

Humanisation of Mythological Characters in the *Mahabharata*

Rohini D. Kasar,

Asst. Professor, Arts, Science & Commerce College, Rahata, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

Parva (1979), a magnum opus by a Kannada writer S. L. Bhyrappa and translated into English by K. Raghvendra Rao as *Parva (A Tale of War, Peace, Love, Death, God and Man)* gives a new insight to look at the mythological characters in the *Mahabharata*. The characters no longer remain in mythology, but become human beings like any individual around a reader. There is a complete absence of any episode that has an element of divine intervention found in the original. Personal reflections of some principal characters provide an opportunity to the reader to understand the human qualities of these characters. Bhyrappa has tried to give logic behind every action of the characters as human beings. They have their instincts, their worldly wishes and desires. No one can be labeled as black and white character, in the same way these characters represent various types of personality having their virtues and vices. The present researcher would like to analyse the main characters in the light of the above theme. For this purpose, she has chosen a few human relationships like husband and wife, parent and child, friendship, the King and the subjects etc. She has tried to show how after reading the novel, the reader is convinced by a particular behaviour of the character. Stream –of-consciousness method used in the novel reveals a psychology of the characters to the reader.

KEYWORDS: Humanisation, mythological, human, relationships, psychology, reflections

Parva (1979), a magnum opus by a Kannada writer S.L.Bhyrappa and translated into English by K.Raghvendra Rao(1994) gives a new insight to look at the mythological characters in *Parva*. Bhyrappa has taken a realistic and practical approach to look at the epic, *the Mahabharata* in his novel. Therefore, he has tried to be practicable, in the sense he has tried to guess the then lifestyle, the availability of resources and their development. There is a complete absence of any episode that has an element of divine intervention found in the original. The author himself has said in the Foreword, “I was well aware along that I was not giving exact copies of the characters of the original *Mahabharata*, but only the different facets and forms of human nature and human relationships.”(viii)

Personal reflections of some principal characters provide an opportunity to a reader to understand the human qualities of these characters. Every action of these characters has a reason and logic behind it. The reader finds all these characters as normal human beings with flesh and blood. They have their natural instincts, their worldly wishes and desires. The subtitle of the English version is quite apt which reads, ‘*A tale of war, peace, love, death, god and man*’. No one can be labeled as black and white character, in the same way these characters represent various types of personality having their virtues and vices. The present researcher has tried to analyse the main characters in the light of the above theme. For this purpose, she has chosen a few human relationships like husband and wife, parent and child, friendship and some individual characters. These characters no longer remain in the mythology, but

become individuals around the reader. Bhyrappa, in a public programme at Maleshwar said, "The purpose of his writing is a search for the changing human values." (Daily Loksatta, 2012). This is very true in Case to *Parva*.

Every relationship described in this novel can be traced in the real life situation. In fact, they reflect the real life relationships. The different aspects of these characters' personality like their ambition, jealousy, love, longing, revenge, hatred, diplomacy, hypocrisy and sacrifice are not imaginary, but real. The analysis of the relationships is as follows:

Husband and wife:-

The couples chosen for the analysis are Pandu and Kunti, Pandavas and Draupadi, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari and Bhima and Salkatankati. A society represented in the novel is the male dominated society. Naturally, men dominate women. The women characters represented in this novel differ from women characters in other mythological characters like *Mrutunjay* by Shivaji Sawant and *Yayati* by V.S. Khandekar. They are emotionally and mentally independent. At times, they refute back to their male partners. They deny the Hippocratic assistance and company of their male partners. Of course, whatever they do, they do for the betterment of their family. This independence has not come to overnight; they have received their positions through their sacrifices. Every wife has sacrificed a lot of her life for her husband and family. After a considerable period of their relationship, they realize that their husbands are not contributing even their lot to the wellbeing of their family.

