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**The history of understanding and understanding of history: A
dialogue with epic heroes and heroines**

Bandlamudi, Lakshmi, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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**The History of Understanding and Understanding of History:
A Dialogue with Epic Heroes and Heroines**

by

Lakshmi Bandlamudi

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York.

1994

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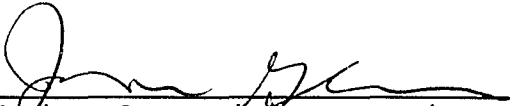
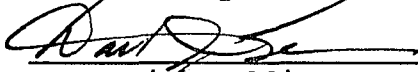
LAKSHMI BANDLAMUDI

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

The History of Understanding and Understanding of History:
A Dialogue with Epic Heroes and Heroines

by

Lakshmi Bandlamudi

Adviser: Professor Joseph Glick

The idea that understanding a literary text is an imaginative act in which something profound about the reader, the text and the world in which both are located is revealed and created is the underlying theme in this research. The study examined the dynamics of reading the ancient epic text *Mahabharath*; specifically how some individuals of Indian origin living in the United States of America make sense of certain segments from B.R.Chopra's television production of *Mahabharath*. Segments from the television production were selectively chosen to focus on the heroine Draupadi and the hero Karna. These selected segments for viewing were both significant to the text and to contemporary concerns and conflicts on gender, caste and class relations. From an epistemological standpoint, the study explored the dynamics of the "history of understanding" and "understanding of history".

This study is about understanding an all pervasive cultural historical text. Epic tales in India penetrates

everyday life, and since the pull of the "story" is so strong in Indian ontology, the boundaries between text/reader, past/present get erased and established, and the study focused on the negotiation of these boundaries. If Mahabharath is a part and parcel of everyday life, the question then is how do we give meaning to everyday life. In order to address this question methodologically, I tried to examine the "interpretive styles" in "reading" lives and reading the familiar epic text.

The study suggests that personal identity and self awareness is at the center of the interpretive act. Readers treat Mahabharath the way they treat everyday life experiences. The more intertextual the self is the more intertextual the epic becomes. The readers' active journey through various time zones and cultural spaces facilitates their development of aesthetic consciousness and in turn enriches the text. An "inactive" movement on the other hand treats each space and time as isolated units and does not facilitate the recognition of multiple realities. In the active understanding, the epic comes in contact with the living present and in turn aids in the development of meaning making.

To conclude, the study suggests that understanding the ancient past involves both "dislocating" and "relocating" the past, after making all the additions and editions and reshuffling the text.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people both in my childhood and in my adult life who contributed to this project directly or indirectly. I wish to thank these heroines and heroes in my life.

My love for Mahabharath comes from my grandmother (Avva). Growing up in the hot and humid city of Madras, telling tales from the epics was a daily ritual in the open air terrace. Avva was a master story teller and a scholar. She said that the tales were the only wealth she possessed. Under tragic circumstances, I left her in India and she extracted a promise from me; that I would do something meaningful in my life in exchange for the sacrifice she made. This work is in fond memory of Avva.

This work would not have been possible without my mother's support. She worked under difficult conditions to keep me financially secure. I thank her for putting up with my whimsical interests and my erratic moods. The drama of Mahabharath was often enacted in our relationship, but through this drama I have been able to understand the difficult mother/daughter relationship. The drama has only enriched our relationship.

A big part of graduate school life was intertwined with difficult domestic life, when all the siblings had to "grow up" and "make it". My sister Usha absorbed all my emotional upheavals and my generous brother Eshwar gave me a surprise

gift - a laser printer, and my kid brother Raghu being a law student himself engaged in quite a number of intellectual debates with me. We are intellectually poles apart and yet emotionally we need each other.

I have to pay my dues to my father who died prematurely; before I could grow up and rebel and redefine my relationship with him. My love for scholarship comes from him. He was an easy chair intellect. His love for books often was at my expense; he paid more attention to the printed matter, than the children around him. Wherever he is I hope I get his approval now.

The immediate hero who made all this possible is my mentor Joe Glick. I quite frankly cannot imagine where my life would have gone without him. His generosity was at so many levels - creating a job for me, and expecting me to find my own voice, and giving me an encouraging word at difficult times. I often exploited this situation and called him at odd times to release tension and to get his reassurance. Writing an "unorthodox" dissertation needs an unorthodox teacher. Joe's confrontational style, would often disrupt my assumptions and would force me to rethink and reevaluate my theories and methods. The disruption, I believe led to my own "development" in the graduate school, and the only way I can repay this is by saying, "I love you Joe, you are a special person in my life".

It all started when John Dore introduced Bakhtin in his class. John spoke about Bakhtin with such passion and love, I

could not rest till I had read all of Bakhtin's books. Over the years I have shared my love for Bakhtin with John and he was available for me both intellectually and personally. I thank him for changing the course of my life.

Intellectual work becomes meaningful when it is recognized by the outside world. Vincent Crapanzano has been instrumental in the publication process. I thank him for his introduction of Nietzsche in his class and for his encouragement.

I have relied extensively on my friends for tossing ideas and refining them. I have benefited from their generosity. Special thanks goes to Minda Tessler, Mark Zuss, Nitya and Shreekumar. I am also grateful to my music teacher, Gnanam. She is true to her name (Gnanam means wisdom), and taught me what aestheticism is in musical life.

Theories and philosophies become meaningful with rich data. I am grateful to all the subjects who participated in this study and generously gave their time. Their life stories and their thoughts on the epic has enriched my life and has added newer dimensions to my own understanding of Mahabharath.

Last but not least, I thank the gods. In writing this dissertation, I have come to appreciate the multiple relationships that Krishna demands. Mentally, it has been a *Rasa Leela*.

PREFACE

'ARE THERE FIXED TRUTHS'?

Alas, having defeated the enemy, we have ourselves been defeated ... The ... defeated have become victorious ... Misery appears like prosperity and prosperity looks like misery. This victory is twined into defeat.

The Mahabharatha ¹

In this *Maha Kavya* (grand poetry) of India, no individual however noble their deeds may be, and no idea however ideal it may seem to be, is all perfect and pure. Everyone is flawed, including gods. All roles are reversed at some point - the valorous warrior, Arjun becomes despondent and turns into a pacifist, and the godhead, Krishna resorts to human tactics and counsels on warfare. Even the most profound treatise on salvation is not utopian in nature and does not necessarily rescue the individual from the abysmal world (Radhakrishnan, 1948); rather they are instruments for shaping and reshaping individual and social consciousness (Nandy, 1987), by repeatedly directing our attention to the complexity and multiplicity of "truth". Therefore the meaning of "defeat", however pathetic it might be and "victory" despite its glory and grandeur are not intrinsic to the events themselves, but are perspectival. Mahabharath is not about purity; it captures the pathos of human existence in

¹ *The Mahabharatha*, Sauptik Parva: 10; Slokas 9,12,13, trans. Manmatha Nath Dutt (Calcutta: Elysium, 1962), p.20.

its most sordid form and repeatedly seems to assert in Nietzsche's (1984) words that, "We are from the start illogical and therefore unfair beings, *and this we can know*: it is one of the greatest and most insoluble disharmonies of existence" (p.35). The disharmony of Mahabharath is certainly not about hopelessness and despair, but it directs our attention to the unfinalizability of ideas and ideals and unsystematizability of human existence. Every moment in the epic presents bewildering complexities.

The truth about Mahabharath itself is not fixed and Sage Vyasa is not its sole author. The text itself evolved and continues to evolve; therefore this grand tale is often referred to as "*Chakra*" - a wheel, and each generation serves as a cog to set this wheel in motion, and the evolution of the "self" and the "text" occurs in a synergistic fashion.

This dissertation is my modest attempt to "evolve" and to understand how individuals play "hide and seek" with this great epic - Mahabharath.

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INTRODUCTION

'SO WHAT'S THE STORY AND WHY THIS STORY?'

Even a lie is truthful
If it does unsullied good

The Kural ²

The idea that understanding a literary text is an imaginative act in which something profound about the reader, the text and the world in which both are located is revealed and created is the underlying theme in this dissertation. The study was designed to explore the interrelationships between individual and cultural-historical dynamics in "reading" texts: more specifically how few individuals of Indian origin living in United States of America read the Indian epic text - Mahabharath, which is a religious, cultural and historical text of India.

This epic within the Indian sub continent is thought of as the "grand story of India" or the "*Itihas* " - the history of ideas, and therefore plays a major role in the society. This grand story is never singular and unified, since the hermeneutical and exegetical tradition in India was never preoccupied with the "authenticity" and "originality" of the text, but allowed popular imagination to give its twists and

² The Kural by Tiruvalluvar , (stanza 292, trans. P.S. Sundaram. New Delhi: Penguin books) who was one of the greatest poets of Tamil classical literature who lived sometime between second century BC and eighth century AD.

turns and add its flavor. From these multiple versions, redactors and readers distill texts (or narrative fragments) and recreate them to suit their specific needs. Epic narratives have their own regional variations, variations of generations, languages and social groups and slices of these texts are selectively used to match the "political slogans" of the day. However each of these traditions also canonize the text - referring to the epic as the "timeless story of India", or the "immortal story of India" or the "story that is older than time" and so on. The epic narratives therefore invoke a sense of grandeur, ancientness and glory and yet these seemingly "hardened" texts penetrate every day life - individual, social, and political. From an individual standpoint, I want to understand the processes of "fluidization" and the "canonization" of the epic. Therefore, the concerns are with the "dislocation" and the "relocation" of the ancient past.

The central question is not "how do we understand history", but this question is intertwined with how "understanding itself has a history". The study is about the interplay of several histories - that of the individual past, the individual's past relationship to the text, and the history of the text itself. These multiple histories become crucial in the understanding of an all pervasive cultural text. If Mahabharath is a part and parcel of every day life, the question then is, how do we give meaning to every day life? I am borrowing the concept of "answerability" from

Bakhtin (1990) to understand sense making of every day reality. Bakhtin explains that creative understanding holds the individual answerable to one's own experiences. The "author" is neither a "bearer of inner lived experiences", nor is a passive reactionary to life experiences, but an active agent who engages in a dialogue with the inner self and outer world as Bakhtin (1993) explains,

"An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never - repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life" (p.2).

The answerability factor lies in the relationship between culturally central texts or art forms that have rich emotional overtones and the relationship they have to specific individual lives.

In order to capture the relationship between the text that permeates the cultural life at large, and the unique meaning that it has in specific individual lives, the study explores the interrelationships between interpreting "lives" and interpreting "stories": how do we tell stories about our lives and how lives enter into the stories we read. Individuals select certain aspects of their lives and the world around them to write their own life stories and likewise they select certain aspects of the epic to rewrite the story. The variation among the readers lies in this selective process. Therefore the reality about Mahabharath is refracted through the individual's interpretation of "every day reality", as Lotman (1990) explains,

"The spatial picture of the world is many layered: it includes both the mythological universum and scientific modeling and every day 'common sense'" (p.203).

If we adapt Lotman's explanation, we could expect a constant tension between Mahabharath as a cultural historical text and Mahabharath the "metalanguage", which includes the scientific modeling and common sense. The scientific modeling determines the aspects of text that are brought under scrutiny and the individual's own sense of "common sense" discounts or ignores certain aspects of the text. This study explores the variations in the aspects of the text that are highlighted and those that are ignored.

Based upon these theoretical insights and cultural observations, the underlying assumptions in the current study are that the text is selectively constructed, influenced by the contents of the text itself - which includes both the mediated and the unmediated (that is Mahabharath as a story in general and as a specific version), the history of individuals' relationship to the text, which in turn is influenced by various factors such as, level of knowledge, modes of presentation - through informal oral telling or formal theater, books etc., and notions of "Self", that is how individuals constitute their subjectivities in relation to various cultural entities, and the immediate context within which the text is read.

The objective of this exploratory study is to document the myriad ways in which the transformation of the text takes place in the process of reading an ancient religious and

historical text retold through the television medium - a modern technological device. The epic Mahabharath was made into a television serial recently by the Indian film producer, B.R. Chopra (1989), and the videotapes are available in New York. Segments from this television production were selectively chosen to focus on the heroine, *Draupadi* and the hero *Karna*. These selected segments for viewing are both significant to the text and to contemporary concerns and conflicts on gender, caste and class relations. Such a selection of plots, I believe could force the reader to come to grips with the past and present and allow a negotiation between "tradition" and "modernity". In other words the selected plots are about choosing marriage partner, and an attempted "gang rape", and about a mother trying to reclaim her abandoned child. These topics bear resemblance to contemporary problems and could force the reader to come to grips with both the ancient past and the contemporary present.

I want to address several questions with respect to cognition in this dissertation. How do we talk about our past - both personal and cultural? How do these personal and cultural histories mediate the construction of the "ancient past"? What counts as the ancient past? How do social values and political conflicts of the present day mediate the construction of "ancientness". How are boundaries between self/other, reader/text, past/present negotiated and

instantiated? These questions guide my understanding of the relationships between self, culture and history.

A Synopsis

I am approaching the subject of cultural understanding with the assumption that understanding is a creative act. The question then is, what qualifies as an act of "creativity"? In Chapter 1, I have addressed that question and argued that the relationship between the creator and the created sets the stage for the creative act. I have relied on the theme of "play" in Nietzsche's philosophy and the "author/hero" relationship in Bakhtin's philosophy to discuss meaningful acts of creativity. For Nietzsche, thinking itself is a form of play (Schrift, 1990), - a creative play that creates multiple players. This view is consonant with Vygotsky's ideas on human thinking. He equated thought processes to a drama with a variety of roles. In Chapter 1, I have argued that the "known" is not a thing to be comprehended by the knower, but the known is an equal partner in this creative activity.

In Chapter 2 and 3, I discuss the epistemological assumptions in the act of reading. I argue for a dialogic approach which recognizes the reader and the text as equal partners. In dialogism, meanings are neither contained in the text, nor are they owned by the reader. The emergence of meanings from this nexus in turn is determined by the

cultural and historical context in which both the text and the reader are located.

Even though this dissertation is guided by the Bakhtinian oeuvre, it must be noted that Bakhtin neither had a specific theory of the mind, nor did he discuss at any great length about the nature of the reader. The key concepts that I am borrowing from Bakhtin are "*Chronotopes*", "*genres*", and "*heteroglossia*". For Bakhtin, chronotopes literally translates into "time-space", and spatio temporal relations are intrinsic to all meaning making activities, and genres are the conceptual lens for constructing and understanding the human activity. The concept of *heteroglossia*, which means that all meanings are context bound and not text bound, has special relevance and significance to this study. This concept allows me to discuss the multiple layers of meanings that a familiar cultural text can produce. Interestingly, I have used Bakhtin's own key concepts to question the distinction Bakhtin makes between the epic and the novel. In Bakhtin's scheme, the novel signifies the living and the growing present and it is a break from the antiquated past that the epic symbolizes. The argument that I am presenting in this dissertation is that reading an epic entails weaving the chronotopes of the "absolute past" and the "living present". Therefore, this dissertation is both guided by Bakhtin and transcends Bakhtin. In chapters 2 and 3, I discuss the relevance of dialogism to a reader-oriented

project and connect these principles to Vygotsky's discussion on thinking and speech.

To understand how specific readers make sense of Mahabharath, it is important to know how epics operate within the culture. In Chapter 4, I discuss the penetration of epics in everyday life in Indian culture. Stories are highly potent in the cultural life of India, and individuals consciously or unconsciously carry with them this "baggage" of tradition.

In Chapter 5, I argue that tradition itself has a history. In other words, "tradition" itself is subjected to the forces of history and its history is still being created. Therefore reading Mahabharath translates into an interplay between the "movement of subject" and the "movement of text". The reading activity is an intersection of several histories - that is "historical truths" and "histories about truths".

I discuss the methodological aspects in Chapter 6 - how I recruited subjects, gathered data and transcribed them. I have focused on the various phases of data collection and my strategies for conducting the interview.

The analysis of the data begins from Chapter 7. In this chapter, my focus is on the "life stories". For the purpose of classifying these stories, I have used "chronotopes" as my analytical tool. In Bakhtin's (1981) definition, chronotope refers to both the spatio temporal relations in the narrative and the cultural space and historical time that the narrator inhabits, and together they determine the nature of the narrative. Based on my data, I have created 7 categories of

self - the traveler, the biographer, the "clan self", the seeker, the scriptural self, the gendered self and finally the dialogic self. Each of these categories have distinct plots that determine the story line, and the "heroes and heroines" have unique relationships to various cultural entities around them. In Chapter 7 I discuss the distinct features of these categories and in Chapter 8, I draw the converging and diverging points between them.

To understand the dynamics of reading a familiar cultural historical text, would entail understanding how the memory of this text operates in the reading 'act'. The memory also gives some insight into the kind of encounters that individuals have had with the text in the past and subsequently the relationship that they have established with the text. In Chapter 10, I discuss the memory of specific characters Draupadi and Karna and the specific plots.

The next chapter is on the "reading act", in which I track the "movement of understanding". The first two plots were 5 minutes segments and the readers were more likely to discern "a theme" in these plots. Therefore, "speech genres" were used as analytical tools. The next two plots were lengthy and the readers were "swept by the tide" and were forced to recognize multiple themes and confront a variety of ethical problems. The readers now became "wanderers", and therefore the discourse moved. The nature of the movement varied. In order to track this movement of understanding, I have used White's (1978) explanation of the rhetorical tropes

- metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony as my analytical tools. White discusses Giambattista Vico's philosophy and points out that the transition from one rhetorical trope to another in the discourse (or the stagnation at one trope) signifies human and cultural consciousness. Each transitional phase has a distinct view on human nature and social relations. For instance, the transition from metaphor to metonymy signifies a movement from a theocratic to an aristocratic society. In the former a divine law operates and the human being is conceived in poetic terms, whereas in the later a contractual law operates and the human being is defined in heroic terms. For the purposes of this study, these tropes serve as useful analytical tools to understand the reader's "world view". The movement through these tropes or the stagnation indicates the kind of reasoning that they use to make sense of the conflicts in the story. I argue that these tropes operate in their fullness in a "vari directional discourse". This discourse moves in multiple directions and recognizes multiple realities and these realities exist in a dialogized form (Bakhtin (1984), whereas the "direct" and "unidirectional discourse" stops with the metaphor and metonymy. My discussion in this chapter is both about the "dyads" and about specific individuals. The discussion is both about the features of various kinds of discourse and about the interaction between them. In Chapter 12. I discuss the patterns in the discourse style among various readers in all the four plots.

The interconnections between "stories about life" and "life in stories" is discussed in Chapter 13. Here I attempt to connect the various phases of this study - life stories, past engagement with text, and memories of Mahabharath, and the actual act of reading. I demonstrate that there is a relationship between how individuals "read" themselves and how they "read" the text. The relationship could vary from styles of speaking to their embeddedness in the culture to the evaluative stances that they take about the contents of the text.

In the final Chapter 14, I conclude with a discussion on the role of history in knowledge construction. I argue that a "historically effected consciousness" is capable of a dialogic reading and such a reading affords cognitive gains and ethical possibilities.

Thus, this dissertation is organized in three parts; in the first five chapters, I build broad theoretical arguments, and in chapter 6, I discuss the methods. The following two chapters 7 & 8, discusses the categories of self. In these chapters, I argue that the "self" is also a text that is "read" selectively, and I demonstrate the textualization of the self. These two chapters are about "autobiographical memories", and the next two chapters 9 & 10 are about the memory of Mahabharath and memory of specific characters, Draupadi and Karna. In chapter 9, I argue that various "time zones" - personal, cultural and historical are negotiated in recalling Mahabharath. In chapter 10, I demonstrate that the

memory of the heroine Draupadi is unmistakably linked to the history of gender relations in the society.

The following two chapters 11 & 12 are about the "reading act". In Chapter 13, I discuss the inter relationships between personal histories, memory of the text and the actual reading act, and in the final chapter, I discuss the significance of history and historicity in understanding our personal and cultural past.

Thus, like the characters in Mahabharath, I also want to confront and understand the traffic between good/evil, past/present and set new terms to what has been historically defined as the "ancient past".

CHAPTER 1

BETWEEN CREATORS AND CREATIONS ...

I shall believe only in a god who understood how to dance.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche's (1961) Zarathustra boldly declares the kind of relationship that he seeks with his creator. He refuses to be simply molded by his creator. Instead he expects his creator to anticipate and understand his moves and dance with him on equal footing. Having created, the creator does not have the final say on the creation, but instead has to allow his own creation to alter his consciousness. The movement between creators and creations set the stage for the "dance". The dance has many acts - from synchronizing their steps to a harmonious rhythm, to creating ruptures for establishing their unique identities, to acknowledging each other, salute to each other and at times bow down to the other's grandeur and excellence or playfully tease and mock at each other. In short, in Bakhtin's (1990) words, they are "answerable" to each other in every respect - cognitive, emotional, political and ethical. No act of authoring, Bakhtin says, can be done with impunity, and it is the answerability factor that holds the author accountable for the creation. The accountability factor is valid even in making sense of one's own life experiences. The lived reality (life) and the creative acts

(art) are not one and the same for Bakhtin: life is too humble and art is too mighty and yet they are not separate either. In fact they both need each other and they converge within the individual as Bakhtin (1990) writes,

"Art and life are not one, but they must become united within myself - in the unity of my answerability" (p.2).

The metaphor of "dance", "playfulness" and "child likeness" are found in abundance in both Nietzsche's and Bakhtin's writings. They especially use such images in discussing "higher forms of consciousness". A higher form of thinking to them is not one that frees itself from the baser "body principle", in order to move towards a "purer" rational state, but one that connects the biological to the, if I may say "spiritual". The connection creates ambiguous zones, perhaps to play or to dance and therefore it is never clear whether the act is seriously playful or playfully serious. The ambiguities, for Bakhtin function as "loopholes" to trigger newer meanings (Morson and Emerson, 1990), and for Nietzsche facilitates "transvaluation of values" (Schrift, 1990).

The idea of "play" itself is differentiated in Nietzsche's philosophy as Alan Schrift (1990) explains 3 kinds of play that Nietzsche identifies:

(1) *Schauspiel* - the theatrical play. In this kind of play the world is seen as a theater in which we perform. We deck ourselves up, change costumes, put on masks to participate and enjoy in this theatrical world. The world becomes a playground.

(2) The second kind of play is *Weltspiel* - play of the world. Shrift explains that in this kind of play, both the individual and the world are a play of forces. To operate in this disorganized world, the individual has to set the rules of the game and in turn affirm himself.

(3) The third one is *Kinderspiel* - the play of the child. This is the play that Nietzsche was most preoccupied with. This is like a child building sand castles on the sea shore very meticulously, with a full awareness that the tides may wash this castle away any time. This kind of play embraces childlike innocence and persistence in the construction and an almost prophetic awareness of the potential for destruction. Such a play recognizes the transient nature of creative acts and utilizes every destructive moment for yet another creation.

The higher forms of thinking for Nietzsche is when players seek fellow play mates in their own play, as he says in Zarathustra's (Nietzsche, 1961) speeches,

"The creator seeks companions, not corpses or herds or believers. The creator seeks fellow-creators, those who inscribe new values on new tables" (p.52).

The need for the "child likeness" in defining one's consciousness becomes clearer in Zarathustra's discussion on the "metamorphoses of the spirit" - the transformation of the spirit from a camel to a lion and finally to a child. The camel is only a recipient of the given values, and it accepts it unconditionally and therefore its consciousness is

passively nihilistic. The lion on the other hand affirms itself by devaluing the given values symbolizing reactive nihilism, whereas the child is capable of revaluing the given values and hence its consciousness is actively nihilistic (Schrift, 1990). The camel endures the hardships inflicted upon it by the world, whereas the lion establishes its supremacy by terrorizing the world and both are incapable of recreating the "given" world and establishing multiple and newer worlds.

The creation of multiple worlds and conversing with each of these worlds is necessary for any kind of aesthetic activity (Bakhtin, 1990). Works of art don't necessarily "express" themselves; they achieve meaning with the aid of the other. Such "expressive aesthetics" for Bakhtin is too impoverishing and in many ways faulty. When meanings are located in a single plane of consciousness, it discounts a whole range of possible meanings making the activity too monologic, perhaps resembling Nietzsche's lion. Aestheticism is achieved not by ruthless dismissal of the other, but by honest recognition of the other especially when there are differing viewpoints. In fact, Bakhtin (1990) points out that a true measure of artistic ability is not how effectively the author expresses his viewpoints, ideologies etc., through the hero he creates but, "to what extent the souls of the heroes are alive". Bakhtin (1990) writes,

"The author must be situated on the boundary of the world he is bringing into being as the active creator of

this world, for his intrusion into that world destroys its aesthetic stability" (p.191).

The boundary between the author and the hero allows both the creator and the created to retain their unique individual identity and engage in a dialogue. Novelty, for Bakhtin is created not through a synthesis of elements in the Hegelian sense, but by maintaining differences and recognizing the other's special voice, trait, etc. Dialectical philosophy, Bakhtin (1986) argues erases the "partitioning of voices" and their special intonations and blends everything into one abstract consciousness. Dialogism on the other hand does not favor this concoction and Bakhtin argues against it since it removes heterogeneity.

Multiplicity is necessary for development, and for this reason Bakhtin (1981) was very preoccupied with the novelistic genre. The novel, he asserts is distinctly a heteroglot text; it embraces a variety of "social voices", "social dialects", "authoritative pronouncements", "contesting voices", "voices of the past and the present" and so on, all forming a variety of links and interrelationships in a dialogized form. Bakhtin saw the novelistic hero as a growing child, who is struggling to find his niche in the society as his life story is co-authored by a variety of social, political and historical forces. The history of novel symbolizes the history of consciousness in Bakhtin's scheme. Therefore he explains that "development" occurs when the individual dialogizes various social, political and

historical voices. By establishing complex links between these various voices, the individual creates "dialogized heteroglossia" and this dialogic energy in turn serves as a driving force for further development.

The production of a whole range of possible meanings is not only necessary in the acts of creation but also in acts of comprehension. Understanding is not only a matter of "decoding" but it entails recoding and reaccentuating the given information. The cognizing subject should not only understand the literal meaning of an utterance, but also the purpose of the utterance in the given context, establish relationship with the "uttering" subject, evaluate it and relate it to his personal interests and also guess how potential others may interpret it. Understanding itself in many ways is a drama that involves many actors and various conceptual frameworks as Bakhtin (1981) writes,

" Thus an active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding that the speaker counts on " (p.282).

The drama of understanding is explained in an even more detailed manner by Lev Vygotsky (1987), who saw the theatrical elements in a variety of relationships - between private meanings (thinking) and public expression (speaking),

action and thought, those kinds of knowledge that we imbibe as a part and parcel of growing up in a cultural system, which we enact (everyday concepts) and the kinds of knowledge that we acquire through formal instruction (scientific concepts), nature and culture, student and teacher, parent and child, researcher and researched and so on. Acts of meaning making take place at least twice for Vygotsky - between individuals and within individuals. But there is always a disjunction between what happened in the social realm and what happens within the individual. Being sharply aware of such a tension between the social and the individual, Vygotsky (1989) saw psychology in terms of drama. He asserts, "psychology = drama", and that is the only way that "concrete human psychology" gets "humanized". Vygotsky points out that the individual for Hegel is a "logical subject", and an "organism" or "soma" for Pavlov, whereas for him the individual is "an aggregate of social relations" and the social environment is "full of internal struggles and contradictions". Vygotsky writes, "A drama cannot be otherwise, i.e., it is a *clash of systems* " (p.67). The clash is intrinsic even to the understanding of "self" as Vygotsky points out, "I am a social relation of me to myself" (p.67). The drama that Vygotsky is arguing for is not the kind that each individual has a role to play in the world as he points out, " A drama with fixed roles = the idea of old psychology" (p.69). The drama of old psychology which resembles Nietzsche's *Schauspiel* renders the actor too passive. In the

new psychology Vygotsky directs our attention to the variations in roles.

My concerns in this dissertation are about the variations of roles - that of the reader (receiver) and of the writer (creator) and their relationship to other readers and writers. Based on the writings of Nietzsche, Bakhtin and Vygotsky, I want to explore the multifacetedness of "truth" and "creation" and am guided by the following stanzas from *The Bhagavadgita* on the nature of knowledge:

21. *prthaktvena tu yaj jnanam
nanabhavan prthagvidhan
vetti sarvesu bhutesu
taj jnanam viddhi rajasam*

22. *yat tu krtsnavad ekasmin
karve saktam ahetukam
atattvarthavad alpam ca
tat tamasam udahartam* ³

(21) The knowledge which sees multiplicity of beings in the different creatures, by reason of their separateness, know that that knowledge is of the nature of "passion".

(22) But that which clings to one single effect as if it were the whole, without concern for the cause, without grasping the real, and narrow is declared to be the nature of "dullness".

³ The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18 Stanzas 21 & 22. trans. S. Radhakrishnan (New Delhi, Blackie & Son (India) Ltd. 1948) p.358, 359.

CHAPTER 2

SELF, TEXT, AND CONTEXT ...

Say not, "I have found the truth," but
rather, "I have found a truth."

Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."
Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my
path."

For the soul walks upon all paths.

Kahlil Gibran ⁴

Every work of art, whether it be literature, painting, or music needs a reader, viewer and a listener to give meaning to the piece of art (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985). As a result art becomes a collective process, in which there are at least three elements - the creator, the text, and the reader. Lev Vygotsky (1971) points out that the psychology of art cannot be studied by purely analyzing the creator - as revealed in the art or the receptors - as revealed in their reading of the text, but as an interacting system. While the author intends to convey certain messages, the reader depending on his or her history and social location brings varied meanings to the text and as a result transforms the text. The reader is not someone who exists outside the text; but rather as Susan Sulieman (1980) notes, "may be in a text as a character is in a novel". Thus, the reader even while possessing the text is simultaneously being possessed by it.

⁴ Kahlil Gibran (1985) The Prophet on self - knowledge. New York: Alfred A. Knoff.

Jonathan Culler (1980) notes that, "the study of reading is a way of investigating how works have the meaning they do, and it leaves entirely open the question of what kinds of meanings or what range of meanings works have " (p.51). It is in the act of reading that the aesthetic dimension of a literary work is realized. Wolfgang Iser (1978) points out that any literary work has two poles - the artistic, which is a creation of the author and the aesthetic which is accomplished by the reader; as a result the reading process is phenomenological in nature. By this token aesthetic experience demands at least two subjects - a writer and a reader. Reader - response theorists (see series of articles in the books edited by Tompkins, 1980; Sulieman & Crosman, 1980) point out the active role that the reader plays in constructing the meaning of the text. The reader is not someone who is situated in some "ideal" position attempting to decode the text without any pre-conceptions and pre judgments. On the contrary, a variety of pre-conceptions play an active role in comprehending textual narratives. Therefore, a reader and a writer are not two disinfected positions in which one is the producer and the other a consumer, rather, as Roland Barthes (1974) suggests there is a constant traffic between the "writerly" and "readerly" positions. The writer always has an imaginative audience and attempts to address them, while the reader may organize his or her conceptual scheme to be the "ideal" reader or go beyond the text. As a result, even while the author tries to

draw the possible range of meanings, the reader may either expand or contract such a range. It is through the active participation of reader that texts are set into motion. They become dynamic as meanings are made, remade, erased, contested and eventually transformed.

According to Bakhtin's (1986) theory of dialogism, a text is not a thing but an event. He likens it to "life" itself having its ups and downs - experiencing the multifacetedness of life incorporating comedy, tragedy, parody, irony, etc. Bakhtin (1986) posits that "the event of the life of the text, its true essence, always develops on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (p.106). For Bakhtin, meaning making is a joint enterprise. Therefore the consciousness of the perceiver cannot be neutralized, since meanings are not contained "in the text" but "in between" the author and the reader. It is in this nexus that meanings originate and therefore understanding the text can only be dialogic. Understanding a text, for Bakhtin (1986) involves at least 4 steps -

- " 1. Psychophysically perceiving a physical sign
(word, color, spatial form).
- 2. Recognizing it (as familiar or unfamiliar)
- 3. Understanding its significance in the given context
(immediate and more remote)
- 4. Active dialogic understanding (disagreement/
agreement)".

In Bakhtin's framework evaluating a text is part of understanding the text. They are not two different processes but an integral part of comprehension. It is through the "cognitive-ethical determinations" that the text as a whole achieves meaning for the reader and Bakhtin asserts that a true aesthetic experience begins with a dialogue. In turn, a dialogue can take place only if there is a wide range of meanings that are often conflicting, and such a tension gives birth to heteroglossia. It is the relationship of the "knower" to the "known" that determines the nature of the text and creates new meanings as Bakhtin (1990) says,

" (A)ny relationship founded on a necessary principle has a creative, productive character. What in life, in cognition, and in performed actions we call a determinate object acquires its determinateness, its own countenance, only through our relationship to it: it is our relationship that determines an object and its structure, not conversely" (p.5).

Therefore, for Bakhtin form or structure is not contained in the text, but emerges as a result of its interaction with the reader. The interaction is not merely an "exchange" of words rather, it involves an interpenetration of voices and feelings. As Vygotsky (1971) points out aesthetic experience involves a simultaneous combination of two opposite awarenesses. For instance, reading Shakespeare's Hamlet involves seeing tragedy and experiencing it emotionally and yet recognizing that it is only fictional. Vygotsky argues that any feeling for a character in a story has at least two levels of meaning. For instance, if the reader weeps at a tragic moment in the story, he or she is shedding tears for

that particular character and also for one's own misfortunes. However, the reader does not totally identify with the character in the story as his or her own experiences may not be fully congruent with the character. As a result one identifies and distances oneself from the character, mocks at it, creates a parody, recognizes the irony and as a result is led into a dialogue with the text.

The school of literary theory that recognized the active role of the reader put forth some interesting theories about various kinds of readers. Some of the major figures are Roland Barthes (1974, 1977), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975, 1976), Wolfgang Iser (1978), Jonathan Culler (1980), Yuri Lotman (1990), who all agree that both the reader and the text are socially and historically situated. By this token, with respect to the current study, the reader does not come to the epic text with a "tabula rasa" and a set of neutral cognitive apparatuses to decode the text; rather in understanding this historical text, the individual's own "history of understanding" and the history of the text intersect, and such a dynamic process brings about new meanings of the text. The text is seen as providing the readers with some cues and loopholes to invite interpretation and the readers actively introduce cuts, make additions, reshuffle words and parts to give newer meanings. The plurivocality of the text becomes even more pronounced when the texts are read in cultures and times different from those of their production. Bakhtin, in particular emphasized the importance of time and space in

meaning making process. He argues that individuals experience and view the world from a unique position that they occupy at a particular time in a particular place. It is the interconnectedness of time and space that Bakhtin calls as "chronotope". The creating subject (author) or the cognizing subject (reader) always comprehends the world (text) from a particular place at a particular time. The uniqueness of the positionality of author - text - reader creates a need for a dialogic relationship. Like Kant, Bakhtin also believed that time and space are essential conceptual categories in cognitive processes. However, unlike Kant's "transcendental" subject who needs to overcome perspectivistic restraints, Bakhtin's subject accepts it as an immediate reality and incorporates the "transgredient" elements of multiple voices of the society. Temporal and spatial elements are necessary ingredients in both artistic creation and understanding as Bakhtin (1981) says,

" without such temporal - spatial expression even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (p.258).

The perspective of empirically oriented psychologists with respect to comprehension of the text is in many ways diametrically opposed to the views held by many literary theorists and hermeneutic philosophers.

The classic work in the area of children's comprehension of stories is done by Jean Piaget (1959), who made a number of general statements about the sequence in which children come to understand and retell a story. He reported that very

young children confuse cause and effect relations and therefore fail to adhere to temporal order. He further states that children use a large number of egocentric pronouns, and the cognitive milestone for the young child is to overcome this egocentrism and to be able to decode the text (whether it be the physical world or the social world), by using universal principles of logic and reason. In the Piagetian framework, the scientific enterprise is to clearly state when, how, and in what sequence does the "in here" mental structure of the subject synchronize with the "out there" structure of the story. The assumption, therefore is that there are deep "mental structures" and "story structures" and the task of the researcher is to study the match and mismatch between these two structures. From this perspective Bonnie J.F. Meyer (1984) states that " a crucial question in the study of reading centers around how the reader constructs a mental representation of the text similar to that intended by the writer" (p.3). Such a question assumes a "copy theory" of text comprehension and therefore any additions or omissions on the part of the reader is interpreted as a lack of understanding or as slippages. In this tradition, the text is broken down to a set of variables such as, topic content, emphasis, cohesion, structure, etc., and the reader is also made up of a set of variables like processing style, developmental/educational level, purpose, values and so on and the scientific project is to examine the influence of these variables in reading comprehension. Some researchers

have argued that text comprehension is dependent on children's developmental level (Piaget, 1959; Scarmadalia & Bereiter, 1984), while others have argued that comprehension is related to the coherence of the story (Trabasso, Secco & Den Broek, 1984) or is dependent on the nature of instruction (Resnick, 1984; Campione & Ambruster, 1984; Schnotz, 1984) or on the child's concept of a story (Stein & Policastro, 1984). The debate among these researchers would then be on which of these variables play a significant role in proper understanding of the text. The term "proper" is important in these studies; in fact that is the common thread running through these studies. One line of argument is that the more cohesive the story is, that is the causal and logical structure of the story is well laid out, the easier it is for the child to understand; while another argument is that proper instruction facilitates decoding of the text as the author had intended it to be. Reading, therefore is seen as a function of either the narrator, narratee or the text and never seen as a negotiation between the three. The either/or model operates at all levels in the objectivist cognitive model as Hodge and Kress (1988) observe,

"Traditional semiotics likes to assume that relevant meanings are frozen and fixed in the text itself, to be extracted and decoded by the analyst by reference to a coding system that is impersonal and neutral, and universal for users of the code" (p.12)

Such an assumption is reflected in methods that this tradition often adopts, for understanding is often measured by precision in recall (Mandler & Johnson, 1977) or by the

speed with which characters and events are recognized (Fischer & Mandl, 1984). Therefore speed of recall determines the extent to which the story is registered in the individual's mind and the retelling of the story in a tight linear order is an indication of one's understanding of causal connections in the story. The researcher thus seeks "what explanations", to be able to make some universal claims about cognition and make predictions about what people will and will not remember about a story and does not account for change, history and transformation. Mandler and Johnson (1977) argue that there is a clear pattern in the way young children recall stories. In their study they used Bartlett's (1932) protocols of "The War of Ghosts" and assert that the internal structure of the story is revealed in subjects' recall. For them it is the Chomskian notion of universal grammar that determines the internal structure of the story. While Bartlett argues for distortions and deviations in remembering the story, Mandler & Johnson point out uniformity in recall and argue that Bartlett protocols do not account for the internal structure of the story and his term "schema" includes notions such as "literary style, mood" etc. While they acknowledge the importance of such concepts they argue that "they seem less basic than a characterization of the units from which a story is constructed" (p.112).

