowhood. Kuntī however selected the life of a widow. The sensual pleasure might have tempted her at a time, but finally the commitment of mother's *Dharma* prevailed. She returns to Hāstinapur with five children, puts up with the life of widow and as a resilient mother brings them up. Did sacrificing the life of ease and pleasure for the sake of children had given her more sense of satisfaction and self worth? Certain things in life are experienced, but are difficult to articulate!

Conclusion-

The epic with its complexity continues to inspire the creative writings. The novel is not an unrestrained celebration of promiscuous behavior but a genuine acceptance of woman's sexual desires, which patriarchy is generally uncomfortable with. Though Bhyrappa's Kuntī have her desires and feels frustrated as they are not satisfied, but her conscious is not entirely under the control of desire. When Pāṇḍu accepts his weakness and the barrier of ego is lowered, she does not despise him, but the relationship between them becomes like the relationship of mother and son. After the demise of Pāṇḍu she had the choice of escaping the widowhood and become wife of the *Deva* tribe. This could have possibly brought lot of sensual pleasure that she had been craving for years. But her sense of duty prevailed upon the desire of pleasure. This *Vīvekā* (restrain) is what separates human from animals, who are prominently guided by the primitive instincts. We are endowed with the unique faculty to think much beyond our immediate

temptations. Bhyrappa has managed to portray these dimensions i.e. pleasure and duty effectively. His narrations give space to modern sensibility and yet retain the epical flavor.

Iravati Karve's '*Yuganta*' (2008) was a pioneer in the trend of portraying the epical characters in flesh and blood. Khandaekar's in his '*Yayati*' (2010), also reconstruct the story of futility of insatiable desire. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in '*Palace of Illusion*' (2008) and Anand Neelkantan's '*Ajaya*' (2013-15) are some more reconstructions which open up the new, unexplored vistas of human mind by reinterpreting the epic in a novel manner. The lure of the epic continues, justifying Vaisampāyana's statement,

"People are telling it now and others shall tell it in the future" (Buitenen, 1973:130)

The overbearing idealization of *Pativrata*, in Indian tradition, in which a woman leads a secondary existence with the whole focus of her life on her husband with total disregard for herself must be very suffocating. Shalini Shah says that as a reaction to this male hegemony, there emerged a counter discourse, the dissenting voice in the myth of *Pāñcakanyā* (the five virgins) about the five women in Indian tradition i.e. Kuntī, Draupadī, Ahalyā, Tārā and Mandodarī. Though all of them had more than one man in their lives they are referred as *Kanyā* i.e. Virgin.

"The concept of *Pāñcakanyā* was perhaps a subversive strategy formulated by those who militated against the suffocating hegemony of the Pativrata syndrome." (Shah, 2012:111)

This *Pāñcakanyā* episode is not found in any of the text, but seems to be a part of traditional lore (ibid: 130). Revisionism as a means of subverting patriarchy and providing textual spaces for a woman centric reading is important for the understanding of marginal voices (Beena, 2019; 38). Bhyrappa carries forward this legacy as delineation of the women characters is the most outstanding achievement of the novel (Chandrasekar, 1983: 94). Bhyrappa by his own admission however do not subscribe to any ideological positioning like feminism; but shapes his characters purely as an artist (Bhyrappa and Deshkulkarni, 198:6). He believes that *Parva* is his extraordinary creation,

"*Parva* dazed me, sucked me out and took so much from me that I felt I had nothing to write for nearly four years" (ibid :11)

He justifies the creative liberty that he has taken as he believes that novel is essentially a process of understanding with imagination, not with logical thinking. (Bhyrappa, 1990: 256). But to make his imagination closure to reality, he toured to many places related to the epic and also tried to understand the working of polyandry among the people in Garhwal Himalaya (ibid: 261). The epic continues to provide plots and inspirations for the creative retelling as Bhyrappa compares it with the inexhaustible Himalayas which different painters in different ages paint in different manners (ibid:265).

Literature have a capacity to generate awareness and sensitivity to human needs and emotions. Reading of *Parva* has made me more accommodative of the transgressions of the monogamy imposed by the institution of marriage. We are not sure if there are many modern Kuntīs leading sexually frustrated lives and we should look at them with empathy!

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Explanation of the Sanskrit terms-

Dharma- It is one of the most difficult concept to translate into English, but broadly a sense of duty, obligation. There is also God named *Dharma* in the Indian iconography.

Swayamvara- literally, a ceremony of self choice, where a bride will choose a groom that she likes.

Pativrata- A wife dedicated to her husband.

Niyoga- A practice in Ancient India by which a woman is allowed to have a son by a man other than her husband.

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