This is often found in the Indian families that, in the old age, men surrender to their wives because they are aware that she is the pillar of the family because of whom the family and children have got the best of life. In case of the relationship between Pandu and Kunti, when Pandu tries to project that Kunti is impotent, she snaps out at him and says, "No, not her, Even if you took four more wives, you will be incapable of preventing the flow of menstrual blood. Whenever that blood drops to the ground, your sins across births accumulate. And it is further in to hide the truth and lie to the senior wife."(pp.53) Kunti has got such a power that she does not shade even a drop of tear when Pandu slaps her after her reply. The reason behind this is that she has entertained herself and her personal maid servant and friend with the false and inexperienced sexual pleasure with her husband. In fact, she does not want to reveal the secret of Pandu's impotency to the world. When Pandu tries to hide his incapacity and blames her for that, she insults him because she is well aware of her fertility since she has already born a child before her marriage. The same is the case with Gandhari who has forgot and forgiven every a misdeed of Dhritrashtra, in the old age protests silently and does not pay attention to him. But, Dhritrashtra who has a kind of fear never denies her protests. Salkatankati also questions Bhima about his loyalty to her and his duty as a father, but Bhima cannot respond to her.

The relationship between Pandavas and Draupadi is elaborately described by the writer. Though she is a wife of five husbands, she gives her heart to Arjun in the beginning. She tries to find out her image of an ideal husband in Arjun and he also thinks that Draupadi is not only the wife, but a true friend of him. But later in the novel Draupadi is closer to Bhima than Arjun. The specialty of all the women characters here is that they never complain about their previous life or about their

experiment as women. They are reasoning about their life which is not a justification of their being right or wrong. This appeals the reader most. When Draupadi looks back to her previous life, she says that she has to fulfill the sexual desire of every husband and they used to come to her to devour her. Though physically she fulfills their desire, she gives her heart to Arjun. But when she finds that Arjun is also 'a man', who prefers his ego than Draupadi's feelings, her heart breaks. Once it is broken she does not try to please Arjun at all. In fact, she shows no concern for him and in a way suggests that she is emotionally independent. On the other side, when Draupadi rejects to please Arjuna when it's Dharma's turn, annoyed Arjun leaves the palace. In his journey he enjoys a sexual pleasure with many women and ultimately settles with Subhadra marrying her as his personal wife. Though he is with Subhadra, he misses the friendliness, intelligence and beauty of Draupadi in her. But he does not have the courage and will to go back to Draupadi and resolve the conflict. Many times, in the real life situation marriages break because of ego problem. Nobody is ready to give up, the same is applicable to Arjun and Draupadi.

There are some couples in the world which are made for each other. The basic reason behind the success of these couples is mutual understanding, true and selfless love and readiness to sacrifice for the other partner. The relationship between Bhīma and Draupadi goes closer to the above definition of an ideal relationship. Bhīma never tries to fathom Draupadi's mind but he is always ready to please her. He is the typical Indian husband who in the then period strives hard to protect his wife from the wicked intentions of other men. He kills many so called lovers of Draupadi. Once she realizes that Arjun has cheated her, she devotes herself to Bhīma. In exile, they emotionally come closer to each other. Draupadi reveals her heart to Bhīma only and Bhīma tries to fulfill her every wish. Draupadi feels jealous when Bhīma is going to invite Ghatotkach to the war. There is common thread which binds them together and that is to take the revenge of Duryodhana and others. Draupadi does not find any affinity for Dharma and Nakul and Sahdeva are junior to her. Therefore, these relationships are not elaborated in the novel.

Another noteworthy husband and wife relationship is that of Bhīma and Salkatankati. It is a love marriage in which the beloved Salkatankati proposes Bhīma. In fact, Kunti advises him to accept her love. They are appropriate life partners because Salkatankati is equally strong as Bhīma. They live together for a year and depart after that. Actually, Bhīma is unwilling to leave his wife and a newborn son, but Kunti being aware of the Raksasa culture of Salkatankati compels Bhīma to leave. Though in his later life Bhīma remembers Salkatankati, but never thinks of going back to her. On the other hand, Salkatankati goes against her community, but never remarries. Like other women in the novel, she gets an upper hand to her husband.