These studies in general operate within the theoretical paradigm called , "structuralism" which looks for universals, whether it be about mind, knowledge, human emotions,

language, myths, or society in general. The motto here is "deep down people are the same"; therefore surface manifestations are to be disregarded and the common thread that holds the system together is sought after. It is this "common thread" that is worthy of scientific investigation. Platonic ideal (doctrine of forms) operates at all levels in this system of thought as Shweder (1990) explains that this psychology

"assumes that its subject matter is a presupposed central (abstract and transcendent = deep or interior or hidden) processing mechanism inherent (fixed and universal) in human beings, which enables them to think (classify, infer, remember, imagine, etc.), act (strive, prefer, choose, evaluate, etc.) and learn" (p.4)

In the objective cognitive model even evaluating a story or an event is based on universal principles of reason and logic. The classic psychological study with respect to evaluation and judgment of a story or a vignette is done by Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), who built his theory of moral development on the cognitive developmental theory of Jean Piaget. For Kohlberg higher level of moral evaluation is based on principles of "justice" and "truth", achieved through reason. This model views the moral self as a disembodied and decontextualized being whose evaluations are not clouded by their emotions or their personal biases. Carol Gilligan (1982), in response to Kohlberg's theory argues that boys and girls who read the same vignette "see two different moral problems" (p.25). Gilligan argues that concrete principles of responsibility and care guide girls in evaluation, whereas abstract logic and reason guide boys.

These two orientations towards justice, Gilligan argues are produced as a result of different dynamics operating in the psychosexual development in their early years. While the debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan caught the attention of scholars in various disciplines, especially the feminist scholars, it was nevertheless subject to harsh criticism. Some disputed Gilligan's claim on empirical grounds (Walker, 1986); that is when all factors are controlled for there are no gender differences, while others questioned on theoretical grounds (Young, 1987; Benhabib, 1987; Broughton, 1983), for Gilligan's theory retains the dualism between universals/particulars, emotion/reason, male/female, etc. Also Gilligan's operative definition of gender is absolutist in nature and many feminists in recent years have conceived gender as a relationship constantly produced through social interactions (Goffman, 1976; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

What the abstract rationalism ignores is the position (social, historical, immediate context) of the cognizing subject, and the researcher studying the phenomena. Do individuals simply interact with objects, people, or texts and construct meaning through some apriori universal categories as Kant posits or should the meaning that they make have some relevance to the cultural setting in which they are embedded. Such a question, dialectical in nature does away with simple dichotomies like subject/object and attempts to account for process. From this perspective Glick (1985) points out that the "actual child" in contrast to

Piaget's "epistemic child" is embedded in a culture and is held accountable for culturally appropriate behaviors; therefore, the child for instance, does not simply interact with a pendulum to discover the scientific principles underlying it, but the cultural settings, for example, access to pendulum (economic and social class plays a central role here), beliefs about pendulum (individual history and cultural history becomes central) has a certain bearing upon the meanings that the child assigns to the pendulum. The fundamental difference between contemporary structuralism and dialectical methods is not that they merely offer different explanations about a given phenomena, but they raise different questions about the same phenomena and use different methods to investigate such a phenomena (Glick,1981).

The classic work in the area of understanding and remembering stories is done by Frederick Bartlett (1932) in his influential book Remembering: A study of Experimental & Social Psychology. Bartlett argues that the way one decodes a text and encodes it in his or her conceptual system is dependent upon their underlying "schema". Bartlett's experiments pointed out that adults actively reconstructed the stories in the process of recalling specific pictures and events in the story. He argues that subjects' distortions were dependent on their previous attitudes, knowledge and interests. For instance, subjects would often substitute the word "boat" for "canoe", thereby bringing a traditional

concept into a modern framework. Bartlett demonstrates that subjects actively highlight some parts of the story and subvert others. Therefore, for Bartlett "recall" is not merely a retrieval of information in some unadulterated form, rather information undergoes change in the very act of remembering. Unlike the objective cognitivists who were interested in what was recalled and what was forgotten, Bartlett's study explains how and why some events were remembered and some forgotten. For instance, Bartlett points out that his British subjects consistently distorted the role of ghosts in the story. He explains that the British social system does not quite entertain the concept of a "ghost". Bartlett was not so much interested in the "what explanations" or how much is recalled. In other words the emphasis in his study was not on the "quantity" and the "product", of recall but on the quality of reconstruction; the focus is not on passive "memory" but on active "remembering". The act of remembering and forgetting is a socially meaningful and purposeful act.

CHAPTER 3

ON MESSAGES ... AND MESSENGERS ...

All was revealed there none can here express;
 Vision and dreams were fables spoken truth
 Or symbols more veridical than facts,
 Or were truths enforced by supernatural seals.

Sri Aurobindo ⁵

There is always more to be said than what is said, and whatever is said is selectively framed and packaged by the "sayer" to suit her vested interests and needs. The difference between the event and the reporting of that event is both quantitative and qualitative. A researcher is like Hermes, Crapanzano (1992) argues - both a messenger and a trickster, always in an awkward situation of having to resort to all sorts of gimmicks to get the message and to convey the message. In order to hear the message and to deliver the message he has to break many conceptual walls - that of the message giver, his own and of the specialized audience that he wants to convince. To do this, Crapanzano points out that the researcher has to both mystify and demystify the phenomenon - the message.

As researchers we have a tendency to "look for" say an "X", either the presence or the absence of "X", or degrees of "X", almost assuming that such an "X" exists out there (Glick, 1992), and if we can design some elegant methods we

⁵ Sri Aurobindo (1954) Savitri Time's Drama, Book 1, Canto 3. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.

can discover the "X" (Danzinger, 1990). Instead of an "X", there could be a "Y" there, Glick (1992) argues, or for that matter what is "X" to the researcher may be "Y" for the researched. Already the researcher has to come to grips with multiplicity - variations or degrees or "X's", and "Y's". Yuri Lotman's (1990) definition of semiotics becomes useful in understanding the research enterprise. Lotman defines semiotics as simultaneously a (1) *scientific discipline*, governed by certain laws and (2) a *method*, a way of interrogating the phenomenon and finally (3) a *creation* by the researcher. By this definition, the message, the technique to create and couch the message, and the messenger are all tied together.

Based on dialectical materialist philosophy Lev Vygotsky (1978) argued that psychology should not restrict its analysis to whether or not an individual has a certain ability or concept in its finished form, but to study the individual in the process of acquiring such a concept. In that, Vygotsky was interested in the past history of the subject and the potential for future development. He says,

" The search for method becomes one of the most important problems of the entire enterprise of understanding uniquely human forms of psychological activity. In this case, the method is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of the study " (Vygotsky, 1978. P.65).

For Vygotsky, the method not only investigates what the individual can or cannot do but also serves as an aid in mediating the given task. Such a method not only describes the phenomena under investigation but also has an enormous

amount of explanatory power since the subject is studied in the process of meaning making. Vygotsky argued that it is through this dialectical method that one can study the ontogenesis of higher mental functions that have their origins in the social realm. Any development, for Vygotsky takes place twice; first between individuals (interpsychological), and then within the individual. Yet, what happens in the individual psyche is not a carbon copy of what happened in the social realm; rather the process of internalization involves an internal reconstruction, as Vygotsky (1978) says, " the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events " (p.57).

By this line of argument meanings originate in the social realm through dialogue. The child's action and gestures acquire meaning as a result of adult intervention. This point is most convincingly demonstrated by Shirley Brice Heath (1984) in her work on language acquisition in three communities in the Carolinas. Heath argues that each community had their own "ways with words" which emerges as a result of their cultural philosophical beliefs. For instance, when an infant in the Black working class home utters 'ba', the adults interpret this babbling as noise, therefore 'ba' becomes noise; whereas the same utterance by an infant in the White working class home is interpreted as 'bottle', and therefore 'ba' becomes bottle. Children, in the process of growing up learn to give meanings to their own gestures and

babblings that are first established by adults' dialogue with them. These dialogues as John Dore (1989) points out are often re-envoiced by children in their monologues giving different overtone to the adult talk. The meaning of the utterance 'ba', therefore is not contained in 'ba', but 'ba' gets its meaning according to the social practice within which it is used. It is precisely for this reason that Bakhtin (1986) suggests that one should focus not on language but on speech, and utterance according to him is the basic unit of speech communication. Utterances are not made in isolation, rather they are used to establish social relations and therefore cannot be divorced from its social, political, and historical context as Volosinov (1973) says, "*the sign and its social situation are inextricably fused together*". Meanings for utterances are negotiated and established in the social realm. Vygotsky (1978) points out that the meaning of pointing a finger to grasp something by an infant radically shifts once the caretaker comes to the aid of the child. The meaning of child's action is first established by the caretaker and a transformation in meaning occurs "from an object oriented movement it becomes a movement aimed at another person, a means of establishing relations". The growing child does not simply acquire language, but in that process learns the rules of the culture (Ochs & Schieffelin (1984), and thereby learns how to make sense of stories and books (Brice Heath, 1982). If interpretations have social function, in order to understand such function from a

methodological standpoint, the researcher has to understand the social practices within which meanings are made as Bourdieu (1977) points out,

" Practice always implies a cognitive operation, a practical operation of construction which sets to work, by reference to practical functions, systems of classification (taxonomies) which organize perception and structure practice " (p.97).

Therefore, one does not simply read a text and extract meaning, rather how one even approaches a text is dependent on the social context within which such an activity takes place. Shirley Brice Heath (1982) points out that various communities in Piedmont, Carolinas have different orientation towards stories and story telling rituals. She argues that each community has a different philosophy with respect to literacy events and therefore structure "story reading" activity and other literacy related interactions in a very different manner such that adults and children interact very differently. The two communities in Carolinas - Roadville and Trackton fundamentally differ on various aspects of knowledge, ranging from what constitutes knowledge, how knowledge is to be transmitted, what the knowing subject is like and should be like and why teach and learn certain things and not others. The analytic/field independent style prevails in Roadville, whereas relational/field dependent style operates in Trackton. Brice Heath points out that in Roadville stories are treated as "set of events", and the task of the adult is to guide the child in getting the correct story line. In the first place, stories are told only

during bedtime, in that the time and place for story telling is already fixed. Children are not so much encouraged to assess the story as much as they are encouraged to know what the story line is, who the characters are and what each of the character does in the story. Whereas, in Trackton storytelling is not a ritualized event; children are not read bed time stories, but stories are told whenever there is need for it, that is to make sense of certain events in the families or in the community, or to get a point across, etc,. In Roadville, children are told stories, whereas in Trackton, children participate in "storying" rituals. As they grow old they actively participate in the interweaving of stories with the adults and peers and even compete in spinning stories. One community is interested in the "truth" value of the story and therefore seek "what" explanations, whereas another community wants to participate in the "narrative" pull of the story and therefore ask a range of "why", "why not", "what if" questions, and actively rewrite the text. It is these two approaches to knowing that Jerome Bruner (1986) refers to as "two modes of thought" - the paradigmatic and narrative. Bruner argues that the paradigmatic or the logico scientific way of thinking is based on a tight logical system that strives for some idealized version of "truth", and therefore does not provide room for imagination. However it leads to "good theory, tight analysis, logical proof, sound argument, and empirical discovery guided by reasoned hypothesis", whereas the narrative mode that a novelist or a poet adopts

leads to "good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts" (p.13).

Brice Heath (1982) however points out that the narrative style is often at a disadvantage for good school performance as schools are structured on the "objective" model and therefore do not entertain multiple meanings or in the terms of Roland Barthes (1977) do not encourage "writerly" approach to texts. Barthes argues that,

"..the coming of democracy reversed the word of command: what the (secondary) School prides itself on is teaching to read (well) and no longer write.... In fact, reading is in the sense of consuming, is far from playing with the text. 'Playing' must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays (like a door, like a machine with 'play') and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game.... " (p.162).

Barthes argues that anything that is reduced to a passive object ceases to be a Text. Whether texts and readers become passive objects or active subjects depends upon the time (historical moment) and space (cultural location) in which the interaction between texts and readers take place. The activity of "reading" and "writing" texts, then takes place in the social realm or as Stanley Fish (1980) points out depends upon the interpretive community to which the reader belongs. The interpretive strategy then emerges through the social intercourse. If understanding is determined by subject position - both immediate and historical, then reading a literary text is not simple a matter of understanding the story line. Rather, the story is understood through a certain grid, which may be personal, social or political. It is through a certain conceptual framework that story is

understood and evaluated. A plot is not understood from a neutral position, but rather, it is seen through the "eyes" of certain characters with whom the reader may identify. For instance Wolfgang Iser (1980) points out that when the hero violates a certain norm, the plot can be judged in two ways. He says,

" either the norm appears as a drastic reduction of human nature, in which case we view the theme from the standpoint of hero, or the violation shows imperfections in human nature, in which case it is the norm that conditions our view" (p.116).

If social norms mediate reading process, we may argue that the characters in the story will be read and evaluated according to the prevailing norms and biases in the society. This point is aptly described by Hodge and Tripp (as cited by Hodge & Kress, 1988) in their study of Australian Aboriginal children's' responses to the American television program *Different Strokes*. They point out that the conceptual categories that guide these children in reading the television program was cultural in nature, which included categories like American Indian, American blacks and themselves. Therefore they saw the main character in *Different Strokes* , who was a black kid as an Aboriginal who is constantly being set right by his white father and sister. Hodge and Tripp argue that this program provided them an avenue to articulate their powerlessness in a white dominated society. The reality of one's social existence and the need to correct the existing social hierarchies are articulated in the process of giving meaning to the text. The stratifying

factors in our society such as race, class, caste, gender mediate the reading process. For instance, a heroine can be evaluated according to the norms of patriarchy. Valerie Walkerdine (1986) demonstrates the dynamics of class and gender relations in her study on working class families viewing the film *Rocky II*. Walkerdine points out that family dynamics gets acted out in the process of viewing the film; their own economic struggle, and their aspirations to move ahead, in short their own triumphs and tribulations are intertwined with their narratives on *Rocky*. Walkerdine points out that the idea of fighting has different meanings for different classes, since their relationship to oppression is quite different at different moments. Therefore questions such as "fighting what", "fighting when", and "fighting whom" make the concept of "fight" very fluid - constantly being worked and reworked. It is through this process, Walkerdine points out that ideology is constantly being instantiated and contested. In yet another text entitled "School Girl Fictions" Valerie Walkerdine (1990) points out that there could be a whole range of responses from school girls to a feminist reinterpretation of a classic fairy tale in which the princess instead of marrying the prince goes on to be a feminist professional. Such an reinterpretation of a well known classic theme can have multiple levels of meaning in which fantasy and reality operate in a synergistic fashion as Walkerdine (1990) writes,

"For some girls they might well provide the vehicle for alternative vision, while for others they might, by

stressing the one as an alternative to the other, feed or fuel a resistance to the feminist alternative" (p.104).

By this argument, stories are not simply read through gendered lens as Gilligan (1982) claims to be, rather notions of masculinity and femininity are constantly negotiated, instantiated and contested. Therefore "gender" is not an essential construct, but an ongoing process which has its own history, and awareness of such a history is necessary for the messenger to do justice to the message.

CHAPTER 4

THE CULTURAL SCENE

If you want the bloom of youth and fruit of later years,
 If you want what enchants, fulfills, and nourishes,
 If you want heaven and earth contained in one name-
 I say Sakuntala and all is spoken.

J.W. von Goethe, "Willst du die Blute ..."6

This classic Sanskrit play of Kalidasa was a major source of inspiration for the German romantic poet, Goethe, who was inspired by the complexity of the plot structure and the beauty of its imagery (Miller, 1984). Stories, in India are a major source of inspiration. They play a unique role in the Indian ontology. Tales are the semiotic fields in which the individual plays to make sense of one's existence in the world. In turn the individual psyche also becomes the semiotic field in which these tales get acted out. The engagement with tales is precisely that - a play. It is like spinning tops in the street corner. Story tellers and listeners participate in spinning narratives, making it more vibrant, enticing other play mates to intensify the play. There is a certain preoccupation with the act of "storying" as Kakar (1989) points out,

"The stories they hear (or see enacted in dramas and depicted in Indian movies) and the stories they tell are worked and reworked into the stories of their own lives. For stretches of time a person may be living on

6 cited by Barbara Stoller Miller (ed.) (1984) in Theater of Memory: The Plays of Kalidasa. New York: Columbia University Press.

the intersection of several stories, his own as well as those of heroes and gods" (p.2).

Epics, in India serve as a medium for expressions of "culture". They are not texts handed down from generation to generation in a pristine form, rather epics mediate the very consciousness for a Hindu; as a result the epic and culture create each other through a dialogic process. Tales and epics are always invoked whether one wants to talk about political state of affairs, or agrarian reforms, economic development, literature, films or scientific development. Whether one wants to talk about the past, present or the future, one refers to the epics. Even a naive observer of Indian culture cannot help but notice the ubiquitous presence of epic characters.

To add a personal note, I remember as a child, whenever the epic tales were narrated, I was also reminded that it was not just about the ancient past but also about the present and future. My grandmother's favorite expression about the epic characters was "they walk in the streets of India" and are not locked up in space and time. It was always difficult to figure out when the "epic drama" ended and the "family drama" began. Tales recorded in the culture's epics and scriptures play a central role in the Indian psyche. Stories from the epics serve as a mediator in understanding and evaluating one's existence in the world. Whenever a Hindu wants to convey an idea, or a thought either about self or about the world, one is likely to tell a story from one of the epics or myths, as Kakar (1989) observes, "the preferred

medium of instruction and transmission of psychological, metaphysical, and social thought in India continues to be the story". In Hindu culture, philosophy, religion, epics, myths, scriptures, music, dance and social life in general are not separate units but an integrated whole. Each unit carries a slice of the other. Thus epics and myths are not just stories but are an embodiment of "deep philosophical ideas". This makes greater sense when one examines the history of Hindu thought that began with the Vedic period that was characterized by abstract thought, and reason was seen as a tool to get the ultimate truth. This period was followed by the Upanishadic period which saw intuition rather than reason as guide to truth. In the following epic period philosophical doctrines took the form of stories. Ramayan and Mahabharath are the two major epics of this period. Mahabharath is often referred to as the "fifth Veda" - since all the philosophical debates are realized in this grand epic. It is also called as "itihasa" - or the "history of ideas". It is through the epic genre that philosophical ideas were seen.

The epic stories, continue to have a unique and strong influence on social relations in India. Many scholars of Indian society assert that to understand "Indian thinking" one has to understand "narrative thinking". Narrating tales need no occasion or time. It is said at happy times, festive occasions, tragic hours and in lonely moments when one is reflecting on one's own being and existence. Stories from the epics are told with a certain urgency and commitment as Trinh

T. Minh-ha (1989) writes about the philosophy underlying grandma's stories,

"Let me tell you a story. For all I have is a story... The story depends upon everyone of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of people, of us, peoples. Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics) all in one. They call it the tool of primitive man, the simplest vehicle of truth" (p.119).

This quotation aptly resonates one's orientation and attitude towards stories in Indian culture. The focus therefore is not on the "historical truth" but on the "narrative truth". In the story-telling ritual one does not raise questions like "did it really happen" or "can it happen", etc, rather one participates in the interweaving of the story, the narrator's story and one's own story. The story-telling ritual cuts across boundaries of class and caste as A.K.Ramanujam (1989) notes, "Even in the most anglicized Hindu families or in large cities like Bombay and Calcutta, oral tales are only a grand-mother away, a cousin away, a train ride away and mostly no further away than the kitchen". In order to understand psychosexual development, identity formation, moral development, fantasy, or any of the intrapsychic phenomena within Indian culture, one has to understand how the mythical characters function in the minds of the individuals (Kakar, 1989; Kakar, 1981). Kakar, who is a psychoanalyst, further points out that even to understand the myths one needs to understand the intrapsychic conflict, in that it is essentially a hermeneutic process in which both

the reader and text are in a dialogic relationship. In clinical settings, Kakar points out that the analyst can observe how the individual often reenacts some of the plots from the epics. Whether one wants to resolve parent-child conflict, or define student - teacher relationship or enter into a romantic relationship one identifies with some epic character and either reenacts or redefines it. It is very common to refer to a child as an embodiment of the Hindu god *Krishna*; childish pranks are treated as "*Krishna-Lila*" and a pair of lovers are often called as "*Radha-Krishna*"; thereby divinizing humans and humanizing the divine. Epics, in India are vibrantly alive, open to interpretation and as Kakar (1989) says, " constitute a cultural idiom that aids the individual in the construction and integration of his inner world " .

The two epic texts of India - *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath* were originally composed in Sanskrit, but they find an active expression in various regional languages through various performance traditions (Lutgendorf, 1991). As a result these texts are not homogeneous, but they have their own regional variations, often to the point that the plots in the epics seem quite different. The variation is especially marked in the depiction of the epic heroine. The epic heroine in folklore is very dominant and powerful and as she moves to the classical text she becomes passive (Shulman, 1986; Ramanujam, 1986). Even when one examines "classical texts" written at different historical moments one finds variation

in the nature of the heroine as Romila Thapar (Manushi, 1987) points out that the heroine Shakuntala in Kalidasa's text is very different from Vyasa's version. In Vyasa's version she is a strong willed woman who makes demands, whereas in Kalidasa's drama she becomes a shy and a submissive woman who is incapable of asserting her rights.

Narayan Rao (1986) traces the movement of epic heroine from folk to classical form from a sociological and historical framework. The variation in the epic stories in various communities is related to the caste and their attitude towards women. Narayan Rao identifies two types of "epic narratives" - martial epics and sacrificial epics. In the martial epic the protagonist is a male warrior who possesses an enormous amount of physical strength and fights members of his own clan to gain control of his territory. Sometimes he may die in the war and his death is valorized. The sacrificial epics, on the other hand has a female leader as the protagonist, whose duty is to protect the integrity of her clan. Her power is inner-directed and in potentially dangerous situation she kills herself rather than the other. The heroine is often cunning and uses wit to win over her enemies. The *Komatis* (trading caste) patronize the sacrificial epics since the women in this caste enjoy greater freedom and have more decision making power both in the public and private realm. The landowners caste on the other hand narrate the story in "martial" genre as their familial

relations are strictly hierarchical, as Narayan Rao points out,

"The self-image of the dominant landowners in these communities incorporated the ideology of warriors who protected the community and the territory: an ethic of men who preferred heroic death on the battlefield to the humiliation of survival in defeat..... Women, on the other hand, were objects to be protected, like land or family honor" (p.142-143).

Each community gives its own twist to the story and incorporates its own value system into the epic characters. Narayan Rao also points out that the members of the trading caste do adopt the martial version that is more male-centered in its values as they move up the social ladder.

The trading caste and the landowner caste while narrating the same story pitch it very differently. The former focuses on the struggle of the epic characters, it is oriented towards the process, whereas the later points out to the victory of the epic hero focusing on the product. For the trading caste the epic characters are on a lateral plane engaging in a dialogue in contrast to the landowners version in which the characters are hierarchically structured - the epic hero taking the highest post.

In an earlier paper (Bandlamudi, 1991b), I have argued that the epic heroine, like a contemporary woman exists on the periphery of the cultural system and therefore is semiotically dynamic. She is not simply constituted within the patriarchal structure, but she is also actively reclaimed and reconstituted in feminist discourses (Spivak, 1987; Mani,

1990; Chakravarti, 1990) Therefore, the epic heroine is the site for both instantiation and contestation of patriarchy.

One of the objectives in this study is to explore how individuals make sense of the heroine - *Draupadi* in the epic text Mahabharath. Based on the theoretical arguments and the historical and anthropological evidence with respect to epic heroines, the hypothesize that the epic heroine is likely to be semiotically dynamic. In other words there is a likelihood of greater contest over her nature and her actions in the story.

CHAPTER 5

THE PAST: IS IT BEHIND US, WITH US OR BEFORE US ?

Human history is fully textualized in late twentieth-century form; the means of production of the story are displayed proudly: media technology in a "global village." We are all high-tech primitives, worthy heirs of the holographic Taung child.

Donna Haraway ⁷

When B.R. Chopra, the film maker made Mahabharath into a television serial, many critics hailed the event as having heralded the "tele-epic" age. Ancient epics have found a new medium of expression - a modern technological device. The very contact with the "past" is through the modern invention; therefore to understand the "truth" about the "past", one has to understand "truth" as represented and realized through this particular medium. With this in mind, I would like to argue that there aren't just "historical truths" but truths themselves have histories.

Sense making is culturally and historical specific, and Vygotsky's theory relies to a great extent on the nature of sociocultural history (Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky was very much influenced by Marxist philosophy, and history is so crucial to Marxism that it is often referred to as *historical materialism*, and hence the notion of history becomes central in Vygotsky's theory. Sylvia Scribner (1985) posits that

⁷ Donna Haraway (1989) Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the world of Modern Science. New York: Routledge. p.190.

Vygotsky uses 'history' in at least three different ways. The first one is to study the mental phenomenon under investigation in its process of development, capturing the mechanism by which transformation takes place. It is through the dialectical method that one can see "history" happening. It is such a dynamic methodology that reveals the "becoming" process of history, and therefore provides an understanding of what factors enhance or inhibit development. Scribner points out that the second level at which history becomes crucial to Vygotskian approach is at the ontogenetic level, where the history of the individual becomes central. The individual according to Vygotsky does not gain consciousness in a vacuum, rather his or her story [hi(s)tory] is made through various social and cultural practices in which the individual participates. The child in the process of growing up via culturally mediated activities acquires cultural signs and tools and uses them effectively and also brings about changes in the very nature of such tools and signs. As a result change takes place at the level of both the individual history and to the cultural history. By this token, stories that are told to children mediate their consciousness and in turn the child's consciousness brings about a change in the nature of the story; and this back and forth movement between the subject and the text is an ontological reality as Vygotsky (1978) writes,

" The internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human psychology, the basis of the

qualitative leap from animal to human psychology"
(p.57)).

The third level at which Vygotsky uses history as Scribner (1985) notes is about the origins of higher mental functions. In a nutshell, it is the history of higher mental functions. As children grow physically and become mobile (biological development), they also acquire speech (cultural development), and therefore the biological intersects with the cultural. The child, however is born into a cultural system which is not a unified whole, but a system full of variations and contradictions. Therefore in order to understand ontogeny one also has to understand the complexities of phylogeny also and to do this Scribner points out that Vygotsky turned to ethnopsychology. By this line of argument, in order to understand the individual's cognitive functions one has to understand the history of "higher mental functions" of that culture.

Vygotsky's uses of history in various forms seem to have serious implications for research. One is at a methodological level - issues of research design (studying a phenomena in its process), the other is at the level of awareness for the researcher - understanding the subject's individual history and the cultural history within which the individual is unfolding, and the third is at the level of interpretation - the changing nature of the relationship between the investigator and the investigated (the emic and etic perspectives), since both the researchers and subjects are historically situated.

The ideas presented by Vygotsky, whether they are about history, culture, or ontology are quite similar to the arguments presented by hermeneutic philosophers like Heidegger (Kaelin, 1988) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975). According to Heidegger, to be a human being is to understand the world we are born into and situated in. We do not enter the world as biological bodies and subsequently gain knowledge of the world; rather, we are born into the world as social beings. For instance, in our society new born infants are inscribed through social coding - giving a blue color for a boy and a pink color to a girl. The new born infant carries with himself/herself the socially prescribed gender coding, and therefore is defined by a social system. Heidegger argues that our very existence in the world is an understanding of the world. Giving meaning to our own self and to the world and establishing relations with other human beings and other entities is simply a way of "being-in-the-world". Kaelin (1988) explains that Heidegger proposes a whole range of possible relations that human beings can establish with various entities in the world; ranging from, "having to do with something" (transactional), "producing something" (creation), "attending to something and looking after something" (guarding and preserving) "making use of something" (instrumental), "giving something up" (destroying), and so on. For Heidegger it is self's relationship to the other that determines the nature of knowledge. Heidegger dismisses Kant's notion of an ideal

subject as a utopia, as such a subject is nonexistent for him. For Heidegger, a subject is created by phenomenological intuition and not by transcendental deduction as Kant posits.

In the Kantian and Piagetian tradition the ideal subject is the one who approaches the text with no prejudgements and preconceptions. These are treated as prejudices that interfere in decoding the text. Therefore, one has to transcend the time and space in which they are situated to overcome their solipsism. The solipsistic 'I' that Piaget undermines, Bakhtin celebrates, for it is given and it is unique. The self's view of the world is always partial, and therefore such a limitation creates a need for the other, and such a necessity gives birth to a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1990). Likewise for Gadamer (1975) prejudices and prejudgements in understanding are a given. In fact, for Gadamer the preconceived notions play a special role in understanding. They do not necessarily distort truth as the enlightenment philosophers hold, rather they create the possibility for newer meanings to emerge. Understanding for Gadamer is not a "thing" that individuals do but an "event" in which they participate. Gadamer (1975) extends Heidegger's notion of hermeneutic circle and historicizes it; he refers to it as "effective historical consciousness". Human consciousness, according to Gadamer is limited and determined by history. What one understands about a text and how one understands a text is a property of history - both individual and cultural. There is no single 'truth' about a text, but each text is a

function of the philosophical lens through which it is viewed. For example in Shirley Brice Heath's (1982) study, for one community the truth about a story resides in the "facts of the story", whereas for another it is in the "feel for the story". Therefore each truth is theoretical construct of its times. Donna Haraway (1989) says it succinctly: facts are theory laden, theories are value laden and values are history laden.

Gadamer (1975) points out that ancient scriptures and texts are not handed down from generation to generation in a pristine form, rather each generation in the act of understanding these texts participate in the evolution of such texts. Any understanding therefore has to be an active interplay between "movement of tradition" and "movement of interpreter". Sylvia Scribner (1985) identifies even a greater number of strands that are in a dynamic interplay in understanding according to Vygotsky's theory. As reviewed earlier there are at least 4 different histories operating when meanings are made - that of species, that of specific societies, that of specific individuals, and that of a particular psychological system. It is precisely because of this dynamic interplay of various elements that development is spiral for Vygotsky. Similarly, Gadamer (1975) observes that, "the circle of understanding is not a "methodological" circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding" (p.293). In understanding Scriptures or ancient texts, there is not only a constant traffic between

past and present but a constant dislocation of past and present as Gadamer (1975) writes,

"the "naturalness" of the understanding of Scripture depends on the fact that what makes sense can be understood at sight, and what does not can be understood "historically". The breakdown of the immediate understanding of things in their truth is the motive for the detour into history" (p.181).

The contemporary reader of an epic text is both an inheritor, transformer and transmitter of tradition. If the meaning of a certain aspect of the text is not so automatic then one looks for what the ancestors told about that particular aspect. The Soviet semiotician Yuri Lotman (1990) explains that a text serves at least 3 functions. First, it transmits information and tells its view of the world, secondly it provides loopholes or leaves some windows open so that it can trigger new meanings or serve as a "meaning - generating mechanism", and thirdly it is also a condenser of cultural memory. By this token, the contemporary reader of a epic not only gets the epic text but also how previous generations treated this epic text. The epic text's view of the world in that case is intertwined with the world's view of the epic.

If we extend these arguments to the current study, Indian subjects do not simply inherit the epic text Mahabharath. The tales in Mahabharath are told in a certain way by certain people, through a certain medium, demanding a certain attitude towards the text. Hypothetically speaking for example, a subject around 1940's must have gained knowledge of this text through oral tradition which structures cognitive processes in a certain way. They must be

aware of the immediate context and are in a situation to negotiate meanings with the story teller, in contrast to an individual who is likely to gain knowledge of the text through a modern technological device such as television, and this subject has to unpack the codes of television. Mahabharath, therefore is not simply a text handed down from generation to generation but this historical text has its own history and individuals with their own history of engagement with this text create a whole range of dialogic tension. Gadamer (1975) writes that,

" The true historical object is not an object at all, but the unity of the one and the other, a relationship that constitutes both the reality of history and the reality of historical understanding" (p.299).

The dialogic relations between the past and the present is a chronotopic reality for Bakhtin (1981). The contemporary reader's engagement with a text written centuries ago creates not necessarily a synthesis in the Hegelian sense between the past and the present, but create a dialogic tension in which both the past and present are mutually enriched as Bakhtin (1981) says, "Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships" (p.252). Bakhtin points out that the text has its own sense of time as represented in the work, and the performers, story-tellers, and listeners together reflect and recreate the represented time. The dialogic activity according to Bakhtin is further intensified and becomes even more creative

when the reading individual is located outside of the text in space and time.

This point made by Bakhtin is extremely crucial for the current study. The subjects in this study were Indians living in United States, and the text that they engaged with was a religious, cultural, and historical text of India. For an Indian in India Mahabharath may be a taken for granted text of India, but for an immigrant living in a different culture the text may take on a special meaning. In that the engagement with the text could be a way of maintaining ties with "home culture", or narrating these tales to their children could be a way of actively transmitting "culture". The epic text then serves as a stand in for "India", and knowing the text is a way of being Indian and maintaining "Indianness". The difference in the orientation towards the text between an Indian in India and an Indian in America could be at the level of what Yuri Lotman (1985) refers to as "behavioral texts" and "narrative texts". Lotman argues that human behavior within the cultural system is organized according to two principles; the first one being the ordinary everyday behavior that members take for granted to the point they naturalize it, the second one being the ritualistic - which includes rites, state ceremonies etc. The first one is like learning one's native language and therefore knowledge of it is often procedural and it is similar to what Vygotsky (1987) refers to as "everyday concept". The second one - the narrative text is similar to learning a foreign language and

this is learnt systematically through formal initiation and such a knowledge is declarative and Vygotsky refers to this as a "scientific concept". Such a concept is highly semiotized and is made visible. Lotman (1985) posits that the everyday life - the taken for granted behavior and social codes are brought into focus when the individual is culturally displaced (as in the case of immigration) or when the society undergoes revolution or rapid social change. Lotman takes a historical perspective on Russian culture and observes that during and after the Petrine period, in which Russia was grappling with the issue of whether to be Asiatic or European, everyday behavior became a theatrical act as Lotman observes,

"A direct result of the change in everyday behavior was the ritualization and semiotization of those spheres of life that would be considered "natural" and nonsignifying in a culture that had undergone an inversion. The effect was the opposite of that "privateness" which struck the Russian observer of European life.... Everyday behavior became a set of signs for everyday behavior. The semiotization of everyday life, the degree to which it was consciously perceived as a sign, increased sharply. Daily life acquired the characteristics of the theater". (1985. p70)

It is the taken for granted aspects of the text that may become visible for an immigrant, since one is always in the process of reconciling with two cultures. As a result two or even more world views, for instance a particular Hindu world view that the text signifies and the western world view (depending upon the extent to which one has assimilated in this country) may enter into a dialogue. Novelty is created through such dialogic encounters as Bakhtin (1986) writes,

" It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly (but not maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more). A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures " (p.7).

In a Bakhtinian framework, we view the world through our cultured lens and these taken for granted world views becomes questionable only in the event of encountering the other. For Bakhtin, any knowledge, whether it be about self or about one's own culture is always partial and it is the other - both in the individual sense and in sense of culture, that can complete the picture. Such a completion is always temporary in Bakhtin's framework, because the notion of "self" and "text" is always in the process of developing and there is an unfinalizability to their identity.