Parent and child relationship:-

Parent and child relationship is another aspect of the humanization process. Different aspects of this relationship are reflected in the novel. The specialty of Bhyrapp's writing is that the reader feels at home. She never feels that she is reading a novel, but feels as if everything happens around her. The researcher has chosen examples of Kunti and her sons, Dhritrashtra-Gandhari and Kauravas, Rukmaratha and Hiranyavati and Draupadia and her sons. They are analysed as follows:

Kunti and her sons:

Kunti can be called an ideal mother with respect to the Pandavas. She brings up them with caution and proper care because she is well aware of the circumstances, nature of her every son and the diplomatic nature of Dhritrashtra. She has realized a formula of a success of her sons and that is to keep them together always. Kunti is an ambitious mother. She has a goal in her mind and that is the kingship of Hastinavati for her sons. She is a keen observer of the society. She knows that lust can ruin her sons, so she always warns them against it and reminds them the reason for their father's death. She forbids them from extramarital relationships with the maid servants. To bind her sons together, she sacrifices Draupadi's happiness and her beauty. In this effort, she forgets to empathize with Draupadi. Even at the end when she realizes that all of her grandchildren are dead and Uttara delivers a dead child, she goes back to Draupadi and urges her to continue the lineage of her family in the age of 50. When Draupadi replies, "What does it matter if the lineage dies out?" Kunti becomes furious and says, "No, you cannot say that. You must conceive. How can you who joined this lineage as a daughter-in-law say such wicked things?" (pp. 840)

The same mother called Kunti who never behaves partially in case of Pandavas does injustice to Karna. She has given birth to Karna but does not bring him up because of social obligation since Karna is born to her before her marriage. Krishna advises kunti to talk to Karna and reveal the secret of his birth. She does the same. When Karna realizes that Kunti is his mother, he gets angry at her, still expresses his gratitude because she is incidental for his birth. Karna does his duty as a son during the war by not killing his brothers, but Kunti fails to do her duty as a mother because she does not reveal the secret of Karna's birth to her other sons. If she has decided she could have brought her sons together. Kunti's behavior with Karna is not abnormal; any common woman can behave like her. Even today, a child produced before marriage is unacceptable in our society.

Dhritrashtra-Gandhari and Kauravas:-

Another facet of the parent and child relationship can be traced in Dhritrashtra-Gandhari and Kauravas relationship. Many times, it is found that the wards of rich (who have inherited the wealth without any efforts) are debauchers, lavish and extravagant. They do not follow moral ethics and are arrogant. In a way their parents are responsible for their condition. The same is applicable to the Kauravas. Dhritrashtra is blind, but very ambitious fellow. He has a kind of inferiority complex. Because of his blindness, he cannot take part in the war and express his strength. Therefore, he finds pleasure to exploit the maid servants, get sexual pleasure and produce too many illegitimate children. He encourages the arrogance of Duryodhana and Dushashan. He never scolds them if they disregard an elderly person. Besides this, he motivates them to have extra-marital relationships with many young and beautiful maid servants. As a mother, Gandhari is not given much scope; still we find that she is caught in her image of 'Devi'. She does not take initiative to teach her children any moral lesson. Both of them are not consulted by their children before taking any important decision. Both of them regret for their upbringing of their son when they compare them with the Pandavas. At the end, when Krishna brainwashes Gandhari about her band on the eye and asks why she never thought of removing it, she realizes that even her children never persuaded her to remove the band for their sake and it's very suggestive of their attachment.