Now, this brings us to issues of self, selfhood, knowledge of self/other and the nature of narratives on self. The theoretical debates on and about self parallels with other debates on the nature of text, knowledge, ethics, etc,. Much of empirically oriented psychologists have treated self as bounded, unique, integrated and as center of activity (Piaget, 1970; Selman, 1980; Damon & Hart, 1982). The theory of dialogism on the other hand posits that knowledge about self is not always so transparent for the cognizing subject to "discover" or "construct" through rational means, rather this knowledge is always a process; constantly being made and unmade. This process according to Bakhtin (1990) is a joint

enterprise in which self and other are co-participants in giving meaning to each other's words and actions. Any questions about selfhood as Holquist (1990) points out can be pursued only if they are treated as specific questions about location. Developmental studies in the area of 'self' have often treated it as a cognitive concept independent of knowledge about other social aspects (Damon & Hart, 1982). It is this idea of "know thyself" inherent in Western epistemological tradition that Bakhtin problematizes; for the self is constantly emerging through dialogic relations.

Bakhtin examines the emergence of self both in art and in life in great detail in his early writings - Art and Answerability (Bakhtin, 1990) and his keen interest was in exploring the dynamics of self in an aesthetic activity. He argues that an aesthetic consciousness is inherently dialogic in nature. Bakhtin posits that self emerges out of at least three sets of relationships as Morson and Emerson (1990) point out; I-for-myself (how one feels about one's own consciousness), I-for-others (how I appear in the eyes of others) and Others-for-me (how others appear in my eyes). In these sets of relationships, Bakhtin points out that when the self is larger than the other, a cognitive activity takes place, in turn when the other's image is the all encompassing consciousness, then a religious activity takes place since the self totally surrenders to the other. Both these relationships are monologic in nature. When the self and other are on an equal footing and yet not similar in their

views, but nevertheless engage in a dialogue often contesting and acknowledging each other, that is when an aesthetic activity begins. It is the nature of self's relationship to the other, whether it be to other individuals, texts, or one's own creation or reflections on one's own action (which has to incorporate the voices of the other) that establishes the ground work for aesthetic activity. By this line of argument reading an epic text can be an aesthetic experience when there is a movement between the world as experienced by epic heroes and heroines and one's own experiences in the world. It is such a movement that leads one to contemplate on self and text alike and make them both meaningful. It is through this process that one writes one's own story and rewrites the given story as Bakhtin (1990) argues,

" Just as the plot or the story of my own life is created by other people - the heroes of my life, so aesthetic vision of the world, its image, is created only by consummated or consummatable lives of other people who are the heroes of this world. The first and foremost condition for an aesthetic approach to this world is to understand it as the world of other people who have accomplished their lives in it... " (p.111).

Understanding the world of the other is the first step for Bakhtin which is followed by letting the other understand your world (however imaginative that is). This back and forth movement, the give and take between self and other makes the activity aesthetic. By this token, any self accounting is not merely an act of recounting series of life events, but they are active constructions of life story. Such autobiographical accounts are constantly in the process of making. Narratives on life are not merely "facts of life", but they are

constantly made into stories through social interactions. It is through social interactions that both "self" and "text" gets constructed. In other words how one talks about one's own self and about a literary text is culturally and historically specific. The literary theorists Norman Holland (1980) and David Bleich (1980) point out that there are parallels between reading "self" and reading "text". In other words, how one treats a text is similar to the way one treats life experiences. From these theoretical insights, one of the objectives of the proposed study is to examine the interrelationships between "narrative on self" and "narrative on text".

The aim of the current study is to examine how individuals with their own history of prior relationship with this text read or dialogue with the text that is retold in a television medium. I am not assuming here that the past influences the present, for the aim of this study is not to establish a causal link; rather the objective is to study the dialogue between the past and present - both of the individual and the text and hence the title of the current study "The History of Understanding and Understanding of History".

CHAPTER 6

STAGING THE DRAMA

So you see it as if you knew that about it.
And if this seems foolish way of putting it;
then it must be kept in mind that the
concept of seeing is modified by it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein ⁸

I picked this remark by Wittgenstein to draw attention to the transition of ideas from "dissertation proposal" stage to the "dissertation" stage. Life at the proposal stage seemed somewhat secure, a feeling that you knew how to "see" what you wanted to "see". Retrospectively thinking, that stage seemed even grand. I thought I was well equipped with all the "grand theories" to "see". They affirmed my sense of "self" and my "world", but going into the "world" to collect "data" was yet another story - full of wrecks and revelations and pleasant surprises. Proposing an "idea" seemed relatively secure only because it was "behind the desk" activity, and there was only one party - me (of course my dissertation committee), in many ways uncontested. There were no subjects, at least no potential "heroines and heroes" to challenge my methods. The security of the proposal stage was also its limitation, since the proposed "idea" was not constructed axiologically as Bakhtin (1990) explains, "When there is no hero at all, not even in potential form, then we have to do

⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980) Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology Stanza 386, Vol. II, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

with an event that is cognitive (treatise, article, lecture)." (p.22). Cognitive activity, for Bakhtin, is far too monologic since it has only one participant. Interestingly, during the "data collection" and some time after that, especially during the transcription phase, I felt consumed by the "voices" of my subjects - the heroines and heroes, causing quite a bit of wreckage (no pejorative sense implied), and Bakhtin refers to such an event as a religious one. The "other" has taken over the "self". I am hoping that I will reclaim myself and return to my position to strike a balance between me (author) and the subjects (heroines and heroes) in writing this dissertation. In this chapter on methods and design, I shall discuss not so much on how I executed the proposed plan, but I will also try to focus on the gap between my intentions and my actions.

RECRUITING SUBJECTS

The study involved recruiting adults of Indian origin (both males and females from 3 different age groups - (1) 20-30, (2) 31-45, and (3) 50+) living in the United States of America, all them in the Tri-state area (this is purely due to pragmatic concerns since I am located in New York). I approached the potential subjects mostly in social gatherings, temple, Indian shops, personal contacts (friend's friend), apartment complexes, etc. Often subjects themselves introduced me to other candidates. Initially, I was reluctant to use this approach. I feared that the sample would be too

homogeneous. However this approach became both useful and revealing. It was strategically useful to pair up two subjects for the viewing session. Scheduling the viewing session became easier with "friends", than between strangers. The revelation was that there were differences in reading styles, and "friends" were more likely to get into arguments which brought out hidden assumptions in their interpretive strategies.

Indian culture is very multi-lingual and I can speak fluently only 4 languages - Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Kannada. I recruited only those subjects who were able to speak any of these languages. For most part, the interviews were conducted in English. Like most multi-lingual folks, we often switch codes during the conversation. I also informed the potential subjects that they will be viewing segments from B.R.Chopra's television production. If the subjects at this stage reported that they did not understand Hindi they were not recruited.

Procedure

Data collection was done in 3 phases. The first phase was the previewing session, which was designed to gather demographic information, and to generate some narratives on "self", and to explore their past engagement with the text. The second phase was the viewing session. Two subjects were paired to form a reading dyad, and they viewed the selected segments together and engaged in a discussion/debate. The third phase was the post viewing session, which was a brief one. This session is designed to tie loose ends together and

get the subjects to share their thoughts on the project and to give them an opportunity to address their questions about the project to me.

Phase I - Previewing session. This was a multi purpose session in which a variety of information was obtained from the subject. Initially, demographic information such as first name, age, sex, marital status, parental status, length of stay in United States, frequency of visit to home country (India), participation in social, cultural and political activities, film viewing habits, especially Hindi films was gathered. (For a more detailed account see Schedule I).

After the background information was collected an in-depth interview (which was tape recorded) was conducted. The areas that this interview covered were:

Part I - Narratives on self

Part II - History of self's engagement with the text that included their knowledge of the text (story line and the plots), how they gained knowledge of the text and what their relationship to the text has been, and their reflections on the specific characters in

Mahabharath - who are Karna and Draupadi in the current study.

Narratives of Self

This in depth interview was designed to generate narratives on "self". The objective was to explore how the individual narrates and gives meaning to life events. In this study "self" was also treated as a text, and one of the

objectives of the study was to examine the interrelationships between expressing "self" as embedded in a cultural system, and reading a familiar text which is a part of the culture. Therefore, the objective of this interview was to see how and where the individual locates himself or herself in the cultural matrix. The task was to get the subject to reflect on a variety of relationships; self/other, self/culture, ethnic culture/American culture, being an Indian in America/and being an Americanized Indian when visiting India. Allowing the subject to speak about the dynamics of biculturalism is simply a way of getting them to reflect on their sense of connectedness to various cultural entities and to examine how 'self' and 'culture' get semiotized (See Schedule I for interview protocol). As discussed earlier in the theoretical section, self in this study is viewed as emerging out of a variety of relationships, therefore the interview questions are designed to tap individual's relationships to various cultural institutions and entities, and this facilitates exploring one of the hypotheses of the study that construction of "self" and "text" are related. This in depth interview provided a substantial body of narrative to ascertain how individuals were inscribed within a complex set of social relations.

Self's engagement with the text

The second part of the interview was to explore the subject's history with the text; the various ways in which they came in contact with this epic text and their past and

present engagement with the text. In short, the interview is designed to examine one's relationship to the text and to specific characters, which in turn is determined by various factors such as knowledge of the text, and the variations of the text as presented in various modes, such as oral story telling, theater, folklore, books, comic books (*Amar Chitra Kathas*), and the significance of the epic in one's life. The following segments of the interview section are laid out in a sequential form for purposes of clarity. However, in the actual interview the questions did not necessarily follow the same pattern and varied according to the situation; based on the subject's responses. The strategy was to allow certain spontaneity for the speaking subject. (Please see Schedule I for specific questions)

Familiarity with the text

Initially, the subjects were asked to recall as many names as they can from Mahabharath, and their responses were checked off (see Questionnaire I). They were also asked to briefly narrate the epic story. Given that the epic spans at least 6 generations, I did not expect the subjects to narrate the whole story. The purpose of the this part of the interview is get a general idea of how well they know the story line. The subjects were also asked on what they thought was the most important part of the story and what their favorite part was. This information provided a way of assessing what part of the story the subject was likely to privilege, and the reasons for it. Another purpose of this

segment in the interview was to see whether the individual tells the story as a set of events or whether they intertwine it with personal, social and historical meanings.

Modes of exposure and the degree of involvement

This part of the interview was designed to get information on the ways in which the subject was exposed to Mahabharath - both in childhood and adulthood. This was also a way of understanding how involved the subject was and is with the text. This section also provides information on what medium the subject is most comfortable with and provides some insight into whether the subject differentiates and integrates the story line as presented in various mediums.

Significance of Mahabharath for self

This part of the interview was designed to understand what Mahabharath meant to the subject both in the past and at the present moment and to explore if there has been a shift in their perspective. This provided some information on whether the subject was a disembodied reader or an embodied reader.

Reflections on specific characters

The purpose of this part of the interview was two fold; first, it was to get the subject to talk about specific characters in the story. So far in the interview the subject has been talking about the epic in general. The specific characters were Draupadi and Karna, since the stimulus material consisted of segments in which they were central

characters. Secondly, it provided information on the subjects' familiarity with these characters.

On an average, the duration of Phase I was about one and half hours.

Phase II

After conducting a number of interviews, each subject was paired with another subject to form a reading dyad. There were three kinds of dyads - two females, mixed dyad, and two males. Each dyad viewed the segments from B.R. Chopra's television production of Mahabharath and engaged in a discussion. The viewing session is took place either in my residence or in any one of the subject's residence; whichever was most convenient to both the subjects. The subjects were asked to respond spontaneously to the text and to think aloud (For specific instructions and protocol see Schedule II). The subjects' immediate responses and later discussions were audiotaped. After viewing each segment, the subjects were asked to summarize the segment. The subjects took turns in narrating each segment. Then they were asked to reflect on the text; what the particular plot meant, the importance of the plot in the story line, the symbolic meaning of the plot - both within the story and its personal and social significance. The rationale for asking the subjects to narrate and engage in a discussion was to examine the processes of the transformation of the text; how some parts were highlighted and some were ignored. My role as a researcher was to carefully observe possible differences of

opinion and try to get the dyad to engage in a dialogue. The same process was repeated after viewing each segment.

On an average the duration of Phase II was about two and half hours.

Phase III

Another brief interview was conducted within a week, after Phase II. This brief interview was designed to get the subjects to reflect on both the text and the discussion that followed. This interview was conducted over the telephone and was recorded with the aid of appropriate tools. The rationale for conducting this final part of interview over the telephone was pragmatic. It allowed flexibility of timing, both for the researcher and the participant. The purpose of this brief interview was two fold; first, it gave a chance for those individuals who may not have felt comfortable to express their thoughts freely in a group. Secondly, it was designed to give some time for the subject to reflect on the whole process - viewing the stimulus materials and engaging in a group discussion. It also gave them an opportunity to ask me questions about the project.

SAMPLE

There was a total of 48 subjects, who participated in all the phases of the study. The original plan was to have 54 - one third in the age range of 20 - 30, another one third in the range of 31 - 45, and other one third over 50. Due to

attrition rate I fell short of 6 subjects. Within each age group 3 kinds of dyads were formed - a. both females, b. one male & one female, c. both males. The rationale for having 3 different age groups is to observe possible cohort effects; to observe how the concerns and conflicts of each generation mediates reading process.

The rationale for varying gender composition in forming the dyads is that gendered meanings are established through social interaction (Goffman, 1976; West & Zimmerman, 1987;). One of the hypotheses to be explored in the current study is that the construction of text is in part determined by the immediate context in which the subject is located. Meaning construction is a social process in which members actively negotiate meanings through dialogue. However, gender is one of the stratifying factors in our society and the distribution of power between the two sexes is not equal. Power is established and maintained through social interaction (Henley, 1977; Fishman, 1983; West & Zimmerman, 1983). Therefore varying the groups by gender allowed me explore possible group differences in construction of meaning.

The design of the study is as follows:

Composition of Dyads				
	All Males (2 M)	All Females (2 F)	Mixed Group (1M & 1F)	
TOTAL				
<u>AGE</u>				
20-30	3 X 2 = 6	3 X 2 = 6	2 X 2 = 4	16
31-45	3 X 2 = 6	3 X 2 = 6	3 X 2 = 6	18
50 +	1 X 2 = 2	3 X 2 = 6	3 X 2 = 6	14

Materials

Mahabharath, the ancient Indian epic was made into a television serial by the Indian film maker - B.R. Chopra. The television production was 94 part serial, that was televised in India every week for 94 weeks. Video tapes of this production are available for both sale and rental in Indian video rental stores in United States. Segments from this television production was used as stimulus material. Before explaining the specific plots in each of the segments that served as the "text", let me briefly narrate the story of Mahabharath in order to locate these specific plots within the story line.

The author of Mahabharath is Sage Veda Vyasa. He is the "father of the epic" both literally and figuratively. In other words he is the creator of the text and also a character in the text. The story of Mahabharath is about Vyasa's children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Vyasa is the illegitimate son of Satyavati and Parashara. Satyavati is married to King Shantanu - the ruler of Hastinapur. Bheeshma is the son of King Shantanu and goddess Ganga. Bheeshma takes a vow to be a bachelor and remains one through out the story. Before the death of his father King Shantanu , Bheeshma promises him that he will protect the kingdom of Hastinapur as long as he lives. Satyavati has two sons from King Shantanu and both of them die without leaving any heirs to the throne. Bheeshma safeguards the throne, but refuses to break his vow of celibacy, as a result, Satyavati summons her son Vyasa, and requests her two widowed daughters-in-law to beget descendants from Vyasa. The story goes that Vyasa was a very ugly man, as a result one of the widow closes her eyes when approached by Vyasa. The result is she gives birth to a blind son - Dhritrashtra. The other widow becomes pale at the sight of Vyasa and as a result gives birth to a pale child Pandu. Since both the sons are unfit to rule the kingdom, the two daughters-in-law request their servant to beget a child from Vyasa. This child is Vidura, and he eventually turns out to be scholar, and ends up being the minister of the kingdom.

The blind prince Dhrtharashtra is married to Gandhari and they have 100 sons - the Kauravas. The oldest of the Kauravas is Duryodhan and his younger brother is Dhussasan. The pale prince Pandu is married to Kunti. Kunti before her marriage would have had an illegitimate son (Karna) from Surya - the Sun God. She abandons Karna after his birth, and Karna is raised by the royal charioteer of Hastinapur kingdom. The pale prince Pandu in the meantime, while roaming in the forests of Himalayas inadvertently kills two deers while they were mating. The deers angered by Pandu's disrespect to *Kama* (god of erotic love) cursed that he will face death when he attempts to mate with his loved one. As a result of this curse, Pandu's wife Kunti begets 3 sons from other gods (Yudhishtira from Dharma, the god of justice, Bhima from Vayu, an embodiment of air, and Arjun from Indra, the king of gods) , and his other wife, Madri begets 2 sons (Nakula and Sahadeva) from other gods. These 5 sons are called Pandavas. King Pandu eventually dies and the blind prince, Dhrtharashtra becomes the king of Hastinapur. The Pandavas, along with Kauravas are raised in Hastinapur under the guidance of their common teacher *Guru Drona*. The Kauravas and Pandavas constantly vie with one another in the art of war, and animosity and rivalry intensifies between them. When they grow up, Duryodhan prevents his father Dhrtharashtra from giving Pandavas their share of kingdom. Duryodhan, along with his maternal uncle Sakhuni, and his friend Karna (who is born to Kunti out of wedlock) constantly plot to kill the

Pandavas. Pandavas escape one such attempt and are exiled into the forests. While roaming in the forests disguised as Brahmins, they hear that the King of Panchala, Drupad has declared the *Svayamvar* (an ancient tradition in which the woman chooses her husband from numerous candidates who are invited) of his daughter Draupadi, and the Pandavas plan to attend the *Svayamvar*.

EPISODE I (Draupadi's *Svayamvar*)

One of the short segments that the subjects viewed was the scene of Draupadi's *Svayamvar*. This is short segment that runs approximately for 5 minutes.

The scene is in a palace. A number of princes from various kingdoms are invited and are seated in the palace hall. The characters in the scene are King Drupad, who is seated on the throne. Krishna (the Hindu god and one of the main characters in the epic) and his brother Balarama are guests of the kingdom invited to see the *Svayamvar*. Draupadi, dressed in bridal finery is shown standing with a garland in her hand. Among the assembled guests are Duryodhana and his maternal uncle Sakhuni and his friend Karna. The Pandavas, disguised as brahmins are also present in the palace hall. The task set for all the invited princes is to hit with a bow and an arrow a moving fish tied to the ceiling by looking at its image in the water below. The video tape begins when one of the princes attempt to lift the bow and he fails. King Drupad is saddened by the failure of so many princes to

accomplish the set task. At this point Sakhuni softly tells his nephew, Duryodhan that the prestige of Hastinapur is at stake. Karna overhears this remark and tells them that he will succeed in the set task and walks towards the alter and lifts the bow. At this point all the assembled guests applaud him. Draupadi is disturbed and Krishna looks at her and gestures her to say something. Draupadi orders Karna to stop and exclaims that her garland is not for a son of a charioteer. Duryodhan protests at these remarks to which Draupadi's brother says that it is Draupadi's prerogative to choose who her husband is. After this Arjun, who is disguised as a Brahmin walks to the alter and lifts the bow. The televised episode stops here.

To continue the story, Arjun succeeds in the given task, and Draupadi garlands him. The Pandavas reveal their identity and return home with Draupadi and tell their mother Kunti that they have won a prize. Kunti without knowing that the prize is Draupadi tells the five brothers to share the prize. Draupadi consents to this and takes all 5 brothers as her husbands. Dhrtharashtra, the king of Hastinapur consents to give Indraprastha (an arid and dry land) to Pandavas. Pandavas accept the offer and build a new kingdom and turn the arid land into a fertile one. They also build a *Maya Mahal* (Palace of illusions) and invite their jealous cousins Kauravas to their kingdom.

EPISODE II (Maya Mahal)

The second short segment that the subjects viewed was the scene in palace of illusions. The tape begins when Duryodhana takes a walk in the palace of illusions alone. He is amazed by the splendor of the architecture in the palace and the magical illusions. He repeatedly mistakes one thing for another; tries to walk through solid objects that look transparent and avoids open spaces thinking that they are closed enclosures. After a number of such encounters he falls into a puddle of water that does not look like water on the surface. Draupadi who happens to be at the scene laughs hysterically and bullies him by saying, "blind man's son is blind", and Duryodhan is enraged by this laughter. The video tape stops here.

To continue the story, Duryodhana and his brothers become even more envious of Pandavas' success, and also want to avenge the insult brought on by Draupadi's laughter. Their maternal uncle Sakhuni who is very well versed in the game of dice suggests that they invite the Pandavas for a game of dice. Yudhishtira, the oldest of the Pandavas has a weakness for dice game and the Pandavas accept the invitation. Sakhuni, who is also a trickster is capable of cheating in the dice game and his stakes are high. As a result, Pandavas start losing the game. Yudhishtira stakes all his wealth and kingdom one by one.

EPISODE III (Game of dice and disrobing of Draupadi)

The next plot that the subjects viewed was relatively longer. It is one whole episode of the television production that lasts for about 40 minutes. The tape begins with a title song and then the story teller, who happens to be *Sutradhar* (an embodiment of time) narrates what is to happen in this plot briefly. In the television production the story teller is not shown as an actual person, but rather a silhouette of a saint is shown and a voice gives a brief commentary on the plot. After the commentary the plot begins, and Yudhishtira starts staking his brothers one after the other and loses them all. Finally he stakes himself and loses. At this point he tells Duryodhan that the game has to stop since he is left with nothing. Karna, at this point reminds him that he still has his wife Draupadi to stake, and Yudhishtira stakes her too and loses her. Draupadi hears about this and sends her servant to find out if Yudhishtira staked her before losing himself or after losing himself. In the meantime, Kripacharya, one of the teachers in the kingdom protests the dice game, and asks King Dhrtharashtra to stop the game right away. On hearing this Duryodhan insults the Guru Kripacharya by reminding that his livelihood is dependent on the kingdom and asks him to "shut up". Bheeshma reacts to Duryodhan's indignation and tells the king a proverb. He says, "the bamboo tree yields a fruit at the hour of its death and Duryodhan is such a fruit to the kingdom". He warns the king that he should not be delighted at such a fruit, but take

care of the kingdom. Duryodhan again responds back to his grand uncle Bheeshma and insults him. Duryodhana is further provoked by Draupadi's refusal to appear in the gambling hall and sends his younger brother Dussahsan to bring her to the court. Duhshashan goes and drags her by her hair to the hall. Duryodhan laughs hysterically at her sight and reminds her of her previous words, "blind man's son is blind". Karna also reminds her that she insulted him at her *Svayamvar* by calling him the "son of a charioteer". Draupadi angrily asks the king the justification of staking her in the dice game. She asks how her husband, Yudhishtira is allowed to stake her after he has lost himself. She argues that if, as a wife she belonged to her husband, then, she was lost along with the husband, and if she was considered as having an independent identity, then, what rights does the husband have to stake her without her permission. She raises a number of questions on womanhood, women's rights, and what the law of the land is on these matters. She raises many questions to Bheeshma, King Dhrtharashtra, the minister Vidura, and the teachers of the kingdom - Kripacharya and Dronacharya and to the people of the kingdom and seeks justice. All of them fail to provide an answer to her. She finally accuses all her five husbands for failing their duties. At this point Karna again insults her by saying that any woman who is married to five men is not a wife but a whore, and therefore it is perfectly legitimate to take on a sixth one. He further adds that she can stand naked in the court since a whore has no concept of shame and

decency. Duryodhan now asks his younger brother Duhshasana to strip her, and he starts to pull her saree. Draupadi at this point prays to God and Krishna comes in the transcendental form to clothe her. Duhshasana keeps pulling her saree and her saree doesn't seem to end and finally he gets tired and falls down. Bheema, one of the Pandavas takes a vow to kill Duhshahasana. Draupadi also says that she wants to throw a curse at the kingdom. The Video tape stops here.

To continue the story, the Pandavas are exiled into the forests for losing the dice game, despite protests from Bheeshma, Vidura and Guru Drona. The pact that Duryodhan makes with them is that they go into exile for twelve years and live one year incognito and return. Even after these years of exile Duryodhan prevents his father from giving the Pandavas their share of kingdom, and war between the Kauravas and Pandavas becomes inevitable. Krishna becomes the diplomat and tries to negotiate peace between them in vain. Kunti, the mother of Pandavas faces a moral dilemma. Her oldest son, Karna, is in the camp of Kauravas and will be fighting the Pandavas. So far in the story she had never revealed her identity to Karna, even when he is ostracized for being the son of a charioteer.

The next scene that the subjects will watch is the dialogue between Kunti and Karna. This plot is relatively shorter - for about 18 minutes. In order to locate this dialogue in its proper perspective within the story line, let me briefly narrate the story of Karna.

Karna was born out of wed-lock to Kunti and Surya - the Sun God. Kunti abandons him in a basket and Karna is found by the Charioteer of Hastinapur kingdom. While growing up in Hastinapur he desires to take lessons from Drona who was the teacher of Pandavas and Kauravas, but Drona refuses to take the son of a charioteer as his disciple. So Karna takes lessons from another teacher, Parashurama by lying that he is a Brahmin. The teacher later comes to know of Karna's heritage and curses him for lying. Parashurama curses that Karna will forget important war technique when he is fighting for his life. At another point in his life he would have inadvertently killed a cow. The owner of the cow throws another curse at Karna saying that his chariot will fail him at the hour of his need. In terms of his character, Karna is described as a righteous hero and an altruistic person. As war plans are being made Krishna tells Karna of his lineage and tries to persuade him to change camps to which Karna refuses. Since Karna is a great warrior who was born with a protective shield the Pandavas are worried. At this point Indra, the king of gods (who is also the father of Arjun) goes disguised as a beggar to Karna and asks for his protective shield. To summarize, Karna has been betrayed by his mother, his teacher and gods. It is at such a juncture that Kunti goes to Karna to reveal her identity to him.

EPISODE 4 (Dialogue between Kunti and Karna)

This episode lasts for about 18 minutes. It is an emotionally charged dialogue between Kunti and Karna. Kunti

after apologizing to Karna for abandoning him pleads Karna to return home to which he refuses. Karna initially displays anger and resentment towards her and then promises that he will fight only Arjun in the war. Both Karna and Kunti make a pact that they will not reveal their relationship to anybody. There is no story line in this plot, but the dialogue between them is gripping and emotionally charged.

RATIONALE FOR CHOICE OF EPISODES

A number of factors influenced the choice of segments that the subjects viewed. First of all, the selected plots are fairly well-known and are often depicted in various dramas, and are also referenced in religious and philosophical discourses to explain an abstract thought. For instance the *Maya Mahal* (palace of illusions) is often invoked to talk about the concept of illusion in Hindu philosophy. The distinction between appearance (worldly knowledge) and reality (divine knowledge) is central Hindu philosophy. Likewise, the events that led to the dice game and what transpired as a result of it is often invoked to explain the complexity of *Dharma* (The concept of *Dharma* incorporates a whole range of meanings, from justice, truth, rights, to duties and knowledge).

These plots are not only referenced in deep philosophical discourses, but also in popular films and folklore's as a part of a dialogue. Secondly, these plots are central to the specific characters (Karna and Draupadi) in

the epic. The sequencing of episodes also built a certain conflict for the readers. For example, in the first scene Draupadi insults Karna by addressing him as "the son of a charioteer", and these words are thrown back at her by Karna in the "dice game" scene. The underlying assumption is that the built in conflict may generate multiple interpretations.

Another factor that contributed to the choice of "dice game" scene is the complexity of issues raised in the scene. First of all, this is one significant plot in which all the central characters in the epic are present and each one plays a role in the plot. Therefore it allows the viewers to "see" the plot through the eyes of as many characters as they want. Also the plot allows the reader to reflect on a variety of relationships: wife/husband, male/female, teacher/student, god/human, king/subjects (the ruler/the ruled), parent/child and natal family/in-laws. Draupadi, in seeking justice raises the issue of family's treatment of daughter-in-law, which is an issue in the epic and also a feminist political issue in the wake of dowry deaths in India.

The dialogue between Kunti and Karna presents a different set of issues. In the first three episodes that are presented to the subjects there is a clear perpetrator and a victim, whereas such boundaries are fuzzier in this case. Another assumption is that the viewers can identify themselves and empathize (at varying degrees) with the parent-child conflict presented in this scene, and as a result the reading of this text may be more dialogic.

TRANSCRIPTION

Subjects' narrative in all three sessions constitutes the data. The study generated a large body of narrative data, both in the form of individual narrative and group discussion. As a result, transcribing the data was a laborious task and I do not want to pretend that the transcriptions are an exact copy of the audio tape, rather, the position I hold is what Elinor Ochs (1979) says, "transcriptions are the researcher's data ". Ochs argues that transcription is a selective process that reflects the researcher's theoretical goals and definitions. Ochs argues that transcription itself is a theory, evidenced in page layout, to conversational transcripts (simultaneous or sequential), to marking punctuations, pauses and interruptions in the speech. Transcription, in the current study followed two patterns.

The initial pre viewing session and the post viewing session is a conversation between the researcher and the informant. This data was transcribed by me in a sequential manner (researcher's questions and comments and informant's responses). The conversation took place in several Indian languages and they were translated not merely literally, but so as to capture the mood and the tone of the idea. In instances where an appropriate English word was not found, it was transcribed as it is in italics and a suitable

explanation in English was given in parentheses. Elinor Ochs (1979) points out that one of the biases in conversational transcripts is "top to bottom" bias, in which utterances are treated as occurring in a neat manner - one after the other even while there is a simultaneous conversation. The purpose of the current study is not an in-depth analysis of conversational styles, or child's language acquisition, or interruptions in a conversation. Therefore the transcription was in a sequential manner, and some minor interruptions and pauses that were not relevant to the study were not specifically marked.

In the viewing session the subjects responded often spontaneously to the stimulus material and such responses were audio-taped. Transcription of this data followed a different style - that of Valerie Walkerdine (1986), and Jerome Bruner (1986). Walker does an analysis of families watching the film *Rocky II*, and Bruner does a study on reader's retelling of James Joyce's "Clay". Both of them lay out the page into two halves, the left half consisting of the "text" and the right half consisting of "reader's response" or as Bruner calls it the "virtual text". Such a transcription facilitated data analysis. In the current study all the 4 episodes was translated and a standard text was created, and the subjects' immediate response was transcribed alongside. Whenever the subjects paused the videotape and engaged in a discussion the transcription followed the normal conversation pattern mentioned above.

CHAPTER 7

TELLING TALES ABOUT LIVES

My eyes distracted
 By my child's trifling illness
 - Is that me?

Or

My eyes refusing to see
 The child breathing its last on the pavement's edge
 - Is that me?

My eyes moistening
 At the mere thought of my loved ones aging
 - Is that me?

Or

My eyes drowning
 In the flooded mine of Chasnala*, yet dry
 - Is that me?

Jaya Mehta, *Ekoham Bahusyam?*
 (I Am One, I Can Become Many?) ⁹

In writing this chapter, I have two questions in mind. How does one talk about oneself, and how do I tell what one tells me? These two questions create an intersection or perhaps a dialogization of autobiography (the account of a person's life) and biography (the retelling of such an account by the other). Bakhtin (1990) asserts that there is "no clear-cut, essentially necessary dividing line between

⁹ Jaya Mehta, *Ekoham Bahusyam?* (I Am One, I Can Become Many). Trans. Shirin Kudchedkar. In Women Writing in India: Vol.II. The 20th century. S. Tharu & K. Lalita (Eds.) (1993) New York: The Feminist Press.

* Chasnala, Bihar, was the site of a mining disaster in which a large number of miners were killed.

autobiography and biography" (p.150), for any self accounting is achieved with the aid of and in the presence of the other - either literally or figuratively. The *I-for-myself* and self's relationship to lived experience shifts in the very act of textualization. The self acquires its form through the narrative "emplotment" in time and space.

My own focus in both generating the narrative on self and in analyzing the narrative is on the temporal and dramatic dimensions of "life stories". The image of a person within the narrative for Bakhtin is intrinsically chronotopic. The spatio-temporal relations within the narrative establish the individual's relationship to various cultural entities and to different time zones. The "time" here refers to both the individual history and cultural history at large. The interconnections between these multiple chronotopes is the basis for the classification of the novel for Bakhtin and such a system guides in classifying the "life stories" in this study.

I. SELF AS A TRAVELER

The hero of the travel novel is described by Bakhtin (1986) as "moving in space", and having "no essential distinguishing characteristics" (p.10). The focus in this kind of novel is not so much on the hero but on the world. This type of novel is not so much about the complex experiences that the travel affords for the hero - the encounters with various social groups, the awkwardness of

interactions, the questions that are raised about the self and the other, and the eventual awareness and transformation of self and the other. Instead, the author uses the hero's travels as a way of giving a commentary on various geographical locations, different social groups, their customs, their clothing, and so on. The variety is conceived in a highly "spatial and static" form (Bakhtin, 1986).

The very way in which the "traveler" begins the "life story" is informative. To my initial question, "tell me something about yourself..", Malathy says,

" There is nothing remarkable about it ... I guess the only thing is that culturally I grew up in Delhi eventhough I was a South Indian .. and you could call it interesting .. in a sense those who speak Tamil ... eventhough it was in Delhi .. there was Tamil association .. closer ties to language and the culture... so in a sense I sometimes think .. it is like immigrants living here .. it is like Tamils living in Delhi, because it is very different cultural setting..".

The narrative to a large extent focuses on "people in Delhi, "south India" and "America", almost as a unified whole. The initial statement on self, "there is nothing remarkable about it", I thought was either shyness or modesty and the discussion on Delhi, South India and America was a way of situating self in a cultural context. I realized that was not the case, for much of the discussion was on the "world", or the "worlds" out there, and each world exists as an island in and of itself and don't necessarily serve as an axiological point to view the other. In the absence of any meaningful linkages between the worlds, the focus often is on the surface manifestations of cultures, their ways of living and

interacting and their "strangeness". For instance, Malathy was comparing and contrasting Hindi and Tamil films and she said,

" ... you are more interested in Hindi songs .. and I never watched any Tamil movies ... once in a while I would watch and not enjoy them "

Lak: Why would you not enjoy them?

M: Because the culture portrayed was for one thing .. I think it was different from what I lived in like ... language it sounds different ... accent .. I can't understand songs .. the appearance of heroes .. for instance .. the women ... very different .. the men are more .. feminine looking without mustaches ... they don't ... the women are fatter ..."

Lak: Do they think differently?

M: Thinking wise I have not seen that many movies ...

Lak: Forget movies .. in terms of your own experiences ..

M: Yeah! I think there is a certain life style I felt when I go back to visit .. that I had seen more of the world .. and it was especially if I went back to my grandfather's village .. it was like they knew the village and that was it .. they don't know anything else .. they went to school and came back .. whereas for me I knew great ... much more than other people ... so they had a particular culture and they stuck to that ... wear half saree from the day they were 10 years old and they wouldn't know of anything else ...

The world view of the "traveler" becomes clearer in this stretch of talk. She describes other social groups, their appearances, styles of talking and is intrigued by their "exoticness", and the "Self" in turn is defined in distinction to the other and the self assumes authority to speak about the nature of the "other" - their limited world view, and in her view their peculiarities. The most common statement that the traveler made was along these lines, "I

think I have a better perspective on the world, since I have seen places", and when asked about their perspectives they again revert back to places as Payal said,

" To me the major move in my life is when I came to London .. I really saw the world with different eyes .. It is hard to give example ... your attitude towards life changes .. you see things ... different people".

In this category geographical locations become crucial in self characterization and these various places are tightly defined; any internal contradictions in the lives of the people in these locations are flattened out, and they become spatialized and serve as a backdrop for defining "self". This point becomes clearer in Ritesh's life story as he says,

" I think I grew from a variety of backgrounds ... I have spent virtually all my adult life outside of India ... I think of myself as a peculiar blend of India and non India .. sort of India a bit dominating"

And later on he says about living in various places,

" .. it means you are able to adjust to virtually anything because you have bits in you core that are Indian and non-Indian ".

Culture gets spatialized (background), quantified (a bit dominating), and selectively broken into pieces for individual consumption (bits in my core). The evidence of such spatial metaphors in significant numbers guided me categorizing the narratives. Here again Ritesh engages in a "compare and contrast" of various places he lived in as he says,

" I think in India we tend to be self deprecating ... we don't take ourselves probably serious ... it is not good to praise everything ... it is not cool to praise everything .. or everyone ... that is certainly not yourself ... whereas Americans feel I think ... very

much .. unless you do praise yourself .. play your trumpet .. nobody else would play it for you ... ".

At this point I asked him what these differing ideologies meant to him. I was interested in exploring possible dialogic tension.

Lak: So do you find yourself changing .. do you find yourself shifting gears ...

R: Not entirely ... I think ... I am fairly stubborn person in some ways ... I expect people to change to what I am .. perhaps sub consciously I do .. yes .. I wouldn't say the same sort of things to Americans ... that I would say to an Indians certainly that is true ... I am not sure what sort of things ...".

Throughout the interview Ritesh asserted that, "he is the same wherever he is", he said he always "fits in" and is not "uncomfortable" anywhere. My own concerns were with change, movement, dialogue and transformation and therefore my questions were like, "when did your life change", "were there twists and turns", "did your story reach a climax" and so on. Typically, the "traveler" interpreted such questions in a negative light and defended their "adaptive nature", and asserted their "stable" personalities. Without my probing questions, the subjects were quite comfortable in giving their observations and their opinions on the world. At one point I told Ritesh that I was fascinated by his sharp observations of the world around him and again asked him, how he made sense of himself in these multiple worlds. It was my attempt to get him to talk about himself to which he replied,

" I don't think I do make sense of myself in the world .. it is something .. an on going process .. what you try to find about yourself .. in ways you fit in ... you see yourself identifying most .. I identify myself much more with India than else where ...".

The expressions of "fit in" with the world and "bits and pieces" of the world in the travelers narrative is very revealing in terms of their ontological existence. The world is a kind of flat surface with "grooves" for the individual to fit in or avoid if he or she chooses not to fit in. The traveler however, gives detailed descriptions on the nature or the "what about" of the grooves, but not necessarily probe into the "why" and the "how", rendering the narrative almost devoid of "historical time". Bakhtin (1986) explains that the hero of the travel novel is "quite static, as static as the world that surrounds him" (p.11). This static atomized world that surrounds them organizes their life story. When I asked Ritesh about the major events in his life that would organize the chapters in his autobiography he said,

" I don't know if I have any major events .. I think I split my life into stages only by different places I have lived in .. and I see myself .. the events were certainly moving from one place to another .. rather than any specific incidence ... or that is the sort of events .. I was born in Madras .. then went to Goa .. and then my parents went to England .. and I went to live with my grandmother .. coming back to India and then coming to US, that is how I would split up things... ".

Another important feature of travel novel is evidenced in this passage - the leaps in biographical time. The movement from birth to adult life is indicated only through the leaps from one place to another. The kind of temporal expressions that are found in the traveler's narrative are "and then", "after that", "it went on like that", "at that time". The only way time enters the narrative is as an anchoring point and there is tendency to spatialize time. It

is not the duration of time but the specifics of time that is found in abundance in this narrative. The traveler is often very preoccupied with precision and accuracy in describing the places - its location, its surroundings, its population, the area and so on, as Shyam narrates,

" ... as I look at my ... most of my life ... longest period that I ever lived in place is with my grand parents .. the first 10 years of my life ... in a small village in Andhra Pradesh ... it is about 40 miles from Tirupathi ... 150 miles from Madras ... ".

One thing that was striking about the traveler's life story was that they were very detail oriented and interested in describing the specifics. Thinking seemed very reductionistic - every description was reduced to its constituent elements - almost to the sub atomic levels. Therefore to my question on "what was life like in those places", automatically generated an account of daily life as Uma narrates,

" I don't know .. very regular .. in the sense that I went to school .. came back in the evening .. played with friends, studied not too much .. I was always a very irregular student .. but I always came first in class .. so my parents didn't have anything to tell me like .. do study everyday .. kind of thing ... evening wash your face .. tell *Slokas* (prayers) ... very .. that is the way we grew .. nothing out of the ordinary happened ... ".

This style repeats itself when Uma discusses her college life,

" Well .. in college .. what Delhi University is about .. you just go to .. go inside at 7:30 in the morning ... right .. class starts at 8:00 .. and ends 1:00 and by 2'0 clock you are home .. and in between you have one to two classes and the rest of the time you are free ".

The interesting part about the travelers' story is their ability to depict the daily activities in various locations, the new buildings erected, the new stores that were opened, the new things that are available in the market, the latest fashion in the town as Uma explains college culture,

" ... just miss class and go to movies .. just go and hang out .. it is time to go out and have pizza ... that was the time when pizza came and McDonalds ... all the fast food were coming up ... and the in thing .. not to go to classes and hang out in one of those places ... I did go a few time but it never appealed to me ...".

Bakhtin (1986) explains that in the travel novel the world is a "spatial contiguity of differences and contrasts", and the individual life is a matter of affirmations and repudiations, success and failures and so on. The binary model and the reductionistic tendency operates at all levels. The contrasting of the places is also at the level of daily life - the availability of material goods, the daily inconveniences, the mode of transportation etc., as Shyam points out,

" making phone calls .. physical things as inane as they may be ... generally transportation for instance .. perhaps going from say Madras to my village .. in bus would be the most convenient thing .. business .. it is a whole bunch of things ... communications is very poor ..".

Eventhough the traveler mentions the inconveniences of daily life, they assert their ability to adapt and in fact advocate adaptation in daily life. This point becomes clearer in Mrs. Padmaja's¹⁰ story as she discusses her life after

¹⁰ I will be using the prefix Mrs and Mr to denote over 50 age group to draw attention to the generational voices.

marriage when she moved from Trivandrum, a relatively smaller city in South India to the capital city of New Delhi, as she says,

" .. after coming to Delhi it was the first time that I had to wash dishes .. also cooking .. only after marriage .. I started doing hard work .. but I did it gracefully .. charcoal stove ... cooking was difficult .. slowly I tried to learn .. it was war time .. there was ration for everything then, there was no kerosene".

The traveler's motto is "when in Rome be a Roman", therefore they see adaptation especially in daily life a key to success. Hence one finds expression such as "fitting in", "go with the flow", "I am fine any where", "at home" and so on. The guiding philosophy in life is as Mrs. Padmaja notes,

" as times change, we have to change ... now does anyone cook in firewood stove .. we need gas stove ... everyone wants to be comfortable .. to be comfortable we have to change ... we have to realize that ... ".

The traveler views the movement from one place to another as an educational experience, as broadening their perspective. However, when asked about how they developed such perspectives, they give an account of social life, weather conditions, their likes and dislikes etc., as Mrs. Hamsa states,

" .. the more places you go .. the more people you meet .. you get different ideas .. things like .. Cairo .. I used to go to ladies club .. they wanted cooking session .. then I made *Badam Burfi* (almond cake) .. after that we lived in Bhutan also .. that is also a primitive country .. very small place .. we don't even get fresh milk there .. no lights .. there also we lived .. it used to be very cold .. we used to watch Indian movies .. somehow we spent time ..".

The leap from one idea to another is evident in this passage. She quickly moves from stating the virtues of living in

various places and touches on social activities (ladies club) and makes a quick transition to life in Bhutan. By no means am I implying that cooking demonstration is not a learning experience. I am sure it was. My curiosity was more on the kind of cultural exchanges that took place during those sessions. Another striking aspect is that each world exists independently - life in Bhutan, Cairo, England, are all isolated; they don't necessarily converge within the individual. The narrative goes along the lines, "this place is like this, that place is like that" and they don't necessarily talk to each other. Touching a topic on the surface and quickly moving to another is typical of traveler's narrative. Perhaps, this is what Bakhtin (1986) means when he says that the "self moves in space" - on the surface in the travel novel. Since the narrator gives a surface level account of life and places, they often expect me to make assumptions about their life styles as Pankaj told me,

" My childhood was like almost any other Indian student .. you know I grew up basically in an Indian community .. there hasn't been any ups and downs so far .. it has been smooth so far ... ".

Likewise Manoj speaks about his childhood,

" I guess pretty normal .. grew up in suburbs .. and like decent house and lawn ... did all the usual things .. I guess .. I mean go to school ... ".

When I asked him if he could tell me about any major events in his life, he said,

" I don't know .. I guess it is ... the thing that caused a lot of change in my life was my father's death

.. that really changed things a lot ... you know ... but I am in and out .. I have basically been coasting as much as possible... ".

Given the sensitive nature of the event I did not probe further on the changes. However, the spatial metaphors ("in and out", "coasting") that are used in describing a significant tragic event is very revealing in terms of the ontological reality of the traveler. The "travel" is both literal and figurative; it is a certain "mode of consciousness" - a way of being, the kind of relationship that is established with various entities. The traveler's movement in space refers to geographical locations, their life experiences, other individuals and cultural institutions, and all these are flattened out and touched on surface. Bakhtin (1986) points out that temporal categories are rare in this category. Locating oneself in a geographical place, within the family structure and cultural institution (school, work place, etc.) is what the narrative is all about. For instance when "family" is brought into the discussion, one gives a detailed account of the structure of the family - the number of family members, their birth order, age differences between siblings, father's occupation, etc. From the demographic information the discussion does not necessarily proceed to family dynamics as Renuka spoke about herself,

" Nothing .. I grew up in a joint family .. I was the youngest ... of the sisters .. I have younger brothers .. I was the youngest daughter .. I have to think .. I don't know what to say .. my father is a businessman ..".

Likewise Mukta said,

"school environment was like homely environment ..because our school .. compared to other school as small .. we had 30 .. 40 students .. it just went on ... I passed one thing and joined another ..it went like that .. but I enjoy my job .. and how should I define myself ...".

In many ways "life story" seemed to be a matter of demographic information that is being reported. Life story is a "set of facts" that are reported in a linear fashion. Volosinov (1973) explains this style of reporting as follows,

"The basic tendency of the linear style is to construct clear cut external contours for the reported speech, whose internal individuality is minimized " (p.120).

Since the focus is on defining the boundaries and the internal contradictions are discounted, one observes totalizing expressions such as, "entirely", "completely", "definitely", "absolutely", "exactly" and so on, as is evident in Ratna's narrative,

" Most of my childhood we traveled quite a bit in India .. I had a very happy childhood .. perfect .. basically two of us ... my sister and I .. I think my foundation has been very strong ... very strong .. absolutely trouble free ..".

The result of the totalizing tendency in accounting life experiences and places is that the narrative alternates from one extreme view to another. Each view exists in a static form - in a state and it becomes difficult to observe liquefaction of viewpoints, and this point becomes clearer in Pooja's experience of American culture,

" That (America) did not change me.. I was very disappointed when I first came .. I had heard so much ... it is like .. so many years of growing up .. that America was this great wonderful.. clean place .. people were nice and it is fun to be ...but it is not clean .. people are not as I thought they would be .. in India I

never thought racism existed at all .. I thought only the bad people .. in books and movies .. the good people are never racists..".

Interestingly, these observations don't necessarily lead to any self reflections on her view points, but she switches back and forth from what she thought and what she sees, and each exists independently.

In general, as discussed earlier, the travelers rarely talk about themselves as Bakhtin (1986) points out that the hero is almost invisible in travel novels, and therefore one does not observe any metamorphoses, which can be found in "Adventure novel". The image of the adventurer, unlike the traveler is much more well developed. The wandering is not simply circumstantial, but is actively sought out by the individual, as Morson and Emerson (1990) point out, " A measure of agency, initiative, accountability enters this kind of novel" (p.386). Unlike the "travel" narrative, the "adventure" narrative has a theatrical element, which keeps the excitement about wanderings alive, and the active involvement of the character is evidenced. Jayashree's life story belongs to such a category, for her account of herself and the world around her is much more detailed, and here is a sample of her life in England,

" It was one of those experiences ... I started this job as a medical secretary in the beginning .. we had two hours in the middle .. so I used to walk around in the park and next to that there was a church ... I studied in a convent school .. so I have this thing for churches ... I do like churches I went there and there was something for Asian women they were all sitting quietly .. it was like *Mouna Vrat* (vow of silence) .. everyone had their lips sealed .. and down cast eyes I asked somebody what was happening ... he said

women talk about their problems .. they have come away from their places ... children don't care for them ..".

The chance encounters bring back memories, they become personally meaningful and Jayashree enrolled herself as a volunteer in that counseling center and she reflects on that experience,

" It was frightening .. who knows I may also do that.. who knows .. that was voluntary work ... play with them .. talk to them .. swap recipes .. I learnt a lot of cooking, they were so happy that someone enjoyed their cooking .. it was nice actually .. but depressing at the same time ... I learnt then ... I thought that it is not fair to say that westerners don't think of their elders .. I thought then ... that is one of the main reason that I want to go back (to India) ".

One of the prerequisites of the adventure novel, Bakhtin (1981) explains is that the course of life - the life story must "somehow correspond to an *actual course of travel, to the wanderings* " (p.111) and a metamorphoses that is uniquely personal in nature, which in Bakhtin's view is limited and "unproductive" in nature, since it is "not localized in historical time". The wandering and the life story are braided quite well in Jayashree's narrative, she reflects upon the experiences, and on her previously held views about western society. Yet, she goes on to say that she wants to go back to India for certain virtues like respect for elders still exist. It is at this moment that I see the absence of historical time that Bakhtin refers to. The question to my mind is, how is Indian culture that is rapidly entering the global market and free economy going to be immune to such "social evils"? Are such virtues in any unchanging form a property of a particular culture? After all, the very group

she encountered in England were Indians, and the indifference towards the elderly is very much on the rise in India. Jayashree's narration indicates change of a personal kind but the changing society is not necessarily brought into the discussion.

The "traveler" and the "adventurer" to a large degree are defined by their movement from one place to another. The focus is really on the world's diversity, and not so much on the self. Eventhough the image of the "self" is not so visible, there is a strict boundary between the "self" and the "world". In many ways the world is a vast landscape on which the somewhat "insignificant" self moves. The self however assumes a great deal of authority to speak about the world, very often "objectifying" and subjective experience, but everytime a question was directed towards self they would often "down-play" using a variety of expressions such as "pretty much as everybody else", "very regular", "it would be a boring autobiography", "no big deal", "nothing spectacular", "it is O.K.", "just life .. the usual", and so on.

The boundary between the self and the world breaks down when the narrative takes a turn to a "carnivalistic" genre. Individual identity has no place in a carnival talk; the self is completely submerged in the collective and collectively participates in blasphemously degrading the world (Morson and Emerson, 1990). Unlike the "travel talk" that comments on the world, the "carnival talk" exposes the hypocrisies of the

world, mocks at it using wit and humor, showers compliments and curses (Bakhtin, 1984), displays exaggerated emotions, and the language is often raunchy and ribald.

Unlike the "traveler", who is preoccupied with normalities and surface appearances of places, social groups and social interactions, the carnivalistic self utters profanities and curses both the self and the world alike. Mohan narrated an entertaining "life story" in this genre, constantly parodying his life as a bicultural individual. He saw himself as a clown - "life is comical yaar ", he says, constantly wearing a variety of masks to be an "Indian in American society", "American kid in an Indian household", "trying to show off Americanness in India", "trying to be humble about Indianness in America". These various roles are not stated, but they are enacted, social customs are exposed, mocked at, berated, and debased through sexual and scatological references. The wit and humor in such narratives is not on what is said but how it is said. Mohan says scurrilously about the "production" of "holy culture" and "Nirvana" by Indian immigrants in New York,

".... it is important that you marry a nice Indian boy or girl ... go to temple .. every Friday .. blah ... blah .. blah ..people in the temple .. it is a club house than it is a center for religious functions ... people talking .. whose daughter is doing what ... whose son is in medical school ... who got a brand new car ... did you see that stain on her saree ... c'mon ..."

On visiting temples in India Mohan says,

" it is a farce .. if you are a foreigner .. going there .. it is a freak show .. you got people in caged line .. right ... three hours ... next to people who haven't heard of deodorants ... (laughs)".

The speech very often became bombastic, mimicking several voices, making a variety of body gestures and using unofficial language. The absurdities of cultural clashes are enacted by Mohan;

" my cousins (in India) will ask me ... is it true that everybody there is divorced ... everybody has AIDS .. everyone does drugs and you can have sex with anybody you want ...".

(Mohan makes a clownish gesture, winks at me and says), " you have been watching too much Dynasty ... folks in America ... Oh! boy .. everybody has a nose ring .. everybody has a cow .. everybody is skinny and has a mustache .. lives in mud house .. there is no electricity .. you have to walk five miles .. to get water ...".

Mohan's performance reminded me of the "clown" in epic performances in India, who links the events of the story to the events of the world, often cracking jokes at mundane incidents, highlighting on one hand the "reality" of the storyline and yet, through various gestures presenting a set of contradictory images and values. In many ways Mohan's life is at the cross roads of several cultures and through him the boundaries between cultures get erased and he becomes simultaneously the spectator and spectacle, which is what the carnival is all about.

II. THE BIOGRAPHICAL SELF

The plot in the biographical novel is composed of the individuals' passage through various normative phases of life - child birth, marriage, career, accomplishments failures, death etc. (Bakhtin, 1981). The movement through the typical course of life is not necessarily developmental; the story

does not necessarily point out the emergence of the hero or the heroine. Their character is given at the outset. Unlike the travel novel in which the character is almost invisible, the biographical novel "relies wholly on the social and characterological definitiveness of the hero" (Bakhtin, 1984. p.101). Therefore the image of the characters are well defined and the novel relies heavily on their unique traits, their peculiarities and their experiences in the world. The discussion is not "about the world" as in the traveler's account, but about the self's experiences. The self overrides the world, and does not simply "move on the world" like the traveler. Instead, the individual is very much embodied in the biographical novel as Bakhtin (1984) points out, "The hero and the objective world surrounding him must be made of one piece" (p.101), and therefore never takes the outsider's position in sharp contrast to the traveler who is quite disembodied.

Typically, the biographer starts her or his "life story" by providing a psychological profile of themselves as Mohini does,

" I would describe myself as a sociable person .. like doing new things .. I like a lot of friends .. meeting new people ... I hate politics ... I really hate politics ... I hate things about war .. all this gulf war ... I don't see any reason why we have to fight .. I hate violence like even when you are referring to Mahabharath .. I don't like that aspect of it ... of course we .. got .. striving for a peaceful world ... I always want a better life .. I guess everybody wants that .. ".

In sharp contrast to the traveler who is concerned with the "facts" about the self and the world, the biographer is more

preoccupied with how self and the world should be. Therefore one hears terms like "striving for", "aspiring", "ideal", "that is how one should be", "the right way" and so on. What is ideal for the self is the ideal for the world and that should be one's goal. For that matter, the self and the world don't necessarily exist as separate entities, they are amalgamated into one unit and an "ideal" is abstracted out of it and universalized. It is very easy to detect the switch from "I" to the "we" in the narrative. Any discussion of the world's diversity or the anomalies as the biographer implies, is brought into the picture only to point out how they have actively avoided the "wrong paths" as Mohini says,

" I had a lot of freedom in my childhood ... and I didn't misuse it and I am glad for it ... I mean like ... I went into a conservative marriage style even though I had .. I could go out 10:30 at night I mean .. my parents were not strict ... may be I was level headed ... I shouldn't praise myself ... there were things in school .. drugs .. but i was not influenced by it ... many people would say this woman is doing French literature .. what kind of a woman is she ... Alliance Francais in Bombay was always associated with flirting ... vague .. different life style .. not normal .. I would say I enjoyed my childhood ... because of my parents ... ".

Everytime Mohini discussed the choices she made, which in her view were the "right" ones, she would immediately "normalize" her actions, making sure that she is not making herself into a heroine. In a biographical novel there is no room for heroism (Bakhtin, 1986), since the plot relies heavily on the "typical course of life". Even the choices that are made under difficult circumstances, for instance Mohini's resistance to drugs and sex in school, are

standardized and absorbed into the expected course of life. The idea of an "ideal life" is of paramount importance for the biographers and they frequently use expression such as "that is life", "life is like that" "that is to be expected in life". Bakhtin (1981) points out that the individual life events are subordinated to the idea of life, and such an idea is idealized in spatial terms - "the right track", "proper path". Often it is immaterial whether actual life events fit this track, but the "track" as a concept is important and the individual makes all the effort to be on the track and takes precautionary steps to avoid derailment. Such an ideal sets the goals for the individual and steers their destiny as Ravi notes,

" I always believed that an ideal person is one .. we should be able to discuss anything under the Sun .. with a very open mind ... that makes a person .. close to ideal .. and I always try to be like that .. the bottom line is I have always tried to be reasonable ... life has been lots of ups and downs .. it is like this .. I always felt .. I have to get whatever I want .. I have to put more effort than others ... eventhough I have the right potential .. right amount of .. eventhough I am on the right track ... I take it as a part of game .. I look at life as science .. if you add 4 and 3 you have to get 7 .. so the same ... if you do things .. you will get there ...".

It is interesting to observe that Ravi even before drawing a profile of himself, lays out what an "ideal person" is like; likewise his own life events are juxtaposed with what "life" is like. The movement in the biographer's tale is future directed - "getting into the right track" and "getting there". The destination and the way to reach that is what life story is all about. Unlike the traveler's account in

which the spatial metaphors are fragmented and tightly bound, the biographer's metaphors have continuity. The focus is on the finish line and not the journey itself. The traveler leaps from one space to another, whereas the biographer aspires to move along the ideal track of life. Life story, in almost all cases is structured in a linear fashion - from childhood to adult life, often focusing on their unique personalities, their hobbies, their relationship with family members, significant life events such as marriage, pregnancy, etc., and most important their goals in life. The aspiration is what defines "self", and not the actual life course and even if the actual life events deviate from the idealized version, the gap is not necessarily linked or dialogized. Instead, the concrete events get dissolved into the abstract idea of life and gets universalized as is evident in Nanda's account,

" lot of times .. life does not turn out the way you want it to ... but that doesn't mean it is bad ... [NOTICE THAT IT IS NOT HER LIFE THAT IS NOT BAD, BUT LIFE AS A UNIVERSAL IDEA IS NOT BAD] ... when you picture life as a child .. you have a .. everybody has probably a different movie going on in their mind .. when I was 12 or 13 I used to imagine that I would be sitting in an office .. with .. I used to always try to make my role models very successful career women .. and I used to imagine a maid servant bringing my child over to see me at lunch .. that was my picture .. but when I grew up .. my husband did financially very well ... and plus his bent of mind was if not necessary I shouldn't work ... at that point I just caved in .. life is like that .. ".

Unlike the traveler who assumes authority to speak about places and various cultures, the biographer concentrates on "life". The very word appears frequently in the narrative,

constantly switching back and forth from their specific personal anecdotes to a generalized discussion on "life". The specific and complex self interacts with the generalized other. Since the "idea of life" is so important to the biographer, there is a tendency to pontificate, which becomes clear in Kedar's text,

" Like I always ... I pray everyday .. right from my childhood .. I visit temples ... I go a lot religion is only a guidance and you cannot take it as a pure form of life give up all ... for the sake of religion .. then you just forget yourself ...".

Since the biographer is keen on maintaining the uniqueness of their selfhood, their life story is full of personal anecdotes, the tender relationships they had with other family members or teachers, their personal feelings, their triumphs and tribulations and their duties. The biographers are strict idealists and they often express outrage at moral transgressions in the society, and take pride in maintaining some "time honored" virtues as Mr. Sethu said,

"I have been securing very good rank in the school .. and I joined one of the conservative religious schools .. run by Catholics as a result I became more disciplined in life .. and I try to maintain even now .. in terms of time limit and all those things .. one of the best things I learnt ..".

Another distinct feature about the biographers is that it is important for them to fulfill their duties as a son, daughter, mother, wife, sister and so on. Unlike the traveler who provides no insight on familial relationships other than family structure, the biographer provides a detailed account of their family situation as Vinod said,

" Actually I belong to a simple middle class family .. being the eldest among all the five children .. I have 3 sisters and we are two brothers .. so being the eldest of the family .. I was quite responsible from the beginning .. I have seen hardships especially from the economic point of view .. then when I grew up ... I started thinking with them .. responsibilities of life, then I had decided ... I will get married only after I take care of all my sisters .. ".

Bakhtin (1981) points out that while biographical time is visible in this category, the development of the character is not visible. The character is a given from the beginning as Vinod said, "I have been responsible from the beginning". Circumstances and events don't necessarily change the individual; they only reinforce the given character. Even while they discuss about familial dynamics, the focus is on the importance of strong family bonds in the society and how family steers one's life course in the right direction as Mrs. Leela said,

" My major influence .. my father had a great influence on me for most of the religious part of it ... and my husband is .. he wanted me to advance a lot ... in terms .. like education and having a goal .. in life ... doing whatever you wanted to do .. so I had a support .. if you don't have the support that is not possible ... I had a strong base .. so everything fell into proper places ... ".

The spatial metaphors concerning family is very revealing in Mrs. Leela's account - "support", "base", and the idealistic tone - "proper places". She does not discuss the internal dynamics and contradictions in families, but the emphasis is on "family values". Even if they narrate difficulties in close relationships, they would repeatedly stress the importance of family, maternal love and ideals etc. For

instance, Mrs Bhavani discussed at great length about her husband's efforts to help his somewhat ungrateful sister, and on one tragic occasion died of heart attack, and goes on to discuss other difficult relationships, but throughout she kept stressing the virtues of "family". I am not suggesting that difficult relationships should necessarily lead to a dismissal of an "ideal", but my concern is on the "decontextualization" and "dehistoricization" of ideals.

The richness in the biographer's tale comes from the emotional overtones in their narrative. They express very deep feelings about their personal lives and about the society at large, especially in the realm of human relationships as Ulupi laments,

" I am the only child .. you start thinking .. just you are getting older .. it is kind of sad .. I mean because you don't have someone to turn to .. if you are upset at your parents .. or something good happens .. then you can't really share with anyone .. because no one has lived with your parents to really know ..".

In sharp contrast to the traveler who locates herself in various geographical locations, the biographer situates herself in the familial, class or caste structure within the society. Much of the story revolves around this theme. In many ways for the traveler the "world is the home" or perhaps a "house", since it is not the relationship with the world that is as important as the location, whereas for the biographer, "the home is the world", and that is where I felt I was invited to participate in their life story.

III. THE "CLAN - CONSCIOUSNESS" OF SELF

The "life story" in a "clan consciousness" narrative is not the story of the individual, but about their ancestors. It is not any ordinary tale, but about the grandeur of their lives, their deeds, their charitable nature, the mark they left behind for several generations to come. The story is distinctly heroic, ancestors are deified often in the literal sense - their names are etched on the temple walls of their native town. Therefore the story is about pride, honor, and glory of the past. There is no distinction between the familial past and cultural past, for their families are the bearers of tradition and culture. It is the clan that gives any identity to the self, they are recognized as coming from generations of eminent people, and their task is to uphold that tradition and narrate the stories of the "clan" as Bakhtin (1981) points out, "on such family-clan soil, autobiographical self consciousness does not become private or intimately personal. It retains a deeply public character" (p.137). While the biographer is defined by their destiny and therefore looks forward, the self of the "clan" looks backward. Tracing their pedigree is of paramount importance to this individual as is evident in Mr. Murugan's rendition,

" I was born in 1923 ... my father was .. we come from Tiruchirapalli .. district of Tamilnadu .. one of the ... 200 miles from Madras .. we call ourselves as Soliya Velalar .. that is we are agriculturists .. from Tanjore to .. and beyond Trichi it is Pandiya Velalar we belong to Trichi .. famous for Sriraganadha temple .. and Rampur ... about 250 feet height .. that is where

Lord Ganesha is above .. on the rock and there are two rivers .. Srirangam is an island ... situated between Kollur and Cauveri river .. Trichi consists of lot of temples .. and we are very religious people .. we are all .. of course my father whenever he takes bath .. he never forgets to put *Namam* (vermilion on the forehead) .. we don't do now a days .. because of the modern ... my father was advocate .. he was a government pleader .. he was chairman to municipality .. president of district board ... of course those times without any contest .. good people were always there in high post .. and after .. he became the renovator of temple .. he was called *Madhil Pani* (a title) by Sankaracharya .. it is very famous .. he was asked to take up Srirangam temple ..".

First of all Mr. Murugan's description of places is distinctly different from the traveler's account, not necessarily in content but certainly in tone. These places have histories, and his family history is intertwined with the history of the town. He takes pride in the architecture and the grandeur of those temples. They signify the glory of the past, and his "clan" has contributed to that glory. It is important to notice the distinction that he makes between his clan and the other, how far the clan is spread out. Such accounts add to the fortification of the "clan". Another distinct feature of clan consciousness to be observed in Mr. Murugan's account is the quick transition from "I" to "WE". The distinct "I" has no place in this kind of consciousness, it weakens the collective and takes away the glory. The glory resides in the past, and the titles conferred upon their ancestors accord them the status of gods. In the subjective experience, their spirits are very much alive, contributing to the well being of future generations as Mr. Murugan observes,

" We all live together .. my sons .. all of them studied well ... father because of his meritorious acts .. boys are all well .. very good .. even my brother's boys ..

good .. all that is our ancestor's good deeds .. we can say that ..".

Notice that he mentions only sons (eventhough he has daughters). Daughters are not a part of this heritage, for they do not carry the name of the "clan".

The collective voice is very important in this mode of consciousness; that is what gives power to the individual and sets the "path of life", and this path is treated as if it was pre-ordained as Mr. Radharaman said, "my line was set up early in life", and his task was to make the best of it. I would often ask if they had any grievances about it, to which Mr. Murugan said, "nobody complained in that generation", because a certain code of conduct was expected of "children from big house". The self in this category mourns the loss of collective voice, tradition, discipline and obedience in today's modern world as Mr. Radharaman said,

" .. religion has conditioned our family life a lot .. somehow or other they kept an atmosphere of what is right and what is wrong .. anytime they said don't do this or that .. I knew it was a precept or practice that has come down from tradition .. it took a long time to diversify from it in day to day life ... in marching you can't be the only one in step .. you have to go with the traffic .. it is the traffic that has eroded .. much of the values ... in many ways it is bad in hind sight .. then we can't change the world ... ".

In both Mr. Murugan's and Mr. Radharaman's tale the external events in the world enter the discussion only when they are directly tied to their heritage; otherwise they don't exist. A standard strategy in my interview was that I would ask questions about the "self" when the discussion revolved around the "world" and vice versa. Both these

subjects neither talked about the self nor the world. Both the world and the self are synthesized with the "clan". They are like little tributaries that join the "grand river" of the ancestors. Both these men are over 50 generation who grew up in the British era and saw the birth the a nation. When I asked them if the independence movement had any meaning in their lives they said it had no impact whatsoever as Mr. Radharaman said,

" .. very little ..in fact when I was 17 .. in between school .. we were totally protected .. from outside waves .. in fact in quit India movement .. in 1942 .. I didn't even notice it .. and especially down south ... we never got any news .. and at home .. nobody talked about politics at all .. so far as we were concerned .. no activity ..".

The women in this category however speak in a different tone. The lineage that Mrs. Sarla and Mrs. Anusuya trace is matriarchal, and therefore their ancestors were not just part of history, but they rewrote history and made "he[r]story". These two women, like the men trace their pedigree and discuss at great length the accomplishments of their "foremothers", who were personifications of goddesses. Much of their discussion revolved around their mothers, grandmothers, epic heroines and goddesses and how to transmit "womanly" power to the daughters. Once the "clan" is gendered, what is celebrated radically shifts. It is not the uniform "collective voice" and allegiance to "tradition" that is valorized. This tradition , for them is too patriarchal, and the matriarchal tradition is keen on finding "independent voice" and creating "silent revolutions". However there is

"collectivity" to women's voices, so one hears expressions such as , "our women", "ancient women", "those heroic women", etc., which includes women from scriptures and their grandmothers and mothers. The emphasis is on staying in the "tradition" in order to redefine it, so that women could find their voices in it as Mrs. Sarla spoke of her mother,

" ... she was a highly respected person ... she was very patient ... and she did what she thought was her duty .. for a woman who was so ... she was brought up in tradition ... for her to have a mind of her own and a will of her own .. and to carry out because she saw it as right .. regardless of outside pressure ... and her guidelines were usually .. if she did something and we questioned .. she would refer back to some similar event from one of the epics and she would say that is the example set for us and that is the example I am setting for you ... no person is an island for himself .. we are all responsible for the rest of us .. that is how she lived her life ..".

Unlike the men who spoke about their elders as setting the "path of life", Mrs. Sarla speaks about her elders "creating the path", a newer path by reclaiming and reconstituting the past. In that the past is both glorious and troubled and therefore the need to stay within and create ruptures as Mrs. Sarla spoke about her participation in the freedom movement,

" Independence movement was .. it meant more to my sister because she was that age .. to me it was something important to get excited about .. my sister participated in her own small way .. but it was difficult .. because my father's generation .. he grew up venerating the English men .. in fact there were pictures of governor coming to this club .. taking pictures .. our home used to be full of pictures with all these Britishers and these Englishmen and these other officials .. who used to officiate at functions .. so that is my father's background ... ".

Mrs. Sarla goes on to discuss how her mother, while staying within that tradition silently asserted her independence, not

necessarily by excluding the "foreign" British culture, but by embracing both the western and Indian cultures, and insisted that her daughters be well versed in both The Bible and the Hindu scriptures. Mrs. Sarla then talked about how her mother's sense of "personal independence", and her own aspirations for the future was directly tied to the nation's independence. Her mother, therefore made sure that Mrs. Sarla and her sister were well educated to prepare them for the responsibilities in "Free India".

The image of the self is not well defined in the "clan consciousness". It is as invisible as the traveler. The difference is that the traveler is defined by the places they inhabit, whereas the "clan consciousness" is defined by the ancestors. Unlike the biographer who is defined by her own ideals, the self of the "clan" is defined by the ideals of the ancestors. They are merely narrators of those grand tales as Mrs. Anusuya said,

" What can I say .. about me ... I am over 50 generation and lot of my friends were not allowed to go beyond high school ... my mother .. she was very educated for those times .. she got married when she was 11 and she came to live with my father when she was 15 .. my grandfather allowed women folks to go to school ... so she finished high school .. and she finished B.Sc in 1934 ... you can imagine what kind of influence she was on us ... ".

The most interesting aspect of the "clan" narrative is that it offers a glimpse into the social relations in the past, on who holds power and makes decisions for the family. Interestingly, Mrs. Anusuya's grandfather - the "patriarch" is the one who made the decision to let his daughter-in-law go to school and not the husband. Another important aspect of

the "clan" narrative is their emphasis on the social power they held in the society and the power dynamics within the household. There was always a family member who recorded (mentally, of course) the "deeds" of the "elders" and narrated those stories to the youngsters as Mrs. Anusuya discussed her growing up years,

" .. it was a big part ... I think my aunt .. she was the greatest story teller .. almost every night after dinner .. it was a big house .. large pillars .. so this was a big house .. so every night we would gather on the steps .. sometimes from the epics .. sometimes her own stories .. it is etched in my mind ... any child crying would be put in front of her and she could pacify the child with a story ...".

It is important to observe the superlative degree that is used to narrate the story and the expression "etched in my mind" seems to denote the grandeur, almost an immortal one that the individual experiences. The gathering in the verandah is not just for the family members, but for the public in general. They are meant to inspire the society at large and hence as Bakhtin says has a "deeply public character". Bakhtin (1981) explains that in the Roman autobiographies which epitomizes the "clan consciousness", the lives of the ancestors were tightly intertwined with the life of the kingdom and therefore their personal lives are public documents as Bakhtin points,

" The national ideal is represented by ancestors. Self-consciousness organizes itself around particularized memory of a clan and ancestors, while at the same time looking toward future descendants " (p.137).

To conclude, the temporal markers in the "clan" narrative are, "those days", "good old days", "those were the

times", "those times have gone", "two generations back", and the spatial markers are "our household", "all that is virtuous existed there", "in that place a pristine kind of behavior was expected", "they showed the right path", etc. There is no negative connotation attached to this chronotope. It is unmistakably grand.

IV. SELF AS A SEEKER

The "life story" of a "seeker" is developmental in the traditional sense; from the narrator's viewpoint, consciousness progresses systematically from an ignorant state to an "enlightened" state. This journey is not smooth: it is full of upheavals, self-doubt, and experimentation with various schools of thought, which ultimately leads to a true form of knowledge, and such a knowledge facilitates understanding both the self and the world alike. This story is full of expressions such as "those days I thought x,y,z, and now I realize it is a,b,c ". Some of the linguistic markers are, "I realize", "I have a better perspective now", " I did not know any better then", "I started querying", etc. Bakhtin (1981) explains that the seeker's path "passes from self confident ignorance, through self critical skepticism, to self knowledge and ultimately to authentic knowing (mathematics and music)" (p.130). The life story is organized according to this "developmental rubric", and anecdotes from life are brought in to "fit" this rubric. To the seeker, life

itself is an educational experience and therefore they are always in search of analytical tools to make sense of their life experiences and world events. Since these rational analytical tools were unavailable to the seekers in their childhood, they often describe their early experiences with some scorn as Rupak describes his childhood,

" To tell you the truth I don't remember ever philosophizing or anything like that .. like I said, I basically lived by day .. kind of thing .. I was sort of .. I always .. when I look back ... I was like a normal kid .. I was playing and things like that ... no philosophy ... you know go to temple .. you get *Prasadam* (offerings from god) .. something like that .. I wouldn't consider myself to be very devout .. ".

All along Rupak was careful to place the concrete childhood activities and experiences in the lower berth. Normality was equated to primitive existence and he would often say, "you have to get over it". The seeker's life story repeatedly juxtaposes their current mental state which is more stable and wise and the restless periods in their past as Rupak said,

" I am more disciplined now .. those days .. I sit there and my mind wanders like a monkey".

The progression from the underdeveloped and untutored state to a higher form of scientific and rational thinking is often the result of "crisis", especially in the religious realm, and on the way to the "rational state", there is often a temporary loss of faith as Bhairav said,

" Yes .. I chose science as a career ... but at that time the choice was ... it was parallel track to the rest of my life .. it was more as a curriculum .. over the years due to course of Ph.D., science started influencing my way of thinking ... I would say to a large part is responsible for my .. weaning from

religion .. especially the western science .. giving a lot of importance to rationalizing and logic and things of that sort .. because of that .. I started questioning .. everything .. day to day rituals .. to even bigger things ... I got into the habit of trying to rationalize why a particular practice would have evolved .. an now that practice has outlived its usefulness .. or does it make sense .. so I can't claim myself to be a complete atheist .. I still respect a lot of things that my religion has taught me ... ".