Pandavas-Draupadi and their children:-

In case of Pandavas-Draupadi and their five sons, a full-fledge parent-child relationship is not developed because the sons have to live with their grandfather and uncle for thirteen years. Therefore, a friendly relationship and an emotional attachment between the fathers and the sons seem absent. There may be another reason for the detachment is that who is exactly whose father is not clear. Only some references in case of Bhīma are made when the sons were children, he used to teach them swimming, duel etc. Though Draupadi is also away from them for a considerable period of time she tries to peep inside their mind, to develop bondage between her and them. In a way they, can be called Draupadis's sons. This is visible when they are killed by Aswathama, nobody but Draupadi mourns their death. No father comes to console her or express his sorrow for their death. Her remark at that time is very apt. She says, "Krishna, even you don't seem to understand what is happening inside me,. When Abhimanyu died, Arjuna embraced Subhadra and wept loudly, drenching her with tears. Didn't you see it? When Ghatotkacha died, Bhima carried the corpse and washed away the blood stains on it by his tears. Yow saw it or didn't you? Now I am weeping all alone for these five children of mine. The five fathers squatting there have not bothered to fall on their bodies and weep and rave. And none of them embraced me in sorrow as Arjuna did Subhadra. They are all sitting at an equal distance from my dead sons, as if they were mere spectators!" (p.808)

Rukmarath and Hiranyavati:-

Rukmaratha is the king of Madraland and he has a young daughter who is looking forward to marriage. But, Rukmaratha is caught between traditions and his economic condition. Arranging a Swayanwar for his daughter's marriage seems impossible and marrying a daughter to a Prince who would offer dowry is unacceptable to him. In his confusion, Hiranyavati pines to be married. She is young and beautiful and wants somebody to love her, to adorn her and to enjoy her beauty. Her father is keeping a watch on her so that she cannot fall in love with anyone. She curses her parents. Her grandfather advises his son to allow her to bore a child by wedlock, but Rukmarath rejects the idea being primitive. When Shalya with his two sons is busy with the war, Hiranyavati elopes with a tribal lover who often comes to the palace. She revolts against the so called traditions and enjoys her life according to her own way. In a way, she solves the problem in a very natural way. In the beginning of the novel, there is a rain and everyone enjoys it and sings the ritual prayer of rain. At the end of the novel the circle is completed by the rainfall and Hiranyavati is happy because she is conceiving and singing the sameprayer again. Hiranyavati is the representative of the middle class young daughter and we could find many examples around us.

Individual Characters:

Bhishma:-

Bhishma is a representative of the people who in the fit of emotions take impracticable decisions and carry the burden of those decisions throughout their life to keep them. Instead of renouncing the material life, Bhishma remains in the palace and looks after how the lineage of Kuru race will be carried over. He thinks that he has understood the meaning of Dharma, but at the time of the war goes to Krishnadaipayana to get his advice on Dharma. He regrets at the end on his lifestyle.

He thinks that he sacrificed his worldly pleasures for the Kuru race, but it is not considered by anyone. He thinks he should have gone to the Himalayas to enjoy the peace of life. His death is not ceremonial.

Vidur:-

Vidur is the half-brother of Dhritrashtra born to a maid servant, but not given any share of the royal wealth. He is a wise and cooperative fellow. The relationship between Dhritrashtra and him is sweet and sour. He forgives Dhritrashtra and goes back to him. He is the only person who very firmly rejects the side of injustice and does not take part in the war. Like any human being, he has a jealous feeling for Karna because all the Suta people consider Karna their leader.

Krishna:-

Krishna's divine intervention is completely absent here. Whenever there is a critical situation and it is necessary Krishna comes into the picture. But the author has avoided giving the credit of every important event to Krishna. The basic reason behind it might be to give a comfortable space to the other characters and reveal them to the reader. Therefore, every individual character becomes important.

The researcher has tried to analyse the characters the way they are presented by the author as human beings. It is found that all the above characters are certainly found in the real life situation. The psychology of every character is keenly understood and depicted by Bhyrappa with every minute detail. He has skillfully used stream-of-consciousness and flash back techniques to narrate the novel. As earlier said, no character tries to defend or convince his/her case but gives reasoning behind every action and it is appealing.

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