In almost all of the seeker's narrative, there is a struggle to discard the highly ritualistic aspect of Hindu religion and embrace a more abstract philosophical dimension and therefore much of the life story is about the transition from one phase to another and an eventual reconciliation in which faith and rituals are redefined to suit the principles of science. They no longer exist as polarities, which was the condition during the crisis phase, instead they occupy the lower rung in the "spiritual ascension" as Bhairav pointed out,

" I told you in my younger years I used to be very religious .. I used to attach a lot of importance to the idol .. I would even confess that I strongly believed that there was a lot of power in the idol ...I have come far away from that .. in fact when I go to temple .. I look at an idol .. I look at the beauty the culture represented in the idol .. the artist giving some expressions to the idol ... to the philosophy behind the idol .. I have come to a point when I started believing .. god is a figment of our imagination ... but the philosophy had a powerful influence on me .. ".

The most interesting aspect of the seeker's narrative to me was their ongoing dialogue between science and religion: in some instances as in Bhairav's case the rigor of science and the search for certainties aided him in acquiring "ideal and absolute knowledge", whereas for Rupak the dialogue continues as he said,

" I have always for some reason tend to revert back to physics everytime I encounter philosophy .. it somehow seems to be a natural thing to do when Newton started out he said .. that everything was absolute .. the universe .. space and time are absolute .. and time is a progression of events at any point in the universe ... and then came Einstein .. and he said .. no time is .. it depends on the location in space .. and stuff like that it was interesting because .. at that time .. I said may be everything is relative .. and then I thought about it .. and said .. no .. no.. no .. may be there are certain things in life that are absolutes .. like being honest .. being good all the time .. being fearless and .. the idealist philosophy ... if you want to be a part of *Brahman* (in Hindu philosophy it refers to absolute knowledge), you are totally detached ... ".

It is important to observe the emphasis on disembodied "transcendental" knowledge. The seeker's conflict is not merely between religion and science, but with a variety of dualisms - materialistic pursuits and idealistic states, overt concrete actions and deeper abstract thoughts. The seeker often uses the expression "deep down" and that is where the truth about self resides. In many ways the seeker is an embodiment of the philosophical school of thought - "Structuralism", therefore the Platonic ideal (doctrine of forms) operates at all levels and as Shweder (1990) explains such a psychology

" assumes that its subject matter is a presupposed central (abstract and transcendent = deep or interior or hidden) processing mechanism inherent (fixed and universal) in human beings, which enables them to think (classify, infer, remember, imagine, etc.), act (strive, prefer, choose, evaluate etc.) and learn" (p.4).

Since the pursuit of the seeker is some kind of "true knowledge" that is universal in nature, they often use Sanskrit expressions such as "evolving out of *Agnanam* (state of ignorance)", "removing the screen of *Maya* (illusion)",

"and then I realized", "the essence of it", and "the interior person" and so on. The imagery in expressing their pursuits often alternate between "deep inner self" and "higher abstract thoughts" as Nagaraj said,

" .. outside the world .. I am getting confused as usual ... but really deep inside I chose myself to be a lonely person .. and outside I am able to move with as many people as possible ..if I decide that I should live in a particular way .. not getting involved in ritualistic things .. but at the same time take care of your environment without hurting any body's feelings .. and live a life of almost a *Sanyasi* (mendicant) in your mind ... I still drink tea .. I still enjoy the privileges of everything .. but if you deprive me of that I am not going to be bothered by it .. so essentially anti materialism is my happiness ... it is very difficult to convince myself as well as my family and friends .. whatever I am aspiring for seems more materialistic than spiritual ... so this conflict .. this Mahabharath is going on in my mind all the time .. but as I told you .. deep inside me is different than the person I am projected outside ...".

The seeker's story is full of realizations and such realizations are not just restricted to deep philosophical subject matters, but the same tone is extended to discuss familial relations as Nagaraj said,

" .. the strong point of my upbringing was I lived in a big family .. whereas my wife was always alone .. comes from a small family .. my family at any given point there would be 20 people .. I always thought a person ... grown up alone is going to be the demanding type .. sort of funny feelings .. but on the contrary I found that my duality is that ... I lived in a joint family but was always lonely ... whereas she lived as a lonely person .. but in her heart she was a large family type of a personality ... ".

The Socratic ideal, "know thyself" or the Upanishadic principle, *Tat Tvam Asi* (That art thou) or "truth is within us", is what dominates in the Seeker's story. Nagaraj and Bhairav, being scientists used the tools of biological

sciences whereas Rupak being an Engineering student relied of physics. Atul on the other hand, being a psychiatrist uses psychoanalysis as his analytical tool to explore the "self" and the "world". He narrates and analyses a personal anecdote as follows,

" I didn't study any harder .. and I stood second .. I was not first in my class .. but a girl .. my enemy number one was first ... I had a healthy latency period .. when I hated girls which lasted till 9th grade .. and the height of misogyny was in 6th grade when we actually had secret clubs against girls .. so quaint .. to remember all these things .. the first dream .. I remember is in 8th grade when I became attracted to a girl .. and I found out that despite all my beliefs .. I wanted to sit next to a girl .. and now I realize .. she became somewhat of a sexual object at that time .. not a girl but girls in general .. ".

It is important to notice the sense of "discovery" about self in expression like, "I found out", and "now I realize".

The spatial markers in this category have multiple layers such as "on the surface", "deep down", "digging in" and the temporal markers such as " at that time and now I realize" point out the movement of consciousness in a particular direction. From the narrator's standpoint, the movement is developmental or "progressivist" in nature. The seeker, like the biographer lays out the "ideal life type", but unlike the biographer who simply states the ideal, the seeker rationalizes the ideal. In the biographer's narrative the "world" does not exist separately; the self and the world are fused into one piece, whereas the seeker retains distance between the self and the world, but uses the same analytical tools to understand and assess both of them. The biographer and the seeker give a detailed account of the "self", their

goals and aspirations. While the biographer expresses outrage at "immoral acts", the seeker views them as a "primitive state", and the individual's task is to rise above it. The seeker's world is distinctly hierarchical.

V. THE SCRIPTURAL SELF

The scriptural chronotope operates on the principle that time is trans-temporal and space is universal. The individual's reliance is on the "timeless" truths of scriptures and it is their engagement with the scriptures that define self. The cultural space and the historical time that the individual inhabits is immaterial. Such specificities are subsumed by the "Grand time" of scriptures. Let me emphasize that scriptures here don't necessarily refer only to Hindu texts, eventhough they form the overarching framework, but scriptures from other religions - The Bible, The Quran, and for that matter other grand literary texts of the western culture are all included. The self is constructed in relation to the grand "timeless" truths. The flow of time in the seeker's narrative is from the "primitive past" to the "developed present", whereas for the scriptural self, the flow is backward. Beauty, truth, wisdom, all existed in the ancient past and therefore modern concerns, problems and technological inventions are all traditionalized. The "ancient past" is the semiotic field in which the self operates and makes sense of one's own existence and the

world. In many ways, the "Scriptural self" is the quintessential Indian story-teller, who operates at the intersection of several stories - those of his or her own, gods and goddesses, and ancient and literary heroes and heroines. Therefore to tell one story, many stories have to be told. When I look at these narratives, I realized that I hardly asked any questions. The "scriptural self", who is a master story teller raises the questions herself. I only played the role of an attentive listener. In many ways they don't like to be disturbed, it interrupts the flow of the story, and quite frankly I was mesmerized by the "tale" and the "telling". The story of the "scriptural self" is not just a narration, it is a performance and when the narrative is treated as a performance, Maclean (1988) explains , "we see a concrete demonstration of the text at once speaking through the performing I and being spoken through the actantial voices, at once *enonciation* and *enonce* " (p.7). The performance links one story to another, one culture to another and differing temporal zones, and as a result the listener is drawn into the stories.

The categories of self (traveler, biographer, the clan, and the seeker) that I have discussed so far were relatively easy, because the members in each group share a common denominator. There was uniformity in their stories; any story could belong to any body else. In the "scriptural self", we are dealing with multiple texts and therefore the life stories are distinct and varied. A common factor shared by

all the members in this group is that they are all trained in some kind of classical art form (Indian) - theater, dance, or music, and some members actively pursue them as their career. Perhaps that explains their intense engagement with scriptures and a need to connect ancient past to the present, as revealed in Sambhu's story,

" I guess I would start by talking a little bit about what is consuming me at the present .. I am very interested in using my profession ... that is making films .. and television programs .. I am trying to find a way of bringing the wealth of our Indian myths and stories .. and culture .. to children growing up in this country .. Indian and American kids .. there will be a market for children stories .. mythologies and the *Panchatantra* .. the *Jataka* .. and Ramayan and Mahabharath .. many of engrossing films have adapted a lot of values and plots from Indian stories ... so what we are trying to do is try to come out with stories for children .. based on Indian mythology but internationalize it .. bring religious aspects to its minimum .. not eliminate it .. ".

The concerns that Sambhu expresses are those of the story tellers, a story cannot be told unless you craft it to suit the needs of the listeners, and yet one needs to be faithful to the story. Throughout, Sambhu addresses this problem and narrates and weaves his life tale as he says,

" ... what I want to see is .. the question concerns me because my children are growing up in this country . and I want them to view what is to be an Indian .. that is we have a culture that is magnificent .. not that we should live in the past .. but we should understand that we come from a culture that was extremely advanced .. and the train of our culture lasts to this day .. children growing up abroad are at a quandary as where they fit in .. a problem that I never had ..probably because of my parent's upbringing .. it was very clear to me ... I was an Indian .. I grew up all over the world .. I live in America .. but I do see that a lot of children do have a problem with it .. and I would like to address them so that they can feel .. positive and strong .. they should be able to feel proud of who

they are ..and not change their names to make it easy for the western tongue .. ".

For Sambhu, to be an Indian means to engage with its myths and philosophy and geographical and temporal distance is immaterial. The spatio-temporal distance takes away the vitality that these texts have in his life, but at the same time his concerns are not about preserving the texts. He does not worship the "antiquity" of the texts, but rejoices in weaving these tales with his own life story as he said,

" you see, I wanted to experience life fully .. open yourself up to all experiences .. I was experimenting with myself .. some are bad too .. I tried cocaine ... I am convinced that many sages did it too .. many modern great writers did .. unfortunately anything abused turns upon itself .. that is what has happened right now .. anyway these are just plots .. when you are exploring you try different paths ... ".

From this he goes on to tell stories of other sages and about coming to terms with himself, constantly linking his life to the lives of the mythical and literary heroes. The story is distinctly intertextual; the contact between texts in Bakhtin's (1986) words is not "mechanical" but "dialogic", which becomes clearer in the following segment,

" I can build a whole science fiction from Ramayan and Mahabharath as beings who came from alien race and mingled with people ... had intercourse with monkeys and created *Hanuman* ... with bears ... *Jambhavan* ... they created genetically enhanced eagles ... *Jatayu* and *Garuda* .. from science fiction angle look at the weaponry .. aircrafts .. even if you look at it that way which is a very westernized way of looking at it .. no matter how .. it is extremely valuable ... ".

While the narrative is intertextual and one can observe the interpenetration of voices, the narrative is devoid of "history" and "historicity". Various texts intermingle, but

not the histories of various texts that intermingle and therefore the narrative is not "heterochronous" in a Bakhtinian sense. In Bakhtin's view multiplicity does not necessarily translate into historical awareness, a point that Morson and Emerson (1990) clearly explain, "an awareness of real historical time entails much more than an awareness of flux", and historicity does not translate into diachrony either, since it could be a "series of synchronic slices with no intelligible historical links" (p.43,44). It is this historical link between the texts and the "history of historical awareness" that I found missing in Sambhu's story. Of course, there is liveliness to the story when he connects ancient Indian epics to modern western science fiction, but it is devoid of his personal history or the history of scriptures and science fiction.

In order to understand how time operates in the "scriptural self" narrative, I think it is instructive to understand the function of "Time" in various branches of Hinduism. In one school of thought, which is the widely held belief, Panikkar (1976) explains that "Time" is seen as a cosmic power which is the very foundation of reality, and the history of individuals and the societies all come under the sway of this "Great Time" or the "Absolute Time", and hence the focus on "a temporality" or "trans-temporality".

The "scriptural self" does discuss at great length about the changes that took place in their lives and for that matter they actively seek change and are sharply aware of the

changing world, and therefore temporal categories are found in abundance in their narrative, but these multiple "times" are connected to and become a part and parcel of the "cosmic" time, and the very idea of "time" becomes "timeless", akin to the popular expression "the more the things change they seem to be the same". The Sanskrit philologist Bhartrhari (a philosopher of 5th century) viewed Kala (Time) as the "driving force" in all meaning making activities as he said,

" By means of activities similar to the turning of the water wheel, the external and all pervasive Time turns out (*Kalayati*) the fragment (*Kalah*, object) and thus acquires the name of Kala (Time)".

(cited by Harold Coward, 1990: Derrida and Indian Philosophy)

Bhartrhari saw time as the necessary power that sets the mind in motion in order to understand, but he points out "in wisdom it (Time) disappears". Once certain awareness about the changing self and the changing world is achieved, these fragments of "timings" become an integral part of the *Maha Kala* (Great Time).

This somewhat esoteric point perhaps becomes clearer in Vasu's tale. Vasu spoke at great length about the changes in his life - both about the circumstances that produced change and changes within himself, in his outlook etc., and about the changing world. As is typical of the scriptural individual, the narrative is filled with proverbs, Vedic and Upanishadic aphorisms and literary quotations. About the various "twists and turns" in his life Vasu said,

" ... we change our live styles as scientific facts grow, the medical things grow .. you can see longevity grows ... so you could see how things are affecting

people .. in fact I think of Sanskrit proverb .. it is .. *Grethena Vardhathe Buddhihi* ... *Gretham* means .. ghee .. like ghee .. *Vardhathe* .. is in fact it develops ..not only develops .. it goes in multi-dimensional way .. *Buddhi* is your intellect .. knowledge ... or the *Gnana* (wisdom) that we say ... ".

The personal and social changes that Vasu talks about is connected to or incorporated into the "age old truth" as he says which is "eternal". Every experience or observation is linked to some "time honored truth".

As I discussed earlier, the "scriptural self" rejoices in telling stories. One story triggers another story (The narratives in this category are unusually long), and Vasu's discussion of *Gratham* (ghee - clarified butter) leads him to yet another tale about himself - about his love for ghee, and his health concerns, his daily exercise routines, and the general societal concerns about health as he says,

" .. so basically you want preserve nature according to world's scripts .. and the scripts say .. *Annam ne nindya* .. meaning do not throw away food ... *Annam ne bahu Kurvethaha* .. all it says is do not eat food too much .. same thing same concept .. of cholesterol .. or any high calorie food .. they are not saying .. fast .. screw yourself at all times .. they are not saying that .. all that they want to say very clearly is ... eat moderately ... ".

Vasu goes on to talk about "health clubs", linking its principles to the "ancient wisdom". The slogans of "weight watchers" are merely manifestations of "age old truths". In principle, the manifestations are similar to the incarnations that the Brahman (Absolute truth) takes in the form of several gods, as Bhartrhari explains that it is through the power of *Kala* (time) and *dik* (space) that the Brahman appears as many. Time allows the individual to see "reality" in

different forms, and these different forms are an integral part of the "Absolute". The "scriptural self" constantly connects such variations in the society to the ancient scriptures, thereby traditionalizing the modern phenomena.

Another distinct feature of the scriptural narrative is the theatricalization of self; the narrator makes several moves to draw the narratee into the narration. As I mentioned earlier, I rarely asked any questions to subjects in this category. Whether it is submission on my part or a "power play" on the part of the story-teller is an open question. Perhaps it is both, as Maclean (1988) explains that when narrative becomes a performance the "game involves control", however, she points out,

" The narrator has the advantage that a map of the territory (a self reflexive segment) can be included in the text. This is the means by which the narrator can control the advance of the other, turn it into desired paths, and ultimately even persuade him or her to cede the territory " (P.18).

The "scriptural self" would often make assessments about my thought processes, or raise questions for me and provide answers, and therefore the narrative is filled with expressions such as, "you might be wondering", or "you are probably thinking ... what is this fellow saying .. but let me tell you" , or say jokingly, "I know what you must be thinking .. I know it .. all this blabbering ... what.. this guy is simply *Kathe adichindi* (beating or spinning stories)", but "let me clarify" and the story continues even as they intermittently deny that they are telling stories. There is a constant differentiation and blending of fact and fiction and

the narrator switches back and forth between "first person" and "second or third person" speech acts. Vasu says the following when he reflects on taking responsibilities for his actions,

" it has to start from this lower level, than the higher level .. so this could be easily explained in an atomic chain reaction .. mainly if you see the small atoms, when they collide, eventhough they appear to be very small, they come with great power, that is the principle of hydrogen bomb .. so the culture tells you no matter how big a person you are ... how smart a person can be ... he has to know where he is going .. doesn't mean don't do your job ... I would certainly explain to you .. I like to give the example that I like from Tamil literary Tirukural, that says, *nunikum oru yerinal*, that means a person can high .. high .. high .. climbing up a tree, everybody says ... man this person is a great guy, he can go up all the way, it says, he has to understand *akhthe avar ooyir ke erithe ya ge vide* , all that means is .. once he is going to have a fall from the real high tree that is the end of his life ... ".

The interesting part of the scriptural narrative is the connection made between various concepts, whether it be hard core theoretical physics, or life experiences, or mythologies. They are all dialogized. The chronotopes of individual life, philosophical speculations, about cultures, and social histories are all woven together and made into an integral part of the "Absolute chronotope". Their current experiences serve as the basis for reflecting on the scriptures as Bakhtin (1981) says, "Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text) " (p.253). Mr. Rajan's reflection on his childhood is an indication of such multiple chronotopes,

" Ramayan and Mahabharath are ... for one thing there was seldom any boredom about the narrative that exploits .. for a child I totally believed in everything that the epic said ... in terms of all those feats and what not .. is kind of naiveté ... but in retrospect almost each one of those things that are explained in Ramayan ... achievements .. feats that could not have been scientifically proven at that time have now been made possible .. to think of *Pushpaka Vimana* (floral airplane) .. and all that kind of thing .. something that flies .. so aerodynamics and other things were something that is now credible .. but at that time one did not know that so much transpired ..".

In sharp contrast to the "seeker" who views the past as mythical and under-developed, and the "clan" self who saw only glory and grandeur in the past, the scriptural self seeks to connect the past and the present. The present is only a "sampling" of the past and it reinforces and strengthens the past. At a personal level the past also serves as a buffer to absorb the daily pressures of life and serves as an inspiration, as Mr. Bhagirath reminisces on his early musical training,

" .. my father would wake us up at 4:30 in the morning .. we had to sit with him and go through all this by rote .. I knew all these words .. by heart ... that was a great thing .. I don't think anybody can match the kind of discipline that we had in our lives .. eventhough at that time it was very difficult to get up in the morning ... now I think that is the only treasure I have got .. there is not doubt .. only thing I have to do is how it relates to my present or even my whatever future is left of ... that is the whole interest in life right now ... how can I fit that into my own life ...".

The engagement with art, which in turn is connected to the scriptures defines the self in this category, whereas the association with other aspects of life as Mr. Bhagirath says, "you simply tend to live like a water droplet on a lotus leaf kind of thing .. you are there but you are not there also".

Life in all its fullness can be experienced only through art as Mrs. Saroja said,

" I like very much .. music .. art .. I live in art .. whatever I am doing .. if it is art related .. handicraft .. painting .. doll making .. I live .. I forget everything for that .. I will sit for so many hours and work and enjoy that .. better than anything ... every now and then I compose small songs .. generally about human nature .. just socially what is happening .. I have written for *Ugadi* (new year's celebration) .. it is about *Ugadi Patchadi* .. it has six tastes right ... sour ... sweet .. like honey .. bitter .. that *Ugadi* .. Lakshmi (goddess of wealth) in her hands *Amrita Kalasam* (vessel containing life nectar) as if handed to us .. all these tastes are contained in life ... like that my opinion .. I communicated ..".

Art opens up the communication for the scriptural individual; they cross cultural barriers, bridges generational gap, and historical distance. The places that they live in and the "social time" they inhabit is secondary, and often they would relocate if the place is not conducive for their artistic pursuits. All the subjects in this category mentioned that New York allows for that kind of diversity, as Mr. Bhagirath discussed his move from New Zealand to USA,

" Ahhh ... now it comes .. the reason I changed from place to place is also because of that .. see New Zealand I could not find outlet for my cultural talents however much they encouraged me I knew it was all like .. *Namma oor le solluvale palayathele thanni oothera mathiri* (as they say in our town, pouring a glass of water in a big lake) .. what is the point of throwing pearls in for swines .. some thing like that you know ... they are more curious than serious .. that is not the kind of thing I want to do with my talents .. otherwise I was very happy .. had a fantastic job .. ".

To conclude, it is the scriptural soil in which the individual thrives and makes sense of traditional texts and art forms and modern existence. They actively dialogize the

past and the present - both of the individual and the culture and incorporate these "times" into the "cosmic time".

IV. THE GENDERED SELF

As a genre, autobiographical narratives acquire a distinct character when the narrator actively and consciously takes a "gendered" position. I want to emphasize the words "actively" and "consciously", only because "gender" is an ongoing social work that all of us participate in, knowingly or unknowingly (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The term "gender" signifies a social relationship and if the nature of such relationships organize the life story, then I have classified such narratives as "The Gendered Self".

The triadic relationship that Bakhtin (Morson and Emerson, 1990) proposes (the "I-for-myself", "I-for-others", and "others-for-me") for the emergence of self is not only visible in this category but becomes absolutely necessary. Very often the "I-for-others" dominate, which the gendered self resents and struggles to establish the "I-for-myself" and the "others-for-me". The story therefore, is about the socially expected roles and the contestation and redefinition of such roles. In order to assert one's selfhood, the individual has to bargain with a number of social factors and to do so she has to travel through various social spaces and historical times. The gendered self cannot "speak" about herself without discussing how she is "spoken" to as de Lauretis (1987) says succinctly,

" The construction of gender is the product and the process of both representation and self representation" (p.9)

The implications of de Lauretis's definition for understanding the "gendered self" is two fold. First, I must admit that I am very much an active "laborer" in constructing gender. My reasons for doing this labor is to highlight and understand how the fundamental stratifying factor in our society mediates the construction of selfhood. Second, how the individual's "life story" is affected by the social representation of gender and how these personal stories in turn alter the story of "gender". This back and forth movement, de Lauretis (1987) argues, "leaves open a possibility of agency and self determination at the subjective and even individual level of micro political and everyday practices ...". The story of the "gendered self" is precisely that - about gaining agency, and being determined to recognize, acknowledge, confront and sometimes circumvent the gender hierarchy. The "gendered position" is not a fixed position, it is constantly rotating and therefore the individual inhabits multiple spaces simultaneously. Space takes on a whole range of meanings - some spaces are too dangerous and needs to be avoided, some are temporary shelters, some spaces are good platforms for venting anger, all spaces are full of obstacles - some major and some minor, and sometimes the individual has to redirect her journey, take alternate routes, create newer paths, realize the oppressive path that she has taken, and to make sense of

these "spaces", she needs to come to grips with multiple "times", her own past and women's' past and hence she feels the need to write "he(r)story" and rewrite women's stories.

These multiple "spaces" and "times" are both sites for experiencing life and "strands" for weaving the life story. Francoise Lionnet (1989) proposes that women's autobiography can be viewed as a *metissage* or braiding of various cultural forms and it is the "site of undecidability and indeterminacy".

When life is viewed through the gendered lens, history enters the narrative forcefully in a variety of ways, and to understand the uniqueness of women's experiences, I will adapt Bakhtin's (1981) method of constructing a chronotope in which, "Time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history" (p.84). I will adapt this principle to construct "gendered chronotopes" - a category unavailable in Bakhtin's classification.

In sharp contrast to the categories of self that I have discussed so far, the subjects (who are all women, of course) in this category differ both stylistically and in content. The previous categories, despite the internal differences in terms of their life experiences do share a similar world view. Whereas, all the women in this category agree on the "gender inequality" in the society, but sharply differ on the

nature of inequalities and how to confront it. Therefore the following stories are quite varied.

Chitra narrated her experiences as the eldest daughter in a middle class family, and being a wife and then a female student/thinker, repeatedly pointing out the "gender trappings" at each stage as she said,

" I liked studying ... I realized .. but what happened was .. my parents had already made up their minds .. about what was to be done with me .. there was no attention paid to me .. it was tough and then .. when I was in 9th standard my parents .. got me engaged to ... so barely 14 .. I don't think my 14th birthday had also passed .. I doubt it engaged to my present husband .. he had just gotten a research position at Bangalore university and he seemed to be an eligible bachelor .. to my parents .. ".

The forced arranged marriage at a young age marks the beginning for her "life journey", trying to escape from one kind of oppression and encountering yet another and this movement is charged with "time" - biographical, social and historical. Chitra's narrative very often is a mixture of humor, anticipation, anger, and irony and is filled with reinvoicements of the other and subsequent redefinition of the self. About her feelings on the marriage, Chitra said,

" Feel ... I don't know .. I wasn't getting along too well with my mother .. I was happy to get away .. another thing was I was a very proud person .. and I felt if they are in such a hurry ... to get rid of me ... I am too happy to leave .. my attitude was also that if I got married ... I would be on equal basis with my husband ,simply because their authority was complete..".

The transition from the parents home to the husband's household, after the initial "celebration of sexual bliss", says Chitra brought about a different set of problems and different awareness. At the time of marriage, she thought her

husband's "rural" upbringing being "rooted in family" would be more sympathetic to the plight of a young girl forced into marriage, instead she says, "he thought nothing of getting engaged to a 14 year old girl ... that shows how modernized he has become". There is a double-voicedness to her usage of the term "modernity". The rural culture that boasts about maintaining certain "old values" about human relationships meant nothing in a marriage with was conducted within a patriarchal structure. She simply changed her status from a daughter to a daughter-in-law. The movement from one "space" to another did not necessarily "liberate" her or provide the equal status that she had anticipated. The movement only brings about new awareness of "time", which becomes evident when she reflects on her parent's action,

" ..my parents were to all were very obviously modern, my mother was full of the idea of individuality ... she herself would talk about how certain books brought her to herself ... but no ideology will help you ... this is something that I keep wondering about .. they were very conventional people .. whatever they might have thought they thought .. but they didn't think at all ... they were just .. in fact I would say that their very modernity .. that made them think very clearly that here was a girl that was showing signs of rebellion and .. the best way to deal with her is to get rid of her .. in a matter of fact manner .. whereas I have seen a lot of traditional people .. my friend's parents who have generally thought of their children as more responsibilities than liabilities .. in getting me married .. the hurry was embarrassingly evident .. ".

When tradition and modernity is viewed through the gendered lens, the boundaries between them become very fuzzy, and they appear frighteningly similar. Chitra was merely transported as an object from a household that professed "modern ideals", and such an attribute is claimed by virtue of living in a big

city, to a "well educated" rural bridegroom who boasted about "old family values". The parents used the modern idea of individualism to shirk off responsibility and packed her off to another place to "grow up", and the husband used tradition to get her to conform. In both cases the "socio-cultural time" only became instruments of oppression; modernity betrayed her and tradition suffocated her. The socio-cultural clock operates in multiple ways in the gendered chronotopes.

The conflict that Revathi discusses is between biological time and socio-cultural time. To a large extent her story resembles the biographer's narrative - about accomplishments in school, her personality, her urban upper class upbringing that expected and took it for granted that she would become a professional woman. She fulfilled the expected norm and got married and came to America and secured a "prestigious job" in a financial company and purchased a suburban house, which Revathi said was the "traditional path". The "path" so far has been smooth and gender was not a topic in the discussion, and then the questioning of "womanhood" begins,

" had a miscarriage .. that was rough .. you start questioning ... you get preoccupied with your physical ability .. to bring a child .. I still go through that .. with my son I went through that .. I think what happens is .. this is something a lot of women can relate to .. sort of postpone things in your life .. it takes a long time to conceive ... then you go through such grief after the child is born ..".

An interesting intersection between the "biographical self" and the "gendered self" occurs in Revathi's narrative. The biographer's tale, as discussed earlier is about

fulfilling the "expected roles" and following the "traditional path". In Revathi's case the expected norm of the life course - a biological one was not accomplished "on time" and this raises a whole range of questions about "body" and "body clock" and about motherhood. At one point she said, "now I feel no one should have children". The disjunction between biological time and social time leads her into yet another conflict about her competency in the "public space" - the professional self and her incompetence and lack of training to handle the "private sphere" of the household as Revathi lamented,

" You know my parents did bring me up to be very upright and they gave me a lot of independence .. it was given that I would work and be a strong earning member .. which I was when I quit .. I was making a lot of money .. I was making over 125,000 .. that to me was a lot to give up ..you just got to do it .. follow your instincts .. back to my original thing .. I was not equipped you know .. basically to handle this household business .. I am not into the business of raising kids .. still I am a domestic person .. you just have to .. you take on responsibilities of life ..".

The life stories of Chitra and Revathi provide a glaring contrast to discuss the myriad ways in which time and space operates in the "gendered chronotope". Chitra wanted to get away from being a daughter and a wife and "walked away" as she said, "America would be the answer .. for all my problems", whereas metaphorically "America" (modern western upbringing) is the culture that Revathi was raised in and expected to be a part of. The "western" schooling that she received in various parts of India only trained her to do well in the "public sphere", but being confronted with

"domestic issues" and problems with "biological clock", she says,

"now I find that I want to go back to my roots .. may not be physically in India .. go back to the myths ... I want my cultural roots back ... after I had my daughter .. I think with a girl you have to worry more ... I am totally neurotic .. the more I think about myself .. I feel in any household the woman is the focal point .. in terms of bringing a home .. bringing up children .. much as we say equality .. my husband does a lot .. in terms of the house .. the emotional energy comes from the mother .. ".

In the gendered chronotope, the meaning of nation, tradition, modernity, public space and private space all achieve multiple layers of meaning. Nation is not a geographical location or a static culture, it actively becomes a "narration" which embraces the contradictory forces of collective and personal histories.

The spatio - temporal relations in the narrative about "nation", when constructed within the "gendered framework", produces a variety of links between personal and cultural/national history. Sometimes they replace each other, dismiss each other or confront each other.

In Kala's story, there is a distinct polarization of "India", "tradition", "female" and "America". "modern" and not necessarily "male" but "feminist". The brand of "feminism" for Kala is very much the liberal philosophy of "what is good for the goose is good for the gander" - a viewpoint that is often associated with "patriarchy" by many western feminists. However, I recognize the "productiveness" of such a viewpoint in Kala's life. She said,

" it was harsh ... I think my father obviously raised in India comes from the old school .. old way of thinking .. the old way of thinking I guess is to .. put it broadly .. women are ... subservient to men .. treated my mother and me in that sense .. something that I have always been frustrated with and it has been a problem .. there was a lot of hardened violence in the family .. between my parents ... a lot of arguments and fightings... ".

When I asked her how she was coping with it and defining herself, she said,

" It has been a real struggle .. because of that I have a lot of western ... feministic feelings at this point in my life .. as you know in Indian tradition they want the girl to get married at a certain age ... my parents think I have reached that age .. I am trying to battle this whole issue .. that women should be independent .. that is one reason why I want to further my studies .. that I will be able to stand on my feet .. I will never have to be dependent on another person that way ...".

The most immediate reality that Kala faces is domestic violence and subjugation of women in her family by male members. Her father took the family back and forth between India and America; the visits to India was to teach the daughter to be both a "proper Indian" and a "proper girl", therefore "gender" and "nation" are a package deal for Kala. She can't see one without the other and understandably so. All rules in the household - in the private space are implemented in the name of preserving culture. What liberates Kala is her dwelling in the public space of school - which is also American. Therefore being American means freedom, respect and dignity. Everyday she has to enter this American space to buy her freedom. Even to entertain the thought of domestic violence in American culture is too costly and too far-fetched: when I asked her about it she said she hadn't

sorted those things out. The most visible reality is violence and an expectation that she enters into an arranged marriage and remains to be a "good Indian". Kala needs to be an "American" to exercise her fundamental choice. I am not implying that all Indian women have to become "western" to choose their partners. That is not the case. I only want to give enough weight to Kala's sense of "Americanness", which is important at this time in her personal history.

The "flow" of the narration in the "gendered self" has an interesting momentum. Sometimes the story is narrated in a matter-of-fact form and reaches a climax when the "gender battle" begins. The narrative at this point gets intensified, the style of speaking changes, and anger is expressed, spaces are either amalgamated or broken into pieces, "times" exchange places. At other times, the life story could come with quite a force - talking about hopes, expectations, and accomplishments: the narrative is an indication of life's exuberance and vitality and once this flow hits the "gendered obstacle" there is dead silence. Mrs. Rukmini was describing her lively childhood - about her musical training, her intense relationship with her music teacher and other musicians, going to concerts, listening to discourses on great sages and philosophers, participating in radio programs and then she said,

"my father and mother .. because they were looking out for marriage .. at that time what can we do ... I learnt music before marriage ... till .. **the day before the wedding day ... and then complete stop ... from next day .. after marriage .. no music at all ... full stop**"

I have highlighted the portion when the voice was raised and the pain was clear in the voice. At this point the narrative becomes dull and lifeless and starts picking momentum when she discusses her reentry into the musical life after years of protests. She reflected upon this reentry in a poignant manner,

" after joining all those *Sloka* (Sanskrit recitation) classes there was some gratification ... and then I started learning music also .. even then .. the way you learnt in young age .. the voice .. the strength .. energy .. and to leave the breath ... hmmm ... only then I felt .. I have wasted life .. just giving birth to children .. and cooking in the house .. going to market to buy vegetables .. being so preoccupied with things ... I seemed to have avoided music .. I thought quite a bit about it .. ".

The loss and the absence of music is both literal and figurative. The energy is felt only when she talks about her engagement with music. Mrs. Rukmini said that she did not want her daughters to reproduce the "same history", she made sure that all her daughters were highly educated and one of her daughter became a well known dancer and through her Mrs. Rukmini said she found, " **plenty** of fulfillment " because her daughter has a "**tremendous** amount of devotion" in her art. The highlighted words denote joyous and proud expressions. When I asked Mrs. Rukmini what stories about the world she would write in her autobiography, she said she would discuss the changing lives of women, the difficulties faced by them to "find their voice".

In a similar tone Anu, who grew up in an upper class family, who lost her father at a young age said,

" I would speak about the position of women in India .. I would love to .. because what I have seen is my mother ... I had seen her becoming a widow at the age of 40 .. I had seen a transition of a woman .. like from I can say .. **if you have seen a colorful picture and you turn the page and look at a blank page** (long pause) it gives you a shock .. so I went through that shock ... looking at my mother at that age you know ... so I find that .. though we talk big .. though we say very many things .. but we have not really come across those hindrances ... women are still inferior to men in India .. atleast they are treated as one .. and they are still burdened with, I don't know what to call them ..".

The "blank page" is the bitter moment when the life/narrative comes to a stand still. The "flow" of life became stagnant not only by death of the spouse, but by the social customs that followed, which assigned her to specific spaces that are defined as inauspicious as Anu said, "she is barred from doing certain things" and "time" in her life is arrested as Anu said, "she was supposed to lead a very austere kind of life" and "not wear colorful sarees". Anu goes on to reflect on what she saw early on in her life,

" my father would not have been very happy .. if she went through .. partially .. (Anu earlier said that her father was a broad minded person) because you have to live in a society .. you can't run away .. so compromises are made .. because we are a little upper level, had it been some other women .. she would have to do all the things that the society has asked her to do .. my mother being an educated woman, being a doctor's wife .. having some amount of money .. atleast was saved of doing some other things .. she didn't have to go for absolute white sarees .. may be she was not allowed to wear bright sarees ...".

In Anu's story you find the intersection of class and gender; her mother belonging to an upper class family was exempted from certain rituals that are symbolically implemented to denote the "lifelessness of widowhood", but nevertheless was not totally immune to it as she said, "can't run away", no

space is "patriarchy free". It is only a matter of degree. The "objectification" of women bothered Anu so much that she preempts her life course to avoid certain kinds of indignities. She fell in love at a young age and got married to a person of her choice to avoid the rituals of an "arranged marriage" when she will be decked up and "displayed" to the prospective groom.

To conclude, in the gendered chronotope the road is full of obstacles, the journey at every step poses a different set of problems, different pits and different hurdles. Sometimes you can avoid them, sometimes you need to remove them and sometimes you need to pave a different path and ask others to take that path, and with respect to time, the woman has to come to grips with the past, present and the future.

VII. THE DIALOGIC SELF

The dialogic novel for Bakhtin is one in which the changing hero/heroine is in a constant interplay with the changing world. The self and the world are equally active forces, and therefore the development of the self is amidst and within the historically changing world. Bakhtin (1986) writes, "Man's emergence is accomplished in real historical time, with all its necessity, its fullness, its future, and its profoundly chronotopic nature" (p.23). Therefore such a text is saturated with "time". The dialogic self cannot talk about oneself without discussing the changing world that they inhabit. Therefore every axiological position that the

individual takes to "view" self is dense with time - a dialogic interplay between the "time of experience" and the "time of narration", and every creative act on the part of the individual is the product of historical necessity. Bakhtin accords no magical quality to creativity; instead it is inextricably woven with the "historical emergence". Since the individual development is linked to the historical development, the individual cannot speak about oneself as a product. A tight boundary about oneself has no place in a dialogic world view; it always unfinalized and open-ended, as Bakhtin(1990) writes about author/hero relationship in a biography,

".. the fundamental task is a *life as biographical value*, that is, the *life of a hero* is the fundamental goal, and not the inner and outer determinateness of the hero, not a finished image of his personality. What is important is not who he is, but what he has lived through and what he has done" (p.173).

To my initial question, "tell me something about yourself", all the subjects in this category expressed the difficulties of talking about themselves in some form or the other. It is not initial reluctance or discomfort, but as the narrative proceeded I realized it was a genuine concern about the possibility of talking about self. Mamta starts off saying,

"it is very tricky ... to sort of formulate you own identity because on one hand you are exposed to so much internationally .. so on one plane we .. all of us have now a days .. global reference point .. and then it begins with your religion, background .."

Mamta problematizes the very production of "self accounting" in a high-tech era that seemingly brings the world together

and yet she says we don't know enough and therefore, "how can I talk about myself" In a similar tone Sukumar asked me, "is it that easy to talk about self", to which I said tell me in whatever way you can. Sukumar in turn gave a sarcastic smile and said,

" ... it is very complicated ... it is not so easy ... because even if I tell some things .. it probably represents 40% or 60% of .. because it is very difficult to define self and it is very difficult to define people in USA with roots in India all the more complicated ..".

At the very beginning Sukumar lays out the unfinalizability of self, and the construction of selfhood becomes all the more difficult when he is in the process of understanding the world around him. He told me many times that to know himself he needs to understand American culture. The self cannot be made into an "entity" without the aid of the world around himself. Likewise Mausmi said, " well .. it is hard .. you know I am just going to rattle off whatever .. I really can't say everything I am .." She goes to say, "perhaps I could talk about where I come from". There is tendency on the part of the "dialogic self" to express doubt every step of the way. The language at every point indicates doubt, uncertainty and change - both about the self and the world around them. Purvik said, "Oh god! there is so much .. OK .. what I can first think is I come from a family of musicians and my father is an Engineer". Such accounts are not mere statements of demographic information. Later in the narrative it becomes clear that these factors in the subject's view contribute to

their world view. Anup was even startled by my initial question,

"My life story (laughs).. oh! .. I would steal a line from a friend ... that this is on his Ph.D. .. we had to write a bio sketch ... and he said .. his life story isn't ready to be written .. nothing is been done .. that is .. I had no life story .. for one thing .. I don't think so .. nothing in terms of worth writing about ...".

Lak: Alright .. anything worth speaking about?

Anup:(laughs) .. no .. not really ..

LAK: Perhaps your childhood ...

Anup:"I will tell you about my childhood .. not childhood .. what is the movie .. called ... *Chocolat* .. I do see movies and it is about a French woman going back to somewhere in Africa .. because she was born there .. she is driving .. she .. all memories .. very colonial .. her life ... whatever childhood is like .. and I was thinking that now I am sitting in the US .. my childhood seems to be a little interesting because now a days we live in building .. closed walls .. and stuff like that .. I don't think you see stars in New York ever .. I was in boarding school and just watching the openness of the thing on TV .. somehow I remember seeing movies in school ... we used to see in .. screen .. open air screen .. and the guy used to .. whenever the woman was naked or half naked with clothes .. the teacher used to put a hand on the screen ... the vision would never come up .. it was 19 ... by US standards it was 19th century or something .. now when I think back it was a beautiful sight .. we saw in open air .. the night was really dark and stuff ... and we had two mountains around us .. and there are the kiddies watching movies .. that is .. childhood .. that is what I remember the most .. I was quite nostalgic about that .. I don't think that can ever come back in a sense .. a chance to have so much openness .. we didn't have refrigerator .. in school .. we used to drink from *Matkas* (clay pots) ... we didn't have any of the so called modern amenities .. but they didn't seem to make much difference .. but now .. sometimes seeing the movies .. one realizes how nice and easy life was .. may be relatively more relaxed and no tension ..."

The childhood nostalgia is not a passive "memory" but an active "remembering". The individual past and the cultural

past comes in contact with the living present. In this stretch of talk so many "texts" speak out, all intersecting with each other - the heroine of French film, her journey to her childhood locations parallels Anup's recollection of the past. All aspects of nature - open-air, and mountains and darkness of the night are all animated with the discussion of people's actions and the social norms that prevailed at that time. These norms, and material goods (clay pots) contrast with the current norms and the goods that are available in the present day. It is not a mere statement of what was available then and what is available now, but he reflects on how such things organized his mental state. Every time I heard this stretch of talk, my own imagination stretched, making me visualize energetic and mischievous young boys watching films in the open air and giggling at the sight of a half clad woman and a somewhat embarrassed and stern boarding school warden trying to cover the film and distract students' attention.

This segment of Anup's life story illustrates various ingredients of dialogism. The narrative is "heterochronous" and these multiple texts are dialogized. They don't exist as isolated and disconnected units. They retain their uniqueness and yet connect to other texts. The existence of "multiple texts" in Bakhtin's view does not necessarily mean that the "heteroglossia" is dialogized (Morson and Emerson, 1990), instead each text serves not only as a vantage point to view the other, but they "interanimate" each other as they enter

into a dialogue and are made "alive". Since the texts don't synthesize or replace each other or mask the other (for example French film, Anup's childhood, his adult life in New York, etc.), they leave some cracks open which Bakhtin refers to as the "loopholes" in the text, which in turn prompts the reader to engage in her own creative acts.

The personal past in conjunction with the cultural past as Nietzsche (1983) points out performs "services" for the individual to "spin his web" and "give expression to his artistic drive". The usefulness of such a dialogic contact between the past and the present, Nietzsche (1983) explains as follows,

"If you are to venture to interpret the past you can do so only out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present: only when you put forth your noblest qualities in all their strength will you divine what is worth knowing and preserving in the past " (p.94).

In Mausmi's story I found the struggle to "preserve" some aspects of the personal past and the cultural past and the need to "change" other aspects of both her life and her small town's life. Mausmi is the daughter of a landlord from a village called *Chickpalya* , which literally translates into "small town". She initially resorts to an "idyllic chronotope" to describe her childhood association with this place. Mausmi said,

" first of all I am from *Chickpalya* .. it is a village ... but it is like a paradise .. even to this day none of my siblings have as much feeling for the place as I do ... my parents were trying to set up a home in Bangalore (which is a big city) .. but that house was great ... we and a library of books .. I would pack up all my favorite things and send it back to *Chickpalya* ... it is really a small village .. they grow sugarcane,

paddy, and then it is close to Mysore .. so that is another favorite city .. my mother comes from there .. she loves her hometown the same way .. so the charm of that town is in my bones .. I know all the street corners .. I mean just when I think about it .. I have come a long way baby .. people out there don't stretch beyond".

First of all Mausmi brings out the "tenderness" of the place which is also linked to the "innocence" of her childhood. She goes on to discuss the "smell of the people" in that place, and chasing goats in the paddy and sugarcane fields. Sugarcane is not just a crop that grows there, the place and her life are sweetened by it. Her later recollection of *Chickpalya* is not just "romantic", but her changing life is woven together with the changing village. She both understands the change and mourns the loss of certain aspects of life that comes with change as she said,

" I wish I could make it immortal ... I want to preserve its pristine .. its purity .. it is already getting corrupt .. corrupt because with electricity has come the radio and the television and bombarded ... we never had a shop there ... my house was the only one with electricity .. so the villagers would come .. and we would teach them to play carom or chess .. that was the deal everyday ... hang around smoke *bidis* .. discuss politics .. bring up their own life situations and problems ... but now **fortunately for them** .. there is electricity .. but along with it comes the vices of it .. like .. people were still using those beautiful *Bindiges* .. you know the copper and brass vessels ... four years later .. everything is plastic ... plastic has taken over .. women used to wear silver anklets .. now nylon sarees .. yellow sarees and pink petticoats .. very cute .. hmm ...TV commercials .. those are bad .. TV itself is rotten .. commercials put pressure on people to be a certain way ..".

Mausmi goes on to discuss her own need to "modernize" (coming to America and making it), the same kind of necessity that her villagers sought out. The most interesting part of her

connectedness with the village and the "usefulness" of village mentality came up when she was discussing her life as a waitress in America. Mausmi, being the daughter of the landlord, was fully aware of the power relations that existed between her and the villagers. When she was a waitress she encountered a well known and a powerful film maker and had to use that opportunity to get make a transition from a waitress to a future "film maker". She said she deployed all the tactics that the villagers used to gain favors from her father to secure a position in the film industry. She eventually did gain the position and she reflects on power,

" in villages I give lectures ...they really respect me ... because they think these are words of wisdom ... So I always whenever we go home .. lecture to every man we see ...(laughs) .. how women should be treated .. they should be sending them to school .. no dowry .. but the next thing you know they would have gotten their daughters married .. but still you got to do it ... we have the privilege .. I am sure they will listen to me rather than any politician or social worker .. it is the thing of trust ... my family has been there .. all people who are in any power situation .. like I do .. in their region .. they should go do something ... I hate to be treated like a *Zamindar* daughter ..but life is like this .. I have this privilege .. I always take the village bus .. because it is so much joy to me .. just to be there ...".

Mausmi is not "anti-power", she understands the dynamics of being both in a subservient position and in a position of authority. The concerns are only with the use and the misuse of power. Dialogism entertains no neutral spaces, power is intrinsic to all social relations, and it is such an awareness on Mausmi's part, I think, makes her narrative dialogic.

The "dialogic self" sees reality not only by traversing in and through various temporal zones and cultural spaces, but also through different "professional genres" - as an artist and a scientist and a performer, etc., an ability in Goethe that Bakhtin admired. Sukumar who is an amateur poet and a professional scientist said,

" your interaction in science does not start with science ... your interaction with other scientists starts only after you finish your social interaction ..only when you are completely interactive with others .. your science starts .. not the reverse .. your scientific interaction is limited if don't have social interaction ... because even to discuss any idea ... not just science .. even poetry or any other field .. you should have a mutual ...amount of respect .. between two individuals ... then it is an automatic flow ..".

All activities - scientific or non scientific has a human element to Sukumar. For that matter, he says the division between science and fiction is a false one. He grew up in a literary environment and said he aspired to be a scientist to get another view of reality, but said that he feels agitated with the emphasis on "impersonal" scientific pursuits, and science without "literariness" becomes useless and unethical as Sukumar said,

"genetically we can prove that there can be a lot of variation .. but I consider another perspective of human behavior where though everyone has a chance to be equal .. they don't tend to be equal ... because they don't know and the only way they can realize that they can be equal to others is through literature ...".

These are not just statements on science and literature, but they have a special place in Sukumar's life, they need to converge within him, and it does, but he is also aware of the fact that the external world - both the scientific and the

literary does not necessarily recognize that and in a frustrated tone he said, " science has become dry without literature, and literature has become useless without science" and both are in the race to "put things on paper". About his own writing, he said,

" When I write .. free style poetry ... but those are all confined to either a personal emotion or to communicate to another person by way of letters .. but only those people whom I have written .. they have sent to magazines ... they are publishing it ..".

I asked him if he would share any of his poetry with me. After initial reluctance, he read a poetry that he wrote to his friend in Paris about his "journey" to America. The following is my translation of the poetry which was written in Telugu:

Even as the preparation was underway I entered the battlefield,

I felt agitated thinking battle is useless

With everybody else I searched for noble goals and status

Those who go after desire without noble goals, I thought were my enemies

When I stood next to those who wanted to reach the skies with their noble goals, I shuddered

When I learnt that desire has taken its seat in the inner sanctum sanctorum of human soul, I was agitated

Desire, when it showed itself as I stood in front of the mirror

I closed my eyes and jumped into the battlefield

And am trying to excel in all crafts.

Sukumar's life story revolved around the theme of his desires, goals, his ideals and his failures. At no point in the poetry does he define himself as a finished product; even his "entry into the battlefield", which is a metaphor for life was not in an "unprepared state" but half way through the preparation and at any point in his life, Sukumar said he would have been only half prepared. There is an ironic humor in his poetry - all his lofty ideals and goals momentarily surrendered themselves to the basic "desire", which sets him in motion to act. Unlike the biographer, who only holds on to an ideal and expresses outrage at its violations, the dialogic self allows his life experience to understand the situatedness and limitation of the ideal. Life does not follow an ideal, but life comes face to face with an ideal and enters into a dialogue and it is such a confrontation that I find in Sukumar's poetry. When life follows an idea, that it removes the answerability factor as Bakhtin (1993) explains in "Toward a Philosophy of Act",

" There is no aesthetic ought, scientific ought, and - beside them - an ethical ought; there is only that which is aesthetically, theoretically, and socially valid, and these validities may be joined by the ought, for which all of them are instrumental. These positings gain their validity within the aesthetic, a scientific, or a sociological unity: the ought gains its validity within the unity of my once-occurent answerable life ".

Ethics, for Bakhtin is rooted in action. It is the concretely situated action that determines the nature of ideals, and not the other way around. If action is dictated by a thought then a whole range of factors that contributed to that action gets discounted. A characteristic feature of

the dialogic self that struck me was the individual's use of his or her own life experiences to discuss ethics or ideological stances. Purvik, a first generation immigrant who comes from a family of musicians said, "tradition .. I think in a negative sense tend to accept things simply because they come from parents and grandparents ". He told me in great detail how tradition becomes a "travesty" when it is viewed as a "given". By the same token he also pointed out that so called "modernity" can simply mean a fad or absence of any structure. He said his father always boasted about being an atheist, and needed no structure. The irony of it was that he was an alcoholic and therefore in Purvik's words "worshipped the bottle". The dialogic self has difficulty with any kind of definitive labeling.

The previous categories of self that I discussed earlier had a definite and a distinct theme and the life story revolved around that theme. The story of "dialogic self" has no distinct theme. There are only themes, and there is an ongoing dialogic tension between them. The story is not built upon a single plot, instead the "self" operates amidst several plots.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences between each of these categories.

CHAPTER 8

'WHO TELLS WHAT KIND OF STORIES'?

Connect! Connect! cries my disconnecting
 madness, remembering phrases,
 see the cycles,

But my watchers are silent as if
 they knew my truth is in fragments
 if they could, I guess

they would say, only the first thought
 is clear, the second is dim,
 the third is ignorant

A.K. Ramanujan, *CONNECT* 11

In the previous chapter I had discussed the typologies of autobiographical narratives. Each subject in the study was classified either as a "traveler", a "biographer", or a "seeker" and so on. Such a classification does not necessarily mean that subjects evidence only one type of narrative. The classification was based on major chronotopes that organizes the composition of the "plot" in the life stories. The complex structure of the narrative that was outlined represented the manner in which life experiences and actions are organized and narrated. My reliance is exclusively on the narration - the spoken words, and therefore at the very outset I want to acknowledge the limitations. I have not observed these individuals in any other contexts to make any further claims about their

¹¹ Excerpts from *CONNECT* by A.K. Ramanujan (1990). In Kaiser Haq (Ed.) *Contemporary Indian Poetry*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

"selfhood" or their actions in their lives. I take their narratives as their "representation" of their life experiences and my own analysis in turn is yet another "re(p)resentation" of their life stories, and therefore there are many layers of dialogic relationships as Bakhtin (1981) points out that we must never confuse "the *represented* world with the world outside of the text (naive realism) nor must we confuse the author-creator of the work with the author as a human being (naive biographism) .." (p.253). I take the Vygotskian (1987) approach that the narrative is both a bridge between inner thoughts, outward expressions and past actions and a creator of subsequent thinking, speaking and acting.

While each subject was classified as belonging to one category based on the dominant genre, the narratives do incorporate other genres and resemble other categories in structure and content. The narratives of the "traveler", the "biographer" and "clan consciousness" do not indicate any "emergence" of self. The conception of both the self and the world around them are in highly spatial terms. As discussed in previous chapter the "world" in a static form serves as a "backdrop" for the traveler and the grandeur of the ancestors defines selfhood for the "clan" individual. In both cases the "self" is hardly visible. The traveler's account is as a "matter-of-fact" - in a "flattened" manner without any emotional overtones, whereas the "clan" individual is quite boastful about where they come from. Other than the spatial

conception and the relative "invisibility" of self in the narratives, the traveler and the "clan" self do not share any other similarities. The biographers on the other hand define themselves in great detail and take pride in their aspirations and achievements and move in accordance to the rhythms of the socio-cultural clock, such as completion of schooling, getting married, becoming pregnant and being a parent and so on. The "clock" is conceived in spatial terms. Unlike the travelers who assume a neutral position in their stance towards the world, the biographers are strict moralists, especially when it concerns their personal actions and thoughts. Both the "clan" self and the biographers give a detailed account of their family situation, but the "clan" individuals speak about their heritage, whereas the biographers speak about their destiny. The image of the biographer is much more well developed than the "clan" individual.

The emergence of "self" can be seen in the narratives of the "seeker", the "scriptural", the "gendered", and the "dialogic" selves. Time operates in a linear fashion for the seeker, and the seeker does share some similarities with the biographer. In both cases the "destination" is important, but the biographer's plot is built on the "normative" accomplishments of life, whereas the "seeker's" journey is to climb up to higher forms of knowledge. Time has a somewhat "flat" quality in the biographer's narrative, as I discussed in the previous chapter there is no room for heroism in this

genre, and the individual tries to fulfill the tasks set by the society "on time" and makes every effort to uphold the norms of the society, whereas in the seeker's tale one sees ascension in time and space. It is like climbing to the mountain top, where "true knowledge" exists. In both cases the self is well developed.

Time flows backwards for the scriptural self, an element that they share with the "clan" self. The former celebrates the grandeur of scriptures, whereas the later extols the virtues of their ancestors. The resemblance stops here. The "clan" individual has a tendency to deify his or her ancestors, whereas the scriptural self is quick to humanize the deities. The relationship to the scriptures and literary texts is highly dialogic. The image of the individual is well developed and one observes change in the scriptural self unlike the "clan" individual. A variety of literary, philosophical and religious texts serve as the "lens" for the scriptural self to view the world. Unlike the seeker who takes only the abstract philosophical dimensions of the texts to make sense of himself and the world around him, the scriptural self rejoices in the "literariness" of human existence. Hindu scriptures provide a variety for this individual to recognize multiplicity and diversity in ideas and ideals. The "plot" in the scriptural story is organized around these texts. Even though one finds number of dialogic moments in the narrative, they differ from the "dialogic self" because of the absence of "historicity".

Time moves forward and backward for the "gendered" self, but the back and forth movement is restricted only to discussions of "womanhood". The narrative relies on the changing nature of gender relations in the society. Any discussion on personal life, or about places, or about scriptures are all evaluated from the "gendered position".

Time moves in multiple directions and they expand and contract for the "dialogic" self and there is no one distinct theme that organizes their life stories. It is rather easy to detect standard linguistic markers in relatively monologic narratives (traveler, biographer, clan), for they are keen on "objectifying" reality, as Bakhtin (1984) points out that "language differentiation and clear-cut speech characterizations" are the trade marks of monologic discourses. Bakhtin (1984) writes, "The more objectified a character, the more sharply his speech physiognomy stands out" (p.182). Whereas to identify standard linguistic markers in the narratives of "dialogic self" becomes difficult. The beauty of the dialogic narrative I think lies in its unsystematizability. The linguistic markers are not so clear cut in the narratives of the "seeker", the "scriptural" and the "gendered" self either, however they can be easily identified by the "plot" structure. The dialogic narrative does not necessarily lend itself to a strict linguistic analysis, and nor does it have a well defined plot structure, instead as Bakhtin (1984) points out, "what matters is the *dialogic angle*" between various texts, schools of thoughts,

their past experiences and present existence and so on. The "dialogic angle" is achieved by traversing in and through various cultural spaces and differing temporal zones. Herein lies the uniqueness of the "dialogic self".

The study shows that a majority of the subjects evidence "travel" narrative, followed by a biographical narrative. In

Insert Table I here

order to bring some scientific rigor to my classification, I recruited two other "raters" and asked them to classify a sample of the narratives according to the classification system that I had discussed. There was 100% agreement in the classification with both the "raters".

The distribution of the subjects in various categories of "self" indicate that almost one third of the subjects gave a "travel" narrative. A significant number in this category is not surprising given the fact that all the subjects in this study are Indian immigrants living in the United States of America. In the light of biculturalism, various aspects of culture and nation, especially the "everyday" behavior, and gestures are brought to surface and are made external to the "self", or in Lotman's (1985) words, "everyday behavior" becomes a "semiotic system". I am extending the argument made by Lotman (1985) about the eighteenth century Russian culture which experienced rapid social changes and such a change brought to surface those aspects of behavior that is normally

taken for granted. Likewise I would argue that when individuals move from one place to another, similar kinds of "semioticization" of culture occurs. Almost all the subjects who were classified as "travelers" in this study have lived in many parts of the world. It is not a straight immigration from one part of India to New York; these subjects have never lived in one place for an extended period, and the only movement they experience is the change in places and changing places also means organizing their daily lives to suit the demands of the "places". When there is such a rapid movement from one place to another, the self does not necessarily participate collectively in the "cultural changes"; instead the self "moves on the surface" from one changing culture to another changing culture, to the point when "culture" becomes "topicalized" as a conscious external element. Culture almost becomes a "cloak" to be adorned occasionally, which translates into wearing a saree or a dot on the forehead to be an "Indian" and wearing jeans to be an "American". Indians in India do wear sarees and jeans, but they are not consciously perceived as a "sign", whereas for the immigrant these aspects of everyday life including eating with fingers or with a fork, or cutting hair etc., gains specialized meaning as Lotman (1985) points out daily life acquires the "characteristics of the theater". Let me emphasize that the traveler's narrative is not theatrical, if anything it is very concerned with facts and is detail oriented - as a series of information, but the everyday existence seems

"theatrical" since so much attention is paid to details about clothing, behavior and to appearances and gestures. Every aspect of "selfhood" especially the external features are clearly defined and strict boundaries are drawn between these various features, but the "self" itself has no place in the narrative. They are like actors who play out different roles at different times and in different places, a mode of being that Nietzsche (Shrift, 1990) refers to as *Schauspiel*. While Lotman (1985) makes this observation about "theatricalization" of everyday life from a historical perspective on Russian culture, Lyotard (1991) offers a different angle about the "disappearance" of self in narratives in a rapidly changing world, which he refers to as "The Postmodern Condition". Knowledge, especially about the world, in highly computerized societies gains legitimacy when they are "truncated" and "atomized", and Lyotard points out that the "self does not amount to much" and a "person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits" (p.15). As I discussed in the previous chapter, the "traveler" is very keen on locating "people" in their settings and then assumes authority to "speak" about "other people". I take Lyotard's explanation to speculate that the "travelers" who claim to be "at home" any where are perhaps "enactors" of the "postmodern condition". Majority of the subjects in the "travel" category (see Table I) are in the age group below 50, and they believe that they "know the world" and know "how to make it" in the world.

The subjects are evenly distributed in all three age groups among the "biographers", which I think is not surprising, since the biographer's tale is a personal story - about their accomplishments and their families, and hence age or gender becomes irrelevant. Whereas all the subjects in the "clan consciousness" category are over 50 age group. If I had conducted my study in India, my guess is that I would have found more subjects in this category, since someone with a strong familial pride is less likely to immigrate. I am not implying that ones who immigrate do not have familial pride, but pride of "clan" comes from residing in the familiar territory .

Interestingly all the "seekers" are men, and the seeker insists on rational, universal, scientific knowledge that is disembodied, and such an epistemology is associated with the patriarchal world view (Haraway, 1991), whereas the "gendered" selves, who are all women are concerned with specific embodied realities.

To conclude, the construction of autobiographical and biographical narratives are an ongoing process and any analysis is speculative and historically situated both on the part of the "teller" and the "listener" of the story.

CHAPTER 9

**REMEMBERING MAHABHARATH:
THE "STORY TELLING TIME" AND THE "TIME OF THE STORY"**

Katha Amrito Saman (The story equals life giving nectar)

- A Sanskrit expression (Author and text unknown)

The closest English translation for the Sanskrit word *Katha* is "story", but this English word tends to convert the "active verb" into a "passive noun". Etymologically, the word *Katha* is derived from the Sanskrit root *Kath*, which means "to converse with, tell, relate, narrate, speak out, explain" (Monier-Williams, 1956, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary) and *Katha* therefore best translates as an act of "storying" or "telling" which includes the tellers, the tales, and the listeners. The dialogical angle is fundamental to the *Katha* activity. A common expression to begin a story very often is not necessarily, "let me tell you a story", but "shall we tell ourselves some stories" or "shall we do some storying", or "do you want to spin some stories"? *Katha* is not just a single story, but it is at once a personal, social and a spiritual one. At a subjective level my concerns are with the ways in which the individual makes connections with the "all pervasive" social and spiritual text. The relationship that one establishes with the text is dependent on both the level of knowledge, and the degree of engagement with the text,

which in turn is dependent on the modes of encounter with the text.

Men and women of Indian origin whether they have lived in India or outside India carry with them some sense of the cultural past through the transmission of epic tales, often in a transmuted form via popular magazines, films and songs. Epic tales are narrated, sung, written, dramatized, carnivalised and recently televised. These various modes have differential appeal and impact on the individual. The impact also varies from one epic to another. The epic, *Ramayan* has greater religious overtones than *Mahabharath*. In general one could say that *Ramayan* is and is treated as an "ideal" text that lays out the code of conduct for the individual. The story of *Ramayan* is about kinship, love, honor, duty, and sacrifice, whereas *Mahabharath* is about conflict and revenge in almost every sacred relationship (mother/child, teacher/disciple, god/devotee). The two texts often suggest a different course of action for similar conflicts. In recalling *Mahabharath*, or the ritual of "telling epics", subjects often tie the event to *Ramayan*, and draw comparisons. The *Mahabharath*, barring *The Bhagavad Gita* does not have the same "sacred status" as *Ramayan* since the story is about perennial human conflicts; very often individuals do not purchase or treasure a printed book for the fear of creating rifts in the families. The story can be told orally; the superstition is only towards a concrete printed book. The

nostalgia of Mahabharath is inseparable from the nostalgia of other "epic tellings" and myths.

In the first interview session (previewing session) I had asked all the subjects about their encounters with Mahabharath (See Appendix I for semi structured interview questions). I had also asked them to recall the names of as many characters as they could from Mahabharath. All the subjects in the study (100%) were able to recall more than twenty characters, especially the central characters in the epic, and all of them said that they were either intrigued or captivated by the text. The variation, however was in the level of exposure and the degree of engagement with the text.

Based on the interview narratives on encounters with Mahabharath, I rated each individual's exposure in various modalities and their engagement in each mode on a Likert type scale (see Appendix I). A significant number of subjects ranked high on the oral mode (42%). The nostalgia of Mahabharath becomes emotionally charged and has multiple strands when the text is encountered orally as Vinod recalls,

" Actually I learnt Mahabharath from my family because like me .. if I am religious .. my parents were also religious .. as I told you .. I lived in a village .. my grandfather was the first person to get any kind of education ... in the whole village.. so everyone will come night after dinner .. of course only the males they will come and chit chat .. one thing my grandfather .. he used to smoke .. I never liked smoke .. I used to fill the .. other things he told me was always sit with people who are discussing something solid .. to the extent he never even allowed me to sit with other female relatives .. saying they usually gossip .. I am talking about a village .. my grandfather will tell some stories from his life .. and then somebody will start some religious stories .. like Ramayan or Mahabharath .. so this is how I slowly and slowly.. I picked up ...".

The story telling scenario is very rich and clear in Vinod's recollection. The ritual is meant to be in the company of "wise men" and to "learn" the scriptures and this learning activity is purposeful - to avoid the "women folks" who gossip and to be indoctrinated into the "men's gathering", which is supposed to instill discipline in the growing boy. Therefore Mahabharath for Vinod translates into "concentration", "discipline", and "education". Even when he recalls some segments from the story, he focuses on Arjun's (one of the heroes) ability to focus and concentrate, his archery skill, his disciplined relationship to his teacher and his accomplishments. Vinod said that these are the aspects that one should "look for" in Mahabharath and finds Arjun to be a source of inspiration, and he identifies his grandfather with Bheeshma, who is the grand patriarch of the Hastinapur kingdom in Mahabharath. Very often Bheeshma and his grandfather switch places; they experience similar frustrations with the "younger lot" in households who are reluctant to uphold the "ideals" set by the "old and wise". Vinod who is a scientist by profession was classified as a "biographer" in his "life story" narratives, and hence he focuses on ideals and proper code of conduct among various characters and pointed out the destruction that came about as a result of violating the "code". Atul, on the other hand has a different memory about Mahabharath and as a result has a different relationship to the text as he says,

" My earliest encounters with Mahabharath was .. must have been when I was 4 or 5 years old .. my paternal

grandmother .. there were about 7 or 8 cousins .. all of us were more or less same age .. and we used to live two blocks from each other and every night pretty much .. we would meet at my grandparent's home and my grandmother would regale us with stories from Mahabharath .. Ramayan .. Upanishads .. all I knew is we used to love them .. we used to love listening to her ... I think it was more our relationship to her ... I remember we used to fight as to who sits closest to her .. who puts his head on her lap .. as we grew older our relationship changed .. she was much more of a disciplinarian".

The recollection of Mahabharath for Atul also meant recalling his relationship with his grandmother and his cousins and he mainly focuses on the childish pranks of Krishna, his relationship to his friends and older women in the village, which is intertwined with his own childhood friendships. Mahabharath becomes meaningful only when it is connected to these childhood incidents as Atul says,

" what I remember the most is really the atmosphere of the family .. and us kids coming together .. it is really hard for me to remember what story she told .. or the characters .. or the feel for it"

Likewise Rupak said,

" my grandfather always used to tell the story .. that is how we used to eat our food ... I think that is one of thing I remember in childhood ... we all used to sit around .. and he used to give food ...and we wouldn't eat until he told a story ... one thing that stands out in Mahabharath is there are lot of injustices portrayed .. power and greed .. and he would tell about families and politics ..

The "narrative time" and the "narrating time" often keeps rotating and epic characters often exchange places with either the story tellers and other versions or other contemporary figures as Sambhu recalls,

" He (father) was certainly pivotal in his story telling .. he used .. now when I listen to it I laugh .. he has a certain lilt and tone .. he said .. OH! you are

doing this to me .. the time will come and I will kill you ... and then I would be like .. then what happened .. then Duryodhan walked .. played with his mustache .. and then said ... this kind of stuff .. it was colorful .. it was vivid .. it was very stark ..stylized to depict certain emotions .. I can understand its context .. but Duryodhan was more interesting ... than that ... I see him more like **Al Pacino** ...".

Interestingly, for Sambhu the ancient epic hero/villain Duryodhan is like the modern hero/villain Al Pacino and not the other way around. We observe the insertion of modern day iconographic representation of "villainy" into the epic character. The modern day western melodrama of epic proportion - the Godfather comes face to face with the ancient Indian epic, and in that process the character of Duryodhan exchange places with Al Pacino. Duryodhan is simply not like Al Pacino, but later on in the narrative the attributes of Al Pacino - the insidiousness of his character, his loyalty to his friends and his ruthlessness towards his enemies are all written into Duryodhan's character to modify him. It is very crucial for Sambhu to change the image of Duryodhan (remove his "mustache", change his "gruff" voice) to give meaning to this character as Bakhtin (1990) points out that any understanding requires "converting an image into a symbol" since it gives "semantic depth and perspective". There is no categorical boundary between the "represented" world of the text and the individual's representation of that world. Sambhu's father's depiction of Duryodhan - his twirling mustache, robust built and loud voice are all means of representing "evil" for the young boy, and such a depiction is also a reflection of the times, whereas Sambhu

at this point in his life inhabits a different historical moment, both in his personal history and in the cultural history, where "evil" is not necessarily repulsive but sometimes even seductive. As a result number of exchanges takes place - between father and son, text and reader, between cultures and between past and present. It is such an active transformation of the text that Lotman (1990) refers to as auto communication - the I-I system. Lotman argues that this system of communication adds not new messages but new codes that leads to the redefinition of both the individual and the idea alike. It is not just Duryodhan who is transformed but the idea of "villainy" also undergoes change; the concrete character and an abstract idea are inseparable, akin to the inseparability of the past and the present, and therefore as Lotman (1990) points out "memory" is like a generator. It is forever refurbishing and reframing the past and the "interrelationship between cultural memory and its self-reflection is like a constant dialogue" (p.272). This kind of transformation, both Bakhtin and Lotman argue is not necessarily a "trivialization" of the grandeur of the past but is only an enrichment of the past. It facilitates understanding both the past and the present simultaneously and such a co-existence Lotman argues is not "anti scientific, although it is not scientific either. It exists alongside the scientific image of the past like another reality and interacts with it also on the basis of dialogue" (P.272).

The recollection of oral encounters with the text is often very spontaneous and the concerns are not so much about the "fact" of the story, but about the "event" that they participated in; the arguments they had with the story teller and other listeners. Mahabharath is a "bed time story", a "serious time story", a "leisure time story", as Uma recalls,

" As soon as the evening lamp is lit .. my father used to tell stories .. I have heard so many times .. especially in Delhi what happens is .. lights go off .. there will be load shedding ... so we don't have anything to do .. we just light candles and sit around ... we are really bored .. we want to listen to a story ... Mahabharath began ... "

The beginning of Mahabharath is not just a story, but also the beginning of contesting viewpoints, debates and quarrels. The "epic drama" and the "family drama" go hand in hand and such an integration is as automatic as any other daily activity. Mahabharath is also a "food time story" and the tale gets digested along with the food and becomes an integral part of self as Uma remembers,

" my mother would mix rice and feed us in hand ... then she would tell stories .. my brother was notorious for not eating .. so he had to be stuffed .. so stories were told ...".

The story telling ritual can occur at any time and at any place. Some individuals recall such incidents when they were drawing water from the well or while washing clothes or dishes or during cooking or eating and issues of authenticity and the level of knowledge and the exact sequence of the story becomes irrelevant and the characters are not so distant and revered but a colloquial language is used to describe them as Anup said,

" I told you I was in joint family .. my granny used to tell .. my servant .. cook .. I knew a lot about Mahabharath as a story .. my dad is a great dabbler .. without knowing anything ... has been a trip in my house .. my folks involved suddenly late in his life to do a lot of *Pujas* (prayers) ... my mom has always done it . she never made a issue out of it .. my dad a big thing .. so he starts off with Krishna and Hindus and all that .. so there is a whole bunch of people and my grandmom telling .. everybody holding the floor ... without anybody knowing ... who knows ... so I had views ... I heard Narad Muni .. he is important .. my favorite is that grand old man of India .. Bheeshma .. I liked him for some reason ... Krishna was always playful .. and one of the reasons I liked Krishna was that he was a very sexual guy .. he seemed like a fun guy ... the whole idea .. stealing butter ... lifting mountains ".

In Anup's recollection there are several actors - his father, grandmom, himself, the cook, and the epic figures - Bheeshma and Krishna.

Even though the recollections of oral encounters are rich, the meaning and significance that the text has varies from individual to individual. For instance, engagement with the epic for Vinod is listening to something "solid" and the text is a kind of "spiritual and ethical reservoir" that he draws from to set the course of his life and uses the incidents from the text to avoid the "wrong paths", and for Mrs. Anusuya the epic is one grand story like any other grand literary works and these other texts don't necessarily talk to each other or exchange viewpoints, whereas for others like Uma and Atul the text is the "site" for establishing and contesting human relationships, and their focus is on everything that happened around the "story telling" time. They often go "around" the actual story, almost circumambulating the story, whereas Anup goes "in and out" of

the story, making both the characters in the story and those around him alive, often identifying and distancing himself from these characters. There is an active involvement of the subject when they remember the "oral tellings" of the epic, and history and historicity becomes an integral part of the narrative which becomes clear in Mrs. Saroja's narrative,

" I used to go to radio station program .. my mother used to bring us up with proverbs ... all proverbs .. when we were young we wouldn't understand the meaning of proverbs .. interest also .. we never had ... but now in life .. my mother's every proverb .. in real life becomes useful ... and tell Mahabharath stories .. about Krishna and Draupadi .. I had five sisters and so five brothers-in-law ..so they used to call me Draupadi .. my mother would say .. Draupadi used to ask questions intelligently .. she would tell such things so any time in life don't just go by what others say .. but on your own ask questions .. we need such intelligence .. we can't nod our heads like a buffalo ... that is how we grew up .. now everything seems profound ...".

Mrs. Saroja often said that she "grew up" with the text. The epic mediates her growing awareness of the complexities of human life. Unlike Vinod who "draws" from the text, Mrs. Saroja both speaks from the epic and to the epic. She was classified as the "scriptural self" and hence her "life story" and "epic story" are inseparable.

The "story" of one's life and the "life" of the epic story are inextricably woven together since it is through the stories that everyday interpersonal negotiations take place. The potency and the significance of the stories in one's life could be felt in most people's recollections. The story telling event is rarely ritualized; often narrative fragments are highlighted to suit the situation as Mrs. Rukmini said,

" In young age ... in my household .. I used to live with my grandmother and grandfather ... they would generally .. everyday ... when we talk .. they would say like Duryodhan or Draupadi .. they will give examples .. in my house people talk a lot .. if we fight .. they would say don't be like him ... or be like her .. comparison ..and then you ask .. who is he ...grandfather .. everyday .. he would tell a story .. not regularly .. Mahabharath from the beginning .. like small episodes ... like this at appropriate times .. bits here and there .. I don't think they would tell continuously ... "

These narrative fragments become meaningful and get formalized when she goes to school and encounters books. However the nostalgia of Mahabharath is richest when they recall the oral encounters, and in thinking back many subjects recognize the extent to which the story was modified to suit the situation and in fact appreciate such alterations as Mausmi said,

"Hinduism is great because of this .. so magical and mysterious .. there are no definitions .. there is no definite .. I don't want definites it shouldn't be set of rules ... gives freedom to do anything ... I like it .. my mom used to tell stories ... her own interpretations .. totally crazy interpretations .. Oh! another story .. why I loved .. I have a real fantasy in my life ... even now .. one of my favorite stories in childhood was ... whenever there was thunder in my village .. lightening .. often electricity would go out .. and it is all dangerous .. so there is a big courtyard inside the house .. so rain water comes in .. you could see thunder and lightening ... my mother would say .. nothing to be scared of .. because Krishna is riding .. the horses and thunder is the sound of horses .. the chariot wheels .. and he lashes his whip on the ground .. such a wonderful story .. there is no way you can write about it ... ".

Stories are often altered and edited by the adult to suit the child's mind or to promote a certain kind of thinking, and certain set of values as Anu said.

" .. in my place .. there is a verandah .. so in summer evenings .. I used to sit with my grandmother ... she

used to be reading ... and then she would narrate few stories .. she used to change them you know .. like make it perfect for the kid .. I used to realize that later on ... like when Draupadi's *Vastraharan* (disrobing) was taking place .. she said he just tried to catch hold of her saree .. but she never went into detail ..."

The memory of the story itself is contingent upon these amendments that are made to create the narrative pull and it leaves a lasting impression on the individual and therefore what they seek from these stories are the multiple relationships they produce as Mausmi says, " I don't want to find the truth (about Mahabharath) ... I am interested in my reactions to it ..". The reaction often is both towards the character in the story and the story teller as Kedar said,

" When I was young my mother used to tell these stories and take me to movies .. sometimes the most crucial ..Duhshassan ... in Draupadi *Vastrbharanam* (disrobing of Draupadi) I used to fight with her ... why can't Bheem go hit him .. so that used to be the boiling point ..."

In order to calm the son, the mother had to create another story or reinterpret Bheem's inaction, and newer issues and questions crop up. The story is never resolved, it is always unfinalized and left open-ended. The important function is to get the individual agitated about the injustices in the story. Hence selfhood is brought into the picture and is set in motion to imagine, think, ponder and question as Bhairav said,

" story tellings .. I used to absolutely enjoy them .. some of them were fantastic .. probably because of the narrator .. beautiful .. what was appealing .. wonderful speaker ... oratorical ability .. thoughts keep flowing .. and just .. recitation is so beautiful ... you can actually visualize what is happening ..."

The oral telling not only establishes a relationship, but also triggers a whole range of questions and fosters inquisitiveness and starts the imaginative act as Jayashree said,

" .. for a child when you are listening to stories, you are not only listening to stories but you are listening to the person telling the stories and you are listening to the love that is being given through that .. so it makes it beautiful ... so you get a lovely feeling and you remember the story .. if he is good story teller, he can tell exactly what *Abharana* (jewelry) they are wearing .. all you can do is imagine there .. I remember working a lot of overtime ..."

When individuals imbibe the story as a part and parcel of growing up they become "bearers" or "enactors" of cultural texts. Knowledge of the epic is an "everyday concept" and Vygotsky (1987) points out that this spontaneous concept is extremely fluid and automatic. It is like learning one's native language and the individual is not consciously aware of the formal structures of the language. However the weakness of everyday concept as Vygotsky points out "lies in its *incapacity for abstraction* " (p.169). The spontaneity of this kind of everyday knowledge is akin to what Lotman (1985) refers to as "behavioral texts" that members of a cultural group enact without problematizing it. Lotman writes,

" They are directly immersed in it through direct use and do not notice when, where, and from whom they acquired it. It's mastery seems so natural that such questions are meaningless " (p.68).

A number of subjects especially those who ranked high on the oral mode (42%) said that they can never pin point their exact encounters with Mahabharath. When the exposure to a large degree is exclusively oral the text becomes far too

automatic and their rendition of the story or plots from the epic are fragmented and taken for granted. The boundaries between epic story and life story are completely erased. The individual is completely submerged in the tale. However, there is a difference in the orientation towards the story when the "oral mode" is coupled with other modalities, like frequently listening to formal discourse by expert story tellers. In India such discourses are called "*Katha Kalakshepam*" which literally translates into - "the experience of time through story". The task of the story teller is take the listener on a trip to differing time zones and expose the richness of the story. The formal discourse along with other modes such as books, drama, and the commentaries on them - both formal accounts in newspapers and magazines and informal discussions in households on those formal presentations, leads to the creation of even more *heteroglossic* texts. This makes the oral tellings more meaningful, since the formal exposure serves as sharp analytical tools and brings to surface the automatic informal knowledge of the story. The "casualness" of the daily oral interaction achieves some degree of seriousness. Vygotsky (1987) gives a brilliant explanation on this point. He points out that the movement of the spontaneous concept is "from a thing to concept", whereas the flow is the opposite for a formal scientific concept - "from the concept to the thing". These two modes of knowledge Vygotsky writes may have different histories or different origins, but nevertheless

they are in a constant dialogic interplay facilitating individual development. The spontaneous concept grows "bottom-up", whereas the scientific concept comes "top-down", and through series of developmental tasks the scientific concept pulls the everyday knowledge which is buried deep down to the surface level and the everyday concept in turn brings the formal scientific knowledge to the familiar concrete zone. The internalization and externalization of these two kinds of knowledge is necessary for development as Vygotsky (1987) writes, "The link between these two lines of development reflects their true nature. This is *the link of the zone of proximal and actual development* " (p.220).

In my study when individuals go back and forth between casual oral recollections to formal discourses, they start explaining the characters, the intricate plots and actively use other "texts" which includes commentaries, other literary texts, performances, and life experiences to make sense of the Mahabharath as Mr. Radharam remembers,

" Certainly my father was .. he would tell us from Ramayan and Mahabharath .. he used to tell us from Ulysses .. hindsight also .. nobody .. Mahabharath always started with family stories ... but then those days this *Katha Kalakshepam* .. was very much on ... so once in a while when we were in village .. we had the opportunity to listen to it .. they would extol .. one particular episode ... one particular character .. that also developed our concept of things ... ".

Mr. Radharam goes on to discuss the character of Bheema, who is one of the Pandavas. Bheema is a wrestler in the story and typically described as having only muscle power.

Mr. Radharam observes that such stereotypes are erased with "newer" interpretations as he said,

" Unless we get new inputs .. as known to us today ... I think Bheem was a bit of something like ... dumb person .. massive ... and .. who didn't go out of his way to do mean and immoral things .. whereas Duryodhan specialized in that ..".

Mr. Radharam points out that Bheem's intelligence and Duryodhan's virtues remain unnoticed in the casual daily discussions, whereas the expert story teller directs the listener's attention to these traits. When the level of engagement in various modes are intense the individual both performs and analyses the text. Through the performance they reveal inscriptions of the text in themselves and again take an outsider's position to do the analysis as Mr. Rajan said,

" Yes ... I have listened to a lot of *Harikatha*, *Katha Kalakshepam* .. *Pravachanam* as we call it .. yes I have always been fond of it in India as well as here .. everytime I see ... I find something .. a new dimension .. a new facet at a particular exponent .. that enhanced my ... "

He goes on to enact a few snippets from various performance traditions and then again raises questions. The questions that the casual oral mode raises are sorted out or answered by formal encounters. Vasu discussed at great length about how he was bothered by Bheeshma's (the grand patriarch of Hastinapur kingdom) silence during the dice game and Draupadi's *Vastraharan* (disrobing scene). Vasu said that he was obsessed with the thoughts about Bheeshma's inaction. He said how could a "wise man" who is supposed to be a repository of knowledge, virtue and valor silently witness when basic codes of ethics are violated. Vasu's encounters

with the aphoristic Upanishads allows him to sort out this nagging question and he said,

" .. and finally when things don't work out, he realized that these people are really bad. You cannot do anything about it. Nothing wrong in trying to correct a person and this where another important proverb that I would like to say which is *Upadeshohi murkhanam prako payana shantayeha. Bhayah panam bhujanganam kevalam visha vardhanam*. All that this says is, trying to give some advice to some real idiot who doesn't want to understand you is not going to cool them down, it is going to *prakopayana shanteya* , it is going to provoke the anger and not cool him down. It is like giving milk to the cobras, if you think cobras are really gods and you are going to help them, you are basically *Kevalam visha Vardhanam* , you are basically increasing the poison in the serpent. It is the same concept ..."

Vasu then goes on to point out that many intelligent generals in Nazi Germany were unable to counsel Hitler, which is similar to some of the limitations and the frustrations that Bheeshma experiences.

An active understanding, Bakhtin (1981) explains entails borrowing other's words, commentaries and view points and partially appropriating them to make sense of the given text. It is not a simple mechanical "renting" of other's words but a partial synthesis of "other's words" with one's conceptual system. I do want to emphasize the "partial" because segments from other texts are used selectively to answer a question and again raise newer questions. While Vasu uses the stanza from the Upanishad and a more contemporary reality of Nazi Germany to make sense of Bheeshma's silence, he again problematizes the "silence" when he says, "the danger then is we can justify" and "sometimes we need to protest". Herein lies the openendedness of both the memory and the text.

The extra-textual material, whether it be other versions of Mahabharath, other modalities or other literary and cultural texts have a tendency to raise questions, provide answers, validate viewpoints, expose each other's limitations and strengths and each text/version as Mrs.Sarla points out "addresses a certain need in you" at a given moment. Sometimes other versions "fills in" the gaps created by the others as Ulupi points out,

" .. there are two factors that are added in these .. (dance, drama, and films) .. one is romance .. I mean parents don't tell you .. why Pandu died and stuff .. we just know he did (laughs) ... so you don't find out about all this and the other is comedy .. it is nice to know that romance exists .. and it makes it more worthy .. in terms of watching .. when you read it ... is different ..."

Interestingly, in the current study those who ranked "high" on oral mode also ranked high on other modalities. The oral encounters with the epic were both fluid and crystallized; it was both a part of daily life and the event was also ritualized which becomes clear in Sukumar's recollection,

" Oh! my grandfather and grandmother used to tell ... everyday in the evening ... not just this story ... everyday .. protocol ...grandfather used to sit in easy chair .. we would sit around him .. he would tell stories in a detailed way .. every step .. as you would read in a book .. not just this .. even English stories .. the story that went on for a long time was ... Count of Monte Cristo ... (laughs) I thought it never ended .. Shakespeare .. included with that was Ramayan and Mahabharath ..."

The recollection of Mahabharath therefore comes along with Alexander Dumas, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky and his grandfather. These other texts are not mere recollections, but they are

actively used to make sense of various segments from Mahabharath. They often bring sensitivity to a familiar tale as Mukta said,

" you know Rabindranath Tagore .. he has a very good verse on Karna and Kunti .. *Samvad* .. it is just the conversation between them .. it is written so beautifully ..".

She then starts reciting them and gives an analysis of Karna and Kunti.

The oral telling to a large extent disseminates the tale in daily life and when the oral telling is coupled with instruction and books, the tale gets formalized and establishes a unique and an intense relationship with the individual. However, not all subjects who have an intense relationship with the text have had the experience of "oral tellings". Often, either a formal literary training or artistic pursuits and interests establishes a strong bonding. The intensity however is devoid of the spontaneity and the growing up nostalgia as Chitra, who is a student of literature notes,

" Actually mine was a very dry urban upbringing .. there wasn't *Harikatha* (formal discourses) sort of thing which would have been great ... I would have enjoyed that sort of thing ... my husband was brought up in that sort of thing .. he has seen all night plays ... and things like that .. but I read mostly .. I read comic books also..."

Very often Chitra would mourn the absence or the loss of oral encounters in her life, but at the same time she would display an intense relationship and some sophistication in her analytical skills in making sense of the text as she points out,

" The whole of is quite interesting ... I like it for its .. for me its interest is in some .. stories .. some stray incident that is finally put in place ... in the whole mosaic ... and I like the grand canon .. which allows so many stories to be introduced without any dogmatic heavy moralizing .. and I like Mahabharath for its lack of moralizing .. Ramayan is heavy with it .. Mahabharath is more free of it .. I won't say it is neutral .. but because the characters are not so ideal ... they are full of flaws it allows for more identification ..".

The broader story, the intricate plots and specific characters, all achieve special meaning in Chitra's recollection. In a similar tone Purvik, who is formally trained in music and is familiar with various performance traditions said,

" .. it was more through books .. than .. I can't read Telugu but we can speak .. probably watching dramas .. I am a great fan of old stage actors ... and I used to listen to tapes and the way they gave delivery ... so listening to that .. that type of literary ... my aunts because they were dancers .. I used to see it from that perspective also .. they used to tell stories while it was going on .. how the expressions are .. no one ever told me a story ...".

For Purvik the introduction to Mahabharath is tangential, but the relationship to the text and the characters are intense and direct as he says,

" what Karna went through when he was teased by people as *Sooth putra* (son of a charioteer) ... alienated .. and then found his own identity .. those kinds of things made me feel very emotional about it .. and I found my identity through it .. some kind of strength ... I appreciate each character the way it develops .. the persona .. and everything ... Shantanu .. the mistakes he made .. how it affected Bheeshma .. in childhood .. Ganga Devi .. Amba .. her story .. the revenge that she took .. that I saw only in Indian story.. the purity of a woman's love .. how sacred that was for her .. how there is a fine line between love and hate .. she wanted to kill him and the moment she sees ... she also sent out love almost .. what you see on ~~the~~ surface is not always there inside .. you know ...".

The love for Mahabharath for Purvik is more immediate, the identification that the text allows and the complexity that the text points out and it is not "sweet memory" - like a grandma's tale. The grandma's tale establishes a personal and an emotional relationship with the text and this childhood nostalgia in association with other formal sources establishes multiple relationships (see Table 2 and Table 3 for distribution of subjects according to level of knowledge and the nature of relationship).

The level of knowledge and the engagement with the text is generally low when the encounter with Mahabharath is via abridged books, comic books and occasional films. These individuals would generally know the accurate "story line" and the story is recalled in a linear fashion. When I asked them what their "feel" for Mahabharath is they would often repeat the story and make generalized remarks such as "it is a long story" or "perhaps it is a big part of India" or "Indian culture". The tale is "generally there" and does not leave a lasting impression on the individual as Mamta said,

" Yeah .. mild (oral tellings) .. to me atleast I didn't have that sustained interest .. it didn't have reverberations in the rest of my life .. films .. I don't even remember those names .. but nothing made a fantastic impression on me .. I have read Rajaji's .. I have read comics ...".

The tale is only a leisure time story or a chance encounter as Mr. Murugan said, "once in a while it would fall into my ears". When the relationship to the text is highly impersonal, individuals often resist speaking about specific plots and characters and rely on "what experts say" or as

Mohini would often say, "most people think" or "the general opinion is" or "the way things are in India", or "from what I read". The story is basically reported and Ratna would often recognize that the story beckons her; she would often say, "it is a thought provoking epic", but cannot go into internal dynamics of the story to find out what it is that allures her. I asked all the subjects what their favorite part of the story was to which the subjects who had a very personal relationship gave me an endless account, whereas those who had a distant relationship simply acknowledge their ignorance as Mrs. Padmaja said,

" When you read this only some people can understand ... when you get all the side stories .. for humans ... to read all that these days who has the time .. all people go to work, even to worship god ..we don't have time..".

The text for Mrs. Padmaja is fixed in "ancient times", it symbolizes everything that "old and traditional" and does not necessarily address modern concerns. However there is a greater concern for "facts" and "expert opinions" and when she recalls the story, it is more "factualized" and not necessarily "narrativised". Ravi also has similar concerns on authenticity and he would often begin an anecdote as "the whole idea revolves around the fact that everything depends on ...".

When the relationship to the text is impersonal, Mahabharath becomes a "set of facts" and the focus is on the "length of the story" and the "innumerable characters" and not necessarily on the complexity of the plot structure. The sheer length of the story, Nanda said makes it difficult for

the adult to narrate it to the child, whereas a grown up can handle the number of characters in the story. The interest is in "gaining knowledge" of the story - the sequence and the causal structure and transmitting this "cultural tale" to the younger generation as Malathy said,

" I would teach my children Mahabharath .. well to myself I could have lived without Mahabharath .. if I did not know I would still be around and still be the same way ... so I can't see how it can have direct impact on anything .. I feel it is a myth .. that has somehow survived all these years .. I feel .. that I should .. and I find the story very interesting .. it is entertaining .. the whole story I can listen to it and not feel bored .. it is like any other story ... different feelings .. I can't say I learn anything from that ...I would tell my children .. just because they should know about it ..".

The epic for Malathy is highly undifferentiated - it is like any other story and it is only a "story". The epic either has a status of a "fiction" or a "fact" about ancient times, and her encounter with Mahabharath is like an occasional visit to a museum which offers a glimpse into the past. The time and the space of the story is fixed and the grandeur of the story, which is not personal by the way, resides in its ability to survive. The acquisition of the story or "viewing the story" is often necessary to qualify as an "Indian", because it allows one to trace his genealogy as Ritesh said,

" a great story in itself .. just happens to take place in a particular era .. of course more relevant to Indians perhaps .. it is part of their culture ... I also find it interesting how they explain how the Sun god impregnates Kunti ... it is interesting to see that sort of thing existed in the past as well .. it brings home how literal things change .. that to me brings technicality ...".

Those who encountered the text as a part of growing up feel the vitality of the text and it is "alive" and even if they make references to "ancientness", it translates into grandeur and glory, whereas for Ritesh the text is a "representation" of the "social reality" in those times. He would often use expressions such as "if we look at it microscopically" or "if we put the pieces together" as if they are remnants of the past. He sees himself as the archeologist who puts the available pieces together to make sense of the "fact". The subjects in this category would argue that the magnanimity of the text is the result of many additions to the "facts", and such an addition is typical of Indian culture that constantly craves for melodrama as Mr. Sethu said,

" Mahabharath is considered .. as I mentioned .. the driving force .. to impress those who read it see it .. whether it is a story or actual narration .. of what happened in those days .. a small scale that is exaggerated and put into show .. big volume and all those things .. the author wanted to impress that evil cannot win over goodness .. the evil may show signs of gains .. ultimately it has to go ... to that extent it is impressive ..."

Mr. Sethu detects only "one truth" - the triumph of good over evil in Mahabharath and the confusion that it creates is only to "appeal to the masses". Not only the message in the story is clear cut but the characters are also definitive and symbolize specific traits as Pankaj said,

" .. the important aspects of individuals .. like Bheem was strong ... Arjuna was good in archery ... Duryodhan was a wicked person things like that ...".

The "Indianness" of Mahabharath takes on a different dimension for the first generations of immigrants. Knowledge

about the text translates into knowledge about India. It is not the India of ancient past but the text gets equated to contemporary India, and India in turn is everything that the west is not - old, traditional and mythical. Unlike Ritesh who fixes the text in the "Indian past", Manoj and Mohan "fix" the text in India. One fixes in a time zone and the other fixes in a geographical location and the text is frozen for both of them. For Manoj and Mohan who are first generation immigrants the text is both a way of acquiring "Indianness", and it also serves as a "punching bag" for venting their anger about India which comes as a result of their bicultural existence. Both Manoj and Mohan read a version of Mahabharath because their parents pressured them to gain knowledge about their "Indian heritage", and therefore Manoj enrolled himself in an undergraduate course on Asian Indian studies and he said,

"I don't think I have changed my life because of the story in any way .. I didn't read it casually because I read it for a class .. therefore I didn't enjoy it .. it sort of gave me a view of Hinduism in general ... saying basically do whatever you want .. which is .. does nothing for me ...".

Manoj however insisted on his serious approach to the text and would often say that he perhaps "knows" Indian culture better than his counterparts in India. According to him they are too casual and are not too serious in these matters. However for him, reading the text is still a chore and for Mohan doing this chore is a way of answering his nagging parents, as he said,

" I was supposed to read this book before my Poonal (a Hindu initiation rite into adulthood similar to Bar Mitzvah) .. so I read it and said .. OK .. I am done .. I just saw it as a story .. I didn't get it .. it is alright .. I think it was a big deal because it has religious implications .. it is just passed on from generation to generations and it is old .. so it is like .. vow .. we have got the treasured story .."

When the "Indianness" of the story gets "gendered" the anger towards the Mahabharath/India becomes even more intense, which was the case with Kala who is a first generation immigrant girl. Every tragic moment, especially with respect to the heroine generates a discussion on the "old ways of Indian society" which is very oppressive towards women. Kala said,

" Unfortunately I haven't found any role models in any of the women .. she should never surpass her husband .. I think in that day and age that sort of thing might have been alright .. but I don't think it would work in today's world .. and life style .."

For Kala "that day and age" would frequently translate into India and "today's world" translates into America. The historical time is supplanted by nations, and therefore the "time" of Mahabharath is the "time" of India and in the individual consciousness there is no room for the changing India. It is clearly frozen.

The impersonal relationship to Mahabharath has several dimensions; for some it is just a "story", for some it is just the "past" and for others it is just a "nation", and all of them are somewhat indifferent to the text. There is yet another group that refuses to engage with the text because of the "ideology" that the text seems to suggest. In the age group above 50, many individuals (4 women and 1 man) said

that Mahabharath unlike Ramayan does not lay out "proper ideals" for humans to follow. Mrs. Leela said,

" Ramayan I feel like it is a practical thing .. Rama lived .. god lived as a man .. and showed the world how things happen in the world .. and how we can solve it .. and there are lots of things ...I .. it appeals more .. from Ramayan to me than Mahabharath ..".

It is not the mode of knowledge or the cultural situatedness that creates the distance to the text, but the distancing is deliberate on the part of the individual as Mrs. Bhavani said, I like Ramayan better than Mahabharath .. somehow that animosity between brothers ..". All the individuals in this category would say that there are plenty of conflicts in the world and they don't need to read another epic to "learn about it". They would rather do without it and the constant tension between family members in the story Mrs.Hamsa said makes it "difficult to understand", and Renuka said that everything about the story is "wrong" and she never finds "answers" for human conflicts. Since the story constantly disrupts one's world view and their ideals, Mr.Bhagirath asked, " what is in there for me?". He then goes on to talk about Ramayan which tells him how to lead his life and that inspires him. The inspiration is not only for him but for countless devotees and artists in India as Mr. Bhagirath pointed out,

" Mahabharath has not inspired any great works .. what came out of Mahabharath other than Mahabharath itself .. Ramayan is not like that .. look at all the compositions .. music .. one god .. produced Thyagaraja .. to produce so many compositions .. thousands of songs .. the kind of depth .. Tulsidas .. Kambar .. take any great poet .. they have all sung for Rama ... I think Rama was a very inspiring character .. no doubt about it .. because he

was willing to sacrifice everything in his life ...
Krishna didn't do like that, his life was easy going ".

As I discussed earlier Ramayan is about love, duty and sacrifice, and its hero Rama suffers like any other human to uphold some virtues and promises. Rama therefore inspires devotion and admiration. The relationship to Krishna is more friendly, sensuous and even carnivalesque, and he resorts to human tactics in Mahabharath, which for Mrs. Charu is "so unfair". The pragmatism of Mahabharath is what distances them from the text and makes it impersonal.

When the relationship to the epic is impersonal, the recollection either could be "denotative" - the story is a series of events and a set of facts, or "objective". The philosophical basis for the "denotative act" is "realism", - that truth exists independent of the cognizing subject and more elements qualify as the "truth". The "objectivist paradigm" as Lakoff (1987) explains is "much more specific". The cognizing subject either has to dig the "truth" from the chaos or "extract" the truth and discard the rest. Lakoff (1987) writes,

" It (objectivist metaphysics) assumes that reality is *correctly and completely* structured in a way that can be modeled by set-theoretical models - that is, in terms of entities, properties, and relations" (p.159).

In an objectivist world view, the assumption is that meanings are contained in the text as Revathi would often say,

" ..anytime a story gets so elaborate and so beautiful .. and so many thoughts are in it .. makes you think that itself has an end value in it ...".

Everytime Revathi was doubtful about her viewpoints she would say, "I have to check my sources" or "I have to read the book again". Many of the objectivists asked me to recommend an "authentic" version of Mahabharath, and I was quite diplomatic about it and validated the versions they have read or enjoyed. Unlike the "realist" who is somewhat indifferent towards the text, the "objectivist" does more labor in making sense of the text. After all they have to "extract" the "essence" of the story as Payal would often point out, "if you really sit down and analyze" or "dissect the story" or "look at it carefully". The "truth" about the text is specific and universal and exists only at an abstract level and the "objectivist" would often dismiss the complexity of the plot structure or the narrative pull as "mere noise". Nagaraj's account is an example of such a view,

" As I told you .. I touched .. like in science I like to take only the essence of it ... the story .. the details of it .. I have not bothered to tell you .. in fact literally .. this is what I interpret .. if you ask a questionnaire .. a quiz on Mahabharath I may fail miserably .. but then .. ".

The objectivist is delighted about the engagement with the text, but insists that "some labor" is necessary to get the "true taste"; the text is likened either to a sugarcane or an orange and the individual's task is to chew the fruit to extract the "real eternal juice" and throw away the pulp. The objectivist, as Lakoff (1987) explains is more keen on idealizing the text.

To conclude, the nature of encounter with the text - the modalities and the context within which such encounters occur

and the kind of relationship that the individual establishes with the text are related (see Table 3 and Table 4). The oral mode establishes an emotional relationship with the text and the focus is on the "narrating time" - when and how and by whom the story was told and the relationship to the tale/teller. The oral mode, when coupled with other formal presentations produces "multiple times". The individual history, cultural history and the history of presentation of Mahabharath and the epic time all co-exist in a dialogic relationship and the narrative becomes "heterochronous". Multiple texts point out in different directions rendering the text unfinalizable and creating what Bakhtin (1984) refers to as "Vari-directional double voiced discourse". In such a discourse multiple texts do not such co-exist, but they interpenetrate each other and yet retain their own uniqueness. The focus is on the narrative pull of various texts, the author's intention, the historical context within which such views were presented and the personal feeling for these differing viewpoints. The features of the vari directional double voiced discourse are "hidden polemic, polemically colored confession, [and] hidden dialogue" (Bakhtin 1984).

In an impersonal relationship to the epic (denotative and objective) the memory and the text are either "a temporal" or "transtemporal". Generally, in a "denotative" mode time becomes immaterial and therefore the narrative becomes "a temporal" and the discourse is direct and

unmediated (Bakhtin, 1984), whereas for an "objectivist" the text transcends time and space. The "truth" about the epic is universal and "transtemporal". The objectivist would insist that the epic is immortal and unchanging and the "truth" is contained deep down in the text. The objectivist however would make use of extra textual material, but all the other texts point in one direction. They are all used to reinforce a particular idea, or an ideal. These various texts are at the service of the "truth" that the individual wants to extract from the epic. The abstract idea overrides the nuances of various concrete texts and therefore the individual engages in what Bakhtin (1984) refers to as a "Unidirectional double voiced discourse". In an objectified discourse various texts have to be deployed by the individual in order to strengthen and validate a particular viewpoint, which in turn leads to idealization.

In remembering Mahabharath, the text can either be contracted by subjecting the text to the individual's "rhythm", which provides a closure or expanded by inserting "loopholes" which opens up the text and renews it forever.

CHAPTER 10

DRAUPADI - WHERE IS SHE AND WHO IS SHE?

Women's history has a dual goal: to restore women to history and the restore our history to women.

Joan Kelly-Gadol ¹²

The excursion into the past to recall the epic heroine raises a whole range of questions about memory, representation, retrieval, and about the patriarchal structure within which these mental activities take place. The questions are about her very existence in the memory store house, and if she does exist, then the questions are about her "location" and about the nature of representation in the individual and collective memory. In the interviews that I conducted, I found a sharp contrast between the recollections of Mahabharath and the recollections of its heroine Draupadi. A significant 67% of the subjects said that they either have no thoughts on Draupadi, or they didn't care about her or even disliked her or simply reported the events in which she was the central figure (See Table 5).

The questions that came to my mind were varied; has Draupadi disappeared from the memory storehouse, or was she never "encoded" in the memory to begin with, or is she disseminated, or is it a problem of "retrieval", because

¹² Joan Kelly-Gadol (1983) *The Social Relation of the sexes: Methodological Implications of Women's History*. In *The SIGNS Reader: Women, Gender & Scholarship*. E. Abel & E.K. Abel (Eds.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

recalling her would mean confronting some ugly "gender" questions and waging the "gender battle", or is the memory in the Freudian sense repressed; the ego simply cannot handle the "anxiety" she produces. Conversely speaking, is Draupadi a "necessity" for the present day in order to wage the current gender battle? If that is the case, one needs to "reclaim" her and "reconstitute" her to suit the individual and cultural needs. In such a reconstitution, she simultaneously becomes both a victim and a victor. Feminist historians and scholars have argued all along that such contradictory questions, concerns, and viewpoints are inevitable in "remembering" women's history (Gordon, 1986; Smith-Rosenberg; Kelly-Gadol, 1983). The conflict in "writing" women's history arises out of historian's concerns about "domination" and "resistance" as Gordon (1986) observes,

" Sometimes we feel impelled to document oppression, diagram the structures of domination, specify agents and authors of domination, mourn the damages. Sometimes we feel impelled to defend our honor and raise our spirits by documenting our struggles and identifying successes in mitigating tyranny. Neither aspect corresponds uniquely to myth making; rather we need different myths in different situations" (p.23).

Within the dominant patriarchal structure, womanhood achieves multiple meanings, and adopts multiple strategies to confront oppression. The French feminists Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray point out that the powers of patriarchy to a large extent have either removed the feminine dimension from the intellectual discourse or have defined the feminine as "deficient", "darkness", "chaos" and "absence of meaning" -

in short as non-Being, and the feminist agenda that Cixous (1983) advocates is for a woman to "put herself into the text - as in to the world and into history - by her own movement" (p.279). The insertion of the "essentially feminine" element into the world and history would mean for Cixous a break from the past, and such a break is necessary for Cixous. History has denounced the "essentially feminine" aspects according to Cixous, whereas Kristeva (1980) argued against "essentialism". She viewed womanhood not in terms of essences but in terms of marginality and multiplicity. She flatly denies that there is anything intrinsically "feminine". While Cixous strongly recommends women to bring "womanhood" to writing, Kristeva claims that there has never been and never will be a "feminine writing" (Moi, 1985). One saw pain and injustice in the past and saw the future as a break from the past, and the other saw complexity and contradictions in the past and anticipates different kinds of conflicts in future. Femininity, for Kristeva is "that which is marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order" (Moi, 1985). Instead of viewing women as "marginalized" subjects, Gayatri Spivak (1987) recommends that we could view the woman as a "shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside) ..." (p.107). Spivak argues that a strict boundary between the center and the margin does not allow us to understand the complex strategies in confronting patriarchy and the "traffic" between various positions.

A variety of concerns and strategies - both "masculinist" and "feminist" mediate the recollection of Draupadi. For some, Draupadi is essentially deficient or peculiar (she is married to five men and wants to avenge the insults), and therefore not worth registering in one's memory, while for others the social and historical definitions of her deficiencies and peculiarities are too painful to store in one's memory. In the former, it is her character that prevents registrations, whereas in the latter it is the social meanings ascribed to her that makes it difficult for the individual to register. Remembering Draupadi would then mean remembering many social inequalities and injustices. For some others, her marginal position symbolizes "age old" gender oppression, and for others she is a "vehicle" or in Spivak's words a "shuttle" between the past and the present. The shuttle does not simply link various "time stations" but also disrupts the structures of patriarchy in both the past and the present.

When I asked the subjects about their impressions on Draupadi, almost two thirds of them (67%) were initially either silent or reluctant to say anything. After a long pause, Mr. Radharam said, "I don't have very strong feelings towards her .. I have never given any thought to her ". In a similar tone Mrs. Anusuya said,

" Draupadi is a I don't know .. she is not one of my favorite characters ... (laughs .. and then a long pause) ... nothing inherent .. bad in her ... she is also .. most of the characters are victims of circumstances .. and she is a great debater .. when Yudhishtir loses her ... I suppose her devotion to

Krishna is appealing ...in some way she is very central to the plot of Mahabharath .. but .. I don't know if she is really "

First of all, in Mrs. Anusuya's books, Draupadi does not qualify as a "character", she is either defined (after a lot of reluctance) as a "clever" woman who pulled her husband out of a sticky situation, or a "helpless" woman who is rescued by Krishna, and her actions are somehow crucial to the story, it builds climax and moves the story, but as a character she is not dynamic, or for that matter she does not even exist.

As an interview strategy, when the subjects talked about the epic, I would often ask for their views on various characters and they would readily give their thoughts, but when I asked about Draupadi, many subjects used a variety of expressions such as "oh! she ... well ..." or "what can I say", or simply scratch their head and shrug their shoulders. Vinod said that Draupadi never left an impression on him and said, "she didn't ... but I think by your provoking ... she does ..". And again after a long pause he said, "you seem to be thinking of women characters in Mahabharath". Vinod viewed my own focus on Draupadi as being "trivial" while there were so many "grand" heroes.

The indifference towards Draupadi and the "trivialization" of her comes in many forms. She is often infantilized as Mohan responds,

"Draupadi was the girl right ...the wife .. yeah! ... I don't know anything about her personality from the book".

Or she becomes too "ordinary" to leave an impression as Atul observes,

" Draupadi is not a character that I have given much thought .. the way she was won certainly .. but apart from that ... she is the Indian housewife incarnate ..".

The "ordinariness" of Draupadi that Atul ignores, is validated by many others. For Mrs. Bhavani Draupadi's "loyalty" to her husbands validates her as a character and in a small way becomes admirable. I say in a small way because Mrs. Bhavani does not extol those virtues but mentions it briefly to give some "face" to the character. Mrs. Leela shares a similar sentiment,

" Draupadi .. I think she was a devoted wife to all the five husbands .. and she had faith in god .. other than that .. I think she sacrificed a lot ... ".

The contradictory interplay of words and concepts in defining Draupadi is instructive. It points out the extent to which she is a contested figure. What is sacrifice to one is subservience to the other and what constitutes sacrifice itself varies, and the meaning of sacrifice also differs from one person to another. In Mrs. Leela's account Draupadi "qualifies" as a character only because of her "sacrifice" whereas in Renuka's view Draupadi is "disqualified" as a character only because of her unwillingness to "sacrifice" as she said with some animosity,

" Draupadi didn't sacrifice anything ... as a character Gandhari was more strong.. character than Draupadi .. she blinded her eyes .. what Draupadi did .. nothing .. and she used to get mad for no reasons .. she didn't have any patience .. if you want my frank opinion .. as a woman she should have more patience, but she didn't .."

In Mr. Murugan's view, despite Draupadi's impatience and circumstantial sacrifices, she "treated all her husbands equally", and Mr. Sethu takes her loyalty a step further and recommends that modern women should learn such "devotion" from Draupadi and he said,

" Draupadi is a devoted wife .. and though she was married . to five men at the same time .. there was no conflict between the persons or in herself .. that means a very great and noble character for her to live in such difficult atmosphere .. whereas .. the modern trends even to live with one .. husband .. is a very big problem ... in spite of all the ordeal that Pandavas faced .. she was very patient and was bearing .. she thought of it as her own .. duty ... part of her own fate that she has to experience ..she did not run away from problems, she did not cross the moral boundary ..."

The voice of patriarchy in its most orthodox form finds its expression in Mr. Sethu's narration. Draupadi's unconditional loyalty to her husbands is something that modern women should emulate. Draupadi to Mr. Sethu was a grim reminder of a "lost virtue", whereas for Ravi, she is an anomaly to the ancient virtue and he says angrily,

" If we consider Draupadi as a character .. it is like looking at women in India at the moment ... if we consider the past history, they are supposed to be sober ... that kind of thing .. they are not supposed to be making fun of someone who falls .. so I think it is very wrong on her part to get someone annoyed .. it is wrong on her part (**with an emphasis**) .. again nothing great about her .. if you make a mistake you pay penalty for annoying someone ... in the form .. she went through Vastraharan (disrobing) .. and that is fair .. I say it is fair only because it happened .. you can't deny the fact .. if something happens to her she better accept it .. so that's about it ...".

In Ravi's view Draupadi is directly responsible for the indignities she suffers, and she deserves it. For Pankaj, she is not only is responsible for her own "downfall" but for the

great war in Mahabharath and therefore for the kingdom. He said acrimoniously,

"Well ... I am not fascinated by her ... I can say one thing much of the war and everything revolves around her ... **that character** (emphasis with a lot of anger)

Not all subjects were this overt about Draupadi's laughter and the events that followed. Mrs. Padmaja said,

" she laughed .. she made a mistake .. but still he .. out of jealousy .. he wants to take revenge .. perhaps it is like that in life .. for people .."

In Mrs. Padmaja's view the individual, especially a woman pays penalty for her actions and therefore should avoid such mistakes and not confront those in power and have faith in god as Mrs. Hamsa points out,

" Draupadi .. character I like .. she believed in Krishna .. to the last minute .. he helped her .."

The divine miracles realize through her faith and her devotion is what leaves a lasting impression for Mrs. Hamsa.

While the subjects that I discussed so far were overt in expressing their dislike towards Draupadi or were open in focusing on some "old fashioned" traits like unconditional loyalty to husbands, others were evasive and when I pressed for their opinion, they would refer to an incident that happened to her as Revathi said,

" views on Draupadi ... and now I am trying to think ... Draupadi ... actually Kunti .. how could she go tell them to share everything ... this is one of those weird things I don't understand .. but my view on Draupadi ... I don't have a view on her ... "

As I discussed in Chapter 6, Draupadi is the only female character in scriptures who is polyandrous, whereas most

heroes are polygamous. According to the story she enters into such a situation not necessarily out of her own making but because her mother-in-law, Kunti, inadvertently instructs her son Arjun to share the "prize" that he had brought home with his brothers. In order to honor the mother's words she becomes the wife of all the brothers. Revathi refers to this event as "weird" and attributes the weirdness to Draupadi. The heroine, as a subject has no legitimate "status" in Revathi's memory, but the evaluation of the character is based on the events that Draupadi was not responsible for. The strategy that many subjects in this category adopt is "blame the victim", which becomes clear in Nagaraj's account,

" I never really thought of her as that much of a character ... she seemed to be just a pawn really ... things happen to her .. but I never really got the impression that she really made things happen herself.."

The depiction of Draupadi in books and in popular magazines to a great extent is negative, except in some radical progressive magazines and journals. She is only a character who was "won" in a competition by the hero Arjun, and later became a "common wife" to all his brothers. All the subjects remember this incident along with other events in which she was pawned and an attempt was made to disrobe her. Anup mentioned that Draupadi did not leave an impression on him because her depiction in books and magazines were negative as he said,

" I tell you as far as women are concerned in Amar Chitra Kathas (comic books) ... something that makes me add humor to this ... they always make them as voluptuous .. sexy women .. Draupadi and Sita .. all were like swingers ... I don't know where she came from

... she is one .. who was won in a competition .. she is everybody's wife .. my granny never told me that .. that came as a surprise ...".

The negative depiction in comic books and other magazines does not leave a lasting impression on the individual, especially if that is the only mode of encounter with the text. The image of the heroine does not depend on a particular mode but on the ideological stances of the narrator. For instance Ritesh pointed out that the comic books created a negative image of Draupadi - in a subservient position as he remarks,

" .. she is not somebody I remember or identify as particularly vivid character in my mind ... the picture I have is ... pallu (part of the saree that covers the chest) over her head walking behind the brothers ... from the *Amar Chitra Katha* version ...".

Ritesh said he heard an interview with Mallika Sarabhai who played the role of Draupadi in Peter Brook's drama and that brought about a new dimension to his views. She no longer is the servile wife who walks behind her husbands.

Draupadi as a character poses a number questions to the structures and the values of patriarchy. The epic heroes are all married to number of women and yet their polygamous situation is taken for granted as the "norm". The hero's anger, arrogance and their vengeful nature is seen as desirable and even celebrated. Draupadi also possesses similar qualities and they become questionable. Her marriage to five men raises questions about her identity for Mr. Rajan,

"in the sense being married to five people of different kinds ... what identity could she have had ... what kind

.. after all .. marriage or anything .. both partners should reinforce each other ... I am wondering how she could have reinforced anything in any of these husbands .. I mean that is one character ... part of Mahabharath I could not understand ... whatever morals that are to be enunciated could have been done without having to make her wife to five people ...".

Mr. Rajan had a very intense relationship with the text and various characters in the text. He repeatedly said that he never believed in "absolutes" and the lack of it in Mahabharath makes it a "magnificent" text. He also added that Mahabharath makes one question "norms" and challenges established ethics and morality. However, Draupadi's departure from the "norm" is subjected to the established patriarchal code of conduct.

Her marriage raises logistical questions for Mamta, and she says, "how could it operate on a tangible everyday level .. its seems far fetched", whereas Mohini mocks at the situation and berates her,

" Draupadi was actually born of fire .. how was she born like that is my first question .. how am I supposed to believe and take it .. what proof ... as far as her role in the epic ... she represents that women did have a stand .. I didn't like the fact that she was allowed to have five husbands .. and what am I supposed to think ... am I allowed to have .. sometimes I tell my husband jokingly ... I wish I was Draupadi .. c'mon .. it is fun .. how can she have .. society says have a husband and don't divorce .. things like that ... and this woman is having five .. she fights if another person touches her .. what is happening .."

According to the story, Draupadi's birth is supernatural and she is not an "ordinary woman", and this point is rarely ever highlighted within the patriarchal structure. Mohini wants to "dismiss" her "super naturalness" because she has violated social norms of today's world. The violation also gives her

the status of a whore, and in Mohini's view Draupadi cannot protest when other men attempt to touch her. The violation that Mohini despises is celebrated by Pooja and she says this with a "double voice",

" I have always liked the fact that Draupadi got married to five men I really love that ... because I think that is the best possible .. I think that is the only way a woman can get everything .. it is just not possible for one man to have all those things that those five men have ... in the story it was like almost a punishment or a tragedy .. but I always thought of it as ... she was lucky and she had five .. not get bored .. the simple solution is to get five people ...".

In the minds of most people Draupadi is in a "no win" situation. When she is "victimized" she becomes "nobody" and when she angrily responds to the victimization she becomes arrogant. This dilemma becomes clear in Malathy's account,

" Draupadi ... I remember her as being very .. what do I call it .. a piece to be shared between all the five brothers ... certain things I recall .. she has a certain arrogance in her quality ... when Duryodhan falls down she laughs ... that is not nice thing to do, I find her hard to reconcile as Krishna *Bakhtha* (devotee) .. because I expect more humility in such a person .. and that doesn't go together .. no forgiveness .. so a difficult character ...".

Agency is denied for Draupadi at two levels. On one hand she is objectified in the story, - she is a "piece" to be shared by the brothers. Malathy does not probe into whether Draupadi is a "piece" or made out to be a "piece" by others around her, but her subservient status in Malathy's view should make her more humble and conciliatory rather than being nasty and vengeful towards her enemies.

The vengeance that Draupadi seeks is categorically applauded by Kala,

" She has been unfortunate .. to suffer at the hands of someone else's weakness .. it wasn't her fault ... Yudhishtira gave her away ... why should she be shamed in front of all these people .. do I care for her .. I feel sorry for her .. I have seen a lot of women in that position .. unfortunately like her did not have any power to do anything .. but atleast eventhough she was vengeful she had the right to be .. so I see that as their own fault .. they didn't seem to do anything about it .. whereas she did .. she couldn't rest till they were slaughtered .. in that I admire her ...".

Kala goes on discuss gender inequality and the inability of battered women to speak out. Contemporary battered women and Draupadi don't exist as isolated characters, but they sometimes replace each other, sometimes they converge and talk to each other and sometimes they diverge. The divergence comes in when Kala makes a distinction between ancient royal women and contemporary middle class women. Time and class separate them. Such multiple "gendered chronotopes" can be observed when Draupadi's character is made complex.

In a direct or objectified discourse, Draupadi's character is "fixed" and is tightly defined and the individual's task is to either "report" about her - what happened to her in the story and affirm her or repudiate her. In an objectified discourse it is mostly repudiation because to affirm Draupadi's identity would require more work: to wander into various cultural spaces and disrupt those spaces. The present day's social norms or ethics is the basis for repudiation, but her identity is "fixed". How Draupadi is "fixed" in the minds of individuals, of course varies. As I demonstrated and discussed earlier for some she is "devoted", and for others she is a "trouble maker" or an "impatient

woman". The list of adjectives to describe her is endless. Whatever is the subjective language that is used to describe her is made "objective" about her character. As you can see in Table 5, 67% of the subjects were either indifferent towards her or passionately disliked her. Such a strong distaste for her does not allow them to see any complexity in her character, and all of them would say, "Draupadi is _____" and the blank would be filled differently by each of them. In such a hegemonic discourse, Draupadi simply exists; neither in "space" nor in "time". She is "homeless", so to speak - does not deserve any authorized cultural space, nor does "time" enter the narrative in a true sense. I am referring to "time" in a Bakhtinian sense; when time enters the narrative, Bakhtin (1981) points out one sees the historical emergence of the character. In a direct or "objectified discourse", "these days" and "those days" simply switch places, and patriarchy has existed in "those days" and "these days". Therefore when the interpretation is subjected to the patriarchal mold time disappears. The emergence of a character in all its complexities is a threat to the structures of patriarchy, therefore the "other" - the woman has to be fixed at any cost.

Feminist philosopher, Sandra Lee Bartky (1990) offers a compelling argument about "time" in our discourse on women. She says, unlike other forms of oppression "women have no memory of a "time before": a time before the masters came, a time before we were subjugated and ruled" (p.25). Therefore

to gain feminist consciousness and affirming one's identity would mean "creating spaces" and being aware of "multiple times". If I extend this argument Draupadi cannot become a true "character", in other words have an identity in the minds of individuals unless they come to grips with "gendered spaces" and "gendered times" - in short the "gendered chronotopes". Both the reader and the heroine - Draupadi has to "wander" through the "gates" of these multiple chronotopes to gain meaning and see the emergence of the character in the story.

In this study, the remaining 33% of the subjects (see Table 5) remembered Draupadi as a complex character. She is simultaneously a mythical, social and political figure. As a character in the story, her traits are not "fixed", but they keep changing according to the context - both within the story and outside the story. As a result one sees the "emergence" of Draupadi in the recollections. Draupadi's emergence is directly tied to the subject's emergence. As they acquire newer analytical tools, they devise newer interpretive strategies which in turn changes with their "gender politics" as Ulupi reflects,

" I never questioned that Dasaratha had three wives ... I always questioned why Draupadi had five husbands now it is just very ironic for me ... I just think it is interesting now ... that we are seeing a role reversals .. at such early times .. when we wouldn't have expected .. only now I realize ... it happened back then ..."

She then goes on talk about how the society at large which is "male dominated" would interpret the role reversal. Ulupi's own historical awareness mediates her evaluation of Draupadi

and alters the ancient past and the present. The traffic between the "time zones" and "cultural spaces" become even more heavier in Chitra's recollection,

" Draupadi of course .. a classic .. she is very I guess it is very moving thing as to what happened to her ... such a proud woman .. and was partly divine .. but still she had to go through all the humiliations that women are heir to .. but still she kept her end up .. her pride was not .. she was not broken down is an attractive woman ... somebody in Banglore university wanted to read her as a feminist heroine .. which was non sense .. she said the argument was that she had five husbands .. and it is an achievement .. the thing is it is not her choice .. so what is the big deal ..there was no choice plenty of years back .. for that matter even now there is no choice for plenty of people .. that is not the reason why I would say .. she has pride .. and she is capable of anger .. and has a sharp tongue .. the whole question whether she had a choice or not is a modern woman's pre-occupation .. I guess on the whole it is not important ..".

The narrative is distinctly heteroglot: Chitra's concerns are with Draupadi's actions and her own interpretations within a social and political context. As a result she goes in and out of the text to raise question both about the text and the world alike. To question a contemporary interpretation she goes back to the text and to make sense of the text she brings contemporary concerns.

As I discussed earlier, in a direct or objectified discourse Draupadi stands alone and depending on the nature of negative perceptions that individuals have of her she is disliked. But to "like" her and give enough "weight" to her character, requires one to juxtapose her with modern women and modern concerns and conflicts. Draupadi does not become an "entity", or a Being without such a relationship. All the subjects who remember Draupadi as a complex character raise

questions about "gender politics" in the past and in the present, as Mrs. Sarla remembers,

" Draupadi is a woman of spirit ... I mean she is undaunted .. she is not cowed down .. even in her helplessness ... in that particular scene .. I think it is author's way of presenting that women are not really helpless .. that you are not helpless .. eventhough she conforms .. the indignity she suffers .. women were highly valued those days ... and should be valued today too ... we talk about these abuse .. it wouldn't happen if we really viewed women the way we should ... today in the name of liberalizing ... I don't think women are treated on par ... she is a long suffering mother ... a devoted wife .. a devoted disciple .. all of this in one character Draupadi. I don't think of her as a tragic character at all .. she is an instrument in bringing down .. fall of other clan ...".

For Mrs.Sarla, Draupadi is both a reminder of the "injustices" that women experience and an "inspiration" for women to confront the injustice. Unlike the "objectified" discourse which focused either on "what happened to her", or her "undesirable" qualities, the dialogized discourse constructs her character from various vantage points making the heroine, the text and world dynamic. The question is not just "what is she" but it includes how we may see her, as Purvik points out,

"I think she is a major character in how it affects women in contemporary society .. the role of power ... it is more like charging everyone else's flame ... she is useful for women .. in that she is willing to go through trying times .. but again she is made a bad .."

The dialogized discourse also sees the irony in interpretation. While Purvik recognizes the usefulness of Draupadi's courage and convictions he also recognizes the semantic twist that the dominant society can create. The centripetal and the centrifugal forces are active in a

dialogic narration, as Bhairav points out that Draupadi can be a "rallying point for women's lib", she is a perfect candidate to ground the "liberation" discourse, but Bhairav points out "women's lib ... talk " can be knocked down and along with that Draupadi is also knocked down. The contemporary women's fate and Draupadi's fate go hand in hand.

In an objectified discourse the preoccupation was with her deviations from the norm, but not with the internal dynamics that could have operated in her marriage, whereas in a dialogic conception the internal dynamics are highlighted as Kedar points put,

" she is a great woman .. there is no doubt .. she is basically able to live with different people .. which is rare .. is against out culture .. as we say that .. OK ... they say it is wrong ... if one husband had different wives it would have been a different story ... what I mean is she is able to live happily with all five husbands ..that is important a good understanding ... ".

To make sense of Draupadi Kedar has to get into an argument with the society, what "they" say or what is "given" is posited by Kedar in a different light. Draupadi is both a deviation from the "norm" in her marriage to five men and a proof to the "norm" in the love and understanding she has in her marriage.

In a similar tone, Vasu speculates on the "love and understanding" that Draupadi and her husbands must have had to keep the relationship going and then goes on to talk about the betrayal of such love on the part of her husbands which makes her seek vengeance. Vasu said,

" as a character .. you could see the ferociousness .. particularly Tamil women .. the old Tamil literature ..according to that tigers run away .. when they are angry ... but at the same time most literature says that women are very soft hearted ... and you treat them like flower ...you can imagine the ferociousness that can created just out of the outrageousness of these guys ..of trying to degrade her publicly ...where she is supposed to be the princess of the whole place .. so that is why she is taking the vow .. I am going to take your blood and I am leaving it in my Kundal (hair) .. that is the only way I am going to teach the world a lesson .. that means you could see how cruel these guys have been .. in Mahabharath .. everybody has.. its good and bad side .. that has been shown without any hesitation ...".

Draupadi as a character commands a whole range of contradictory meanings. She goes all the way from a non-existent being, a "nothingness", to a full blown character. She is both "nowhere" and "everywhere" and inhabits multiple times. In a hegemonic discourse, patriarchal values determine her "absence" or her "presence" in a negative light, whereas in a dialogic discourse the absence and the historical nature of her presence are contested and reconstituted.

The opinions on Draupadi varies according to her role in various plots (See Table 6, 7, 8, and 9). During the initial interview (Pre-viewing session) I mentioned the plots that they were going to watch during the viewing session and asked what they remembered and thought about those plots. I did not give a detailed account of these plots, instead I said briefly, "we will be watching Draupadi's *Svayamvar* scene, the *Maya Mahal* scene, the *Dice game* , and the *Dialogue between Kunti and Karna* .

The specifics of the first plot - the *Svayamvar* scene, were not recollected by 58% of the subjects. They only

recognized that many suitors came to the *Svayamvar* to prove their skills in archery and failed and Karna's attempt was sabotaged and that Arjun succeeds and wins her hand in marriage. Therefore they did not have any views on this plot. Besides, the plot structure varies from one version to another, and therefore the memory about the plot was "general". Among the remaining 42%, some thought that Draupadi had a choice in marriage, and other felt she was arrogant in dismissing Karna's candidacy or played the "caste" game, and a few of them thought that there was complexity to Draupadi's action. The discussion revolved around women's choice in selecting her partner.

The memory of the *Maya Mahal* scene was more distinct. This is the scene in which Draupadi laughs at Duryodhan when he falls into a puddle. About 33% of the subjects simply recognized the plot and did not offer their views. Many of them condemned Draupadi's laughter (30%), and few of them argued that this plot never existed in the original Mahabharath. A few others felt that it served "Duryodhan right" or thought that the plot was significant to the story. It builds tension in the story which leads to the war, and 21% of the subjects felt that there were multiple layers of meaning.

The memory of the *Dice game* was more distinct. A significant 36% of the subjects remembered the plot as raising a whole range of complex questions about a variety of relationships - husband/wife, subjects/kingdom,

minister/king, and about ethics and morality and proprietorship and obligations.

When asked specifically about Draupadi as a character, a significant number of subjects were either indifferent or expressed intense dislike towards her. Whereas in specific plots she is judged according to the situation and is held accountable as a character for her actions.

Unlike Draupadi who entertains a whole range of responses, Karna commands unconditional respect, sympathy and admiration. Everyone that I interviewed - 100% said that their hearts go out for Karna and he is the only character in Mahabharath that they would salute to in admiration. Karna is the tragic hero, who has been abandoned by his mother, ostracized by the society, betrayed by teacher and tricked by gods and yet he is rarely the "sinner", he is always "sinned against". A significant 33% of the subjects remembered this plot as raising difficult questions about motherhood, teenage pregnancy, duty, anger, and reconciliation. Many of them expressed sympathy for Karna and others condemned Kunti's action for approaching her son at a difficult time. A few (8%) considered the social factors that led to Kunti's action, and 25% of the subjects just recognized the plot.

In the following chapters, we will see how this memory gets reoriented and reframed in the act of "reading".

CHAPTER 11

THE READING 'ACT'

*jnanam jneyam pariijnata
trividha karmacodana
karanam karma karte ti
trividhah karmasamagrahah*

Knowledge, the object of knowledge and the knowing subject, are the threefold incitement to action: the instrument, the action and the agent are the threefold composite of action.

The Bhagavad Gita 13

An active understanding according to *The Bhagavad Gita* is equivalent to "action", in which there are many actors. Knowledge (product), the knower (subject), and the tools for acquiring knowledge (instruments) and the application of these tools (processes) and the object of knowledge (known) are all equal partners in this "act". In the "*Philosophy of Act*", Bakhtin (1993) expresses similar sentiment, and he says, "every thought of mine, along with its content, is an act or deed that I perform" (p.3). For Bakhtin, removing the "thought" from its concrete "act" results in invalidating the thought itself. He writes,

" As a performed act, a given thought forms an integral whole: both its content/sense and the fact of its presence in my actual consciousness - the consciousness of a perfectly determinate human being - at a particular time in particular circumstances, i.e., the whole concrete historicalness of its performance - both of

¹³ The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18, Stanza 18. trans. S. Radhakrishnan (New Delhi, Blackie & Son (India) Ltd. 1948) p. 357.

these moments (the content/sense moment and the individual-historical moment) are unitary and indivisible in evaluating that thought as my answerable act or deed" (p.3).

My own focus in writing this chapter on the "reading act", is on the indivisibility of the "content/sense moments" and the "individual-historical moments" that Bakhtin points out. My interest therefore is both in the "movements" of the readers - between themselves and with the text and the "moments" at which the semiotic activity intensifies. The intensity of the semiotic activity can be best explained by the principle of intertextuality, which proposes that any text is read in relationship to other texts. The intensity of the reading activity is produced not necessarily by passive comparisons with other texts, but as Fiske (1987) observes, "Intertextuality exists rather in the space *between* texts" (p.108). When readers locate themselves at the intersection of several texts the meaning making process becomes vibrant or in Lotman's words they activate the *semiosphere*. This sphere, Lotman argues is marked by heterogeneity. The dialogic reader's movement produces the interpenetration of these multiple texts, and as a result, the texts and the reader are enriched. Lotman (1990) writes,

".. the hottest spots for semioticizing processes are the boundaries of the semiosphere. The notion on boundary is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. ... The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics into "our" language, it is a place where what is 'external' is transformed into what is 'internal', it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere's internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics" (p.136,137).

In the ensuing analyses in this chapter, my focus will be on both the "movement" from one text to the other and the "nature of such a movement". Sometimes the contents of the Mahabharath could trigger a discussion on similar contemporary problems, and at other times a discussion on contemporary issues could activate the epic text. In the former, the epic text facilitates the understanding of the current day problems and in the later the current social conflicts enriches the understanding of the epic text. An active reader moves both "within" the epic text and "between" various texts. The extra textual materials could vary from memory of the Mahabharath, to other versions of the epic text, to contemporary events, historical events, personal life and cultural life at large. The movement between these texts are multi - directional and the intersection between these texts create meaningful moments.

Methodologically, I am treating these "moments" as the analyzable "units" taken from the "movements". Lev Vygotsky's explanation of the dialectical method is instructive to capture the relationship between the "flow" and the seemingly "arrested units". In any psychological study, Vygotsky (1978) asserted that we need a "dynamic analysis" to understand the "development of thought or voluntary behavior". Developmental processes can be understood only if we study something "historically", i.e., study it in the "process of change". The analyzable units of the mind for Vygotsky are not distinctly different "mechanical pieces" of the whole, but

each "unit" has "all the basic properties of the whole" and "is not further divisible into living parts of the unity" (cited by Radzikovski, 1988). Vygotsky saw the mind as a "stream of consciousness" and therefore in any part, "we find in it all the preceding states (memory), dispositions (emotions) and thought, etc.," (Radzikovski, 1988). My research question is precisely that: how is the reading "act" mediated by one's past memory and engagement with the text, and in turn how does the act of reading reorient and reformat the memory and express certain emotions and thoughts. Memory, emotions and thoughts are not separate "units" for Vygotsky, but they are an integrated whole. Likewise, in his "holistic" approach towards psychology he saw the "knower" and the "known" as inseparable partners as Vygotsky (1986) explains with a suitable example,

" The telephone operator plus the telephone is a special type of organization, a primary concept in higher psychology. Not only the telephone but also the telephone operator develops. The two together: the entire uniqueness of child development " (p.70).

Both the telephone operator and the telephone have their unique "hi(s)stories" and their partnership creates newer "stories" for each of them. The partnership is unique in other ways: it is the relationship between the physical and the social, and cultural and the technological, and between human beings and the tools that they use. Vygotsky (1978) points out that in order to understand the dynamics of psychological functioning, such as "perception, sensory-motor

operations, and attention", we need to understand the linkage between "tool use and speech".

READING TELEVISION TEXTS

If we extend Vygotsky's point on the relationship between tool use and speech to the current study, I cannot speak about the "narratives on Mahabharath", especially during the "viewing session" without discussing how the "technological tools" - the television and the VCR organizes the cognitive and the narrative structure. In his introduction to "teletheory", Ulmer (1989) argues that in the age of electronic technology "cognition itself might be changing". He writes,

" People will not stop using print any more that they stopped talking when they became literate. But they will use it differently - will speak and write differently within the frame of electronics " (p.2).

The dynamics of viewing a familiar cultural text through the television medium, especially via VCR, with another viewer bears resemblance to the "oral culture". Ong (1982) observes that the "electronic" age produces a form of "secondary orality". It is secondary because the "orality" is based upon and derived from the "literate modes". During the "viewing session" I had instructed all the subjects to "think aloud" and make spontaneous remarks even while the tape was running and told them to stop the tape if they wanted to engage in a discussion/debate or make lengthy comments. The "power play" between the "text" - the television production and the "readers" - both among themselves and with the text was interesting. Perhaps I should add that there was power

play even with me. Given the nature of Mahabharath and the television production, it was impossible for the viewers to be passive. All the subjects, irrespective of the age and their level of knowledge and previous interest in the text were "active". There was never a dull moment. Since every plot in Mahabharath is so controversial, the text invited some kind of response, whether it be anger, hatred, or identification. The story, being in a television medium intensifies the "polysemy", as Fiske (1987) explains that the television texts, in order for them to be popular with a variety of audiences has to create various loopholes. Such openings activates past memory and triggers thought processes and generates discussion. The viewers are therefore "activated" by the text and in turn they can either activate the text or "mute" the text, both literally and figuratively. In a literal sense, "muting" the text (put the tape on pause) allows the subjects to engage in a dialogue, carry on a discussion about the contents of the text and in an abstract sense the contents of the text can be overlooked, in a sense muted, because of previously held views on the Mahabharath. The memory of the text sometimes interferes with the immediate text. This activity was common to all viewers.

During the viewing session, all the subjects bring the past contexts, previous knowledge of the text, ask for clarifications, make spontaneous remarks about the character, and about the actors, about the director - B.R.Chopra, and make judgments about the text, and make anticipatory remarks

on the events yet to come. The anticipatory remarks about the text during the viewing session reveals something profound about the role of "history" in the reading activity. Memory of the text operates in many ways; sometimes they interfere with the immediate text and mentally "obstructs" the viewing, and at other times they enter into a dialogue with the current version. The video tape facilitates the conversation with the text; they can make spontaneous remarks, pause the tape or rewind the tape for clarifications. Fiske (1987) explains that "reading a television text is a process of negotiation between the existing subject position and the one proposed by the text itself". The negotiation resembles the "oral culture", in which the listener has the power to reaccentuate, dismiss or validate the teller's message. I will take a snippet from Draupadi's *Svayamvar* scene (Plot I) to demonstrate the negotiation and the contest over meanings by various viewers.

Episode Gloss

Reader's response

(A)

Krishna signals to Draupadi.

He nods his head suggesting

her to say something. V: Why not? He is a
Draupadi says "Wait! My *Soothputra* .. so he probably
garland is not for any not of that family.. probably
Soothputra (son of a Krishna did not want that ..
charioteer) he was interested that one of

the Pandavas should win her
hand.

Vinod aligns himself with Karna and talks to her as if the
insult has been hurled at him. His conversation with her is

direct. He identifies himself with Karna and directly reacts to Draupadi's remarks. Such a direct response to a character's dialogue resembles oral culture, which takes on another dimension in the way Mohan (M) and Manoj (Mn) speak to Draupadi,

- (A) Mn: This Krishna is a big trouble maker in this story..
- M: No kidding ...
- Mn: Every single bad decision was basically he made ..
- M: Yeah! he did it on purpose
- Mn: He did everything on purpose. He is like ..
- M: Real pain in the ass. What did she say ..basically you are a loser and I won't marry you?
- Mn: Yeah .. Yeah .. she says she won't marry a son of a charioteer ..
- M: Honey .. are you from Long Island?
- (They both laugh)
- Mn: just .. just the girls we know .. just the girls I grew up with in high school..

For Mohan and Manoj, Draupadi is a "stand in" for the "Long Island Princess", and the reaction is towards the contemporary "princess". Both Mohan and Manoj in the previewing session said they had no opinion on Draupadi. She was not remembered as a "full blown character", and therefore

during the viewing session her comments are dismissed as words of "Long Island Princess", who is basically a "spoilt brat" and expects the best out of the men she dates. However, they gave more weight to Krishna's gestures, than Draupadi's words. Both of them remembered Krishna as the "decision maker" and during the viewing session saw Krishna as the primary character orchestrating the events. A simple gesture on Krishna's part and volatile words from Draupadi invariably invited a whole range of responses from the viewers. Whether the focus was on Krishna's gestures or on Draupadi's words or both depended to some extent on their memory. The memory in turn operated in a variety of ways. In some cases the memory was too strong and it either clouded the current version or dictated the sense making, in other cases the current version raised questions about the memory and actively entered into a dialogue.

For instance, Anu remembered Draupadi as an intelligent and well poised royal woman, whereas Jayashree remembered her as a complex strong willed angry woman, and here are their responses,

(A)

A: Very unlike Draupadi ..

J: No actually very much like her ...

A: But this is not the thing.

J: She was always as they say, proud peacock .. typical Indian woman, proud peacock .

The differences in memory for Anu and Jayashree serve as a catalyst for further discussion about Draupadi, how she has been depicted and how she should be depicted and what kind of depiction could be "politically useful" for contemporary women. To understand any intellectual activity, Lotman (1990) points out that we have to come to grips with the *text*, the *culture*, and the *history*. The text, Lotman points out has its own intended messages and its loopholes created by the author/teller. These messages can be activated or muted when they enter the cultural *semiosphere* , where meanings are contested and instantiated. The culture for Lotman is the "synchronic semiotic space", which achieves its "diachronic depth" through individual memory and cultural history. For Manoj and Mohan, memory dictates the interpretive act, whereas for Anu and Jayashree memory enters into a dialogue with the current text to give "flesh and blood" to the reading act. For Mohan and Manoj, the past simply substitutes the present and do not retain their own uniqueness to enter into a dialogue, whereas for Anu and Jayashree the past, both the individual memories and cultural histories retain their own uniqueness and they become instruments in the meaning making activity and they energize the *Semiosphere*. Likewise for Kala and Purvik, the text enters into a dialogue with the memory as they respond,

" P: I didn't know that Krishna actually instigates .. she says my garland is not for a charioteer's son .. but

she .. one thing .. I didn't know was that Draupadi was instigated by Krishna to do that ... the Mahabharatha I read .. she does it on her own ... I thought .. that is one reason I never liked the character that much .. because .. not like I don't understand .. I had my own reservation because she always seem to play favorite .. sort of .. so in this scene .. when Krishna instigates her to do that ... it is like cousins ... I suppose he sort of instigates her to do that ..

K: The story I had read .. I read that Krishna takes the form of a rat and sabotages the bow .. is that right .. some interpretations say that ... see this is her future .. which is in these people's hands .. I think she has to take more active stance .. "

Interestingly, Purvik and Kala have different memories and differing viewpoints on this plot, which forces them to enter into a debate to make amendments. Purvik remembers Draupadi as dismissing Karna's candidacy on her own free will and therefore disliked her for her arrogance; whereas in the current version her words gain "legitimacy" because they are juxtaposed with Krishna's gestures. In Purvik's memory, Draupadi was the "sole" active agent, whereas in Kala's memory Krishna was the "sole" active agent, and both of them disliked their memories and approve of the current version. Purvik approves it because it lends some "divine" support and justification for Draupadi's words and for Kala the current version gives some "agency" to Draupadi. Kala and Purvik later enter into each other's memories and common cultural histories and co-construct the given text.

The meaning construction becomes thick with multiple layers when there is a discrepancy between the reader's memory of the plot and the current version. The semiotic activity becomes even more intense when the two readers have

different memories and viewpoints. The differences produces dialogic tension and activates the text at different points. When there is no discrepancy between the readers or between the memory and the text, then the reading act is simply an affirmation of the text as Mrs. Leela and Mrs. Hamsa respond in agreement with the text,

" H & L: Oh! Krishna is here ..

L: Without a family background she is not willing to marry ..

H: Yes .. nobody knows who his father is ..

L: Oh! she wants to know the heritage ... that is what she says .. you know a man without a proper background .. she can't ..

H: Yes .. it is not eligible like .. it is not that she doesn't want to marry .. but she wants to know proper family background .."

The television production for both Mrs. Hamsa and Mrs. Leela is a validation of their memory. The memory is both of the text and of the culture. They are in agreement with Draupadi's actions because she "rightfully" wants to know the "proper family back ground" of Karna, and since his "family background" as is known to the public is not so "meritorious", it is understandable that Draupadi dismisses his candidacy. They saw Draupadi as going along with the prevailing social codes of the culture at that time and understandably invoked caste to reject Karna.

The same text generates a whole range of responses from the readers. For some the text is a representation of social reality and for other the text provides an opportunity to question the social reality and the social realities

themselves vary from individual to individual. For some Draupadi's words are an indication of "dark moments" in history. She invoked caste and class relations to dismiss a worthy candidate. For others Draupadi's actions have to be celebrated. As a woman she exercised her fundamental choice in choosing her life partner, and therefore an indication of women's strength. A few readers took various vantage points to construct a polyphonic discourse on the plot. The text and the readers are like partners in a dialogue, as Bakhtin (1986) points out, the act of reading (understanding) is a meeting of "two subjects" or "two authors" and meanings originate in this nexus. Bakhtin (1986) points out that reading is a special kind of dialogue which produces complex relationships between the "text (object of study and reflection) and the created, framing context (questioning, refuting and so forth)" and at this junction the "scholar's cognizing and evaluating thought takes place" (p.106,107).

READING PLOTS

A fundamental theoretical principle that guides this dissertation is that the act of reading both reveals and constructs the text and the reader as well. In his writings on the *psychology of Art*, Lev Vygotsky (1971) was very preoccupied with the relationship between aesthetic response and other forms of human behavior; in short the traffic between art and life. Vygotsky points out that the

"evaluation of art depends directly on the psychological viewpoint from which we approach it. The reader's approach determines the "reality" of the plot.

In order to understand the kinds of realities that individuals construct, Bakhtin (1986) proposes "speech genres" as the unit of analysis. Bakhtin along with Medvedev (1978/1985) points out that "we think and conceptualize in utterances", and utterances do not exclusively have linguistic properties (lexical, phraseological and grammatical structures), but they reflect theme, content and style as well, and speech genres are "stable types of utterances" which define reality. In the reading activity, the thematic content, the style of speaking and the evaluative stance that the reader takes are all incorporated in these "speech genres" as Bakhtin/Medvedev (1978/1985) write,

" One might say that human consciousness possesses a series of inner genres for seeing and conceptualizing reality. A given consciousness is richer or poorer in genres, depending on its ideological environment" (p.134).

The characteristics of the genres in turn vary according to the types of discourse. For the purposes of my analysis, I have borrowed from Bakhtin (1984) three types of discourses -

(a) Direct, unmediated discourse. This monologic discourse is "directed exclusively toward its referential object, as an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority" (p.199). The readers therefore exert complete authority over the reality of

the plot and the characters and they maintain a strict boundary between themselves and the text. Strict boundaries are also maintained between texts.

(b) Unidirectional discourse. In this type of monologic discourse, the readers effectively use various other texts to strengthen and reinforce their viewpoints.

(c) Vari directional discourse . In this type of dialogic discourse, the reader actively moves from one text to another producing friction between texts. Such a discourse is not interested in a "view point", but in the dialogic angle. This discourse incorporates parody and hidden polemic, and meanings are unfinalized.

In the following segments I will use these types of discourses to classify styles of reading. The first two plots are rather brief (5 minutes each), and readers were more likely to extract a theme from the plot. Therefore, I will use "speech genres" as my fundamental unit of analysis.

The next two plots are lengthy (plot 3 is 40 minutes and plot 4 is 15 minutes). The readers are forced to go through the motions of the plot. In order to track this "movement", I will concern myself with the "tropical element" in the discourse. A "tropical" approach as Hayden White (1978) explains allows me to discuss the movement through the text and from one text to another. White explains that,

" troping is both a movement from one notion of the way things are related to another notion, and a connection between things so that they can be expressed otherwise " (p.2).

In White's scheme "trope" itself is a movement - a dialogic connection between the "thing to be understood" - the distant historical narratives of the past and the "things" that this "thing" bears resemblance to - the familiar contemporary narratives. The interconnection between the two he writes is the "soul of discourse".

From an analytical standpoint White (1978) proposes that understanding could be viewed at three levels; one at the *mimetic* level - the description of "data" and the other at the *diegetic* level - the argument that goes along with the description and finally at the *diatactical* level which combines the description (data) and the argument (the interpretation). To trace the "developmental path" in understanding, White uses the "master tropes" from the rhetorical theory - the metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. The movement of understanding is from metaphor, which involves drawing comparisons to metonymic expressions in which the individual comprehends contiguous relationships, to synecdoche which constitutes objects as parts of wholes and finally to irony in which there is self reflection and awareness of limitations of an idea.

I shall take each plot at a time and then integrate and discuss the styles of reading.

Draupadi's Svayamvar Scene (Plot 1)

In the previous chapter (10), I had discussed that about 58% of the subjects (see Table 6) did not go into detail in

remembering this plot. They rudimentarily recognized the story line. The television production however triggers the memory and as I discussed earlier subjects do bring past contexts during the viewing session.

Before discussing the discourse on each plot, let me make a few preliminary remarks on methodology. To begin with, I am treating the dyadic construction of the discourse as a single unit. Therefore, I shall first discuss the dyadic pairs that share similarities in their "view of the plot", in other words they have similar "genres" and then I will discuss the dyads that have conflicting viewpoints and styles of speaking. Therefore the analysis that follows are both about dyads and about specific individuals.

A simplest form of monologic single voiced discourse is a direct unmediated one. Such a speech, Bakhtin (1984) explains is intended for naming, reporting and representing. The discourse is meant to be an observation from a distance, and not necessarily one that establishes a relationship to the thing being comprehended or represented. Since the "personhood" is not brought into the picture, the readers assume that meanings are all contained "in the text" and therefore they use disembodied language as Uma and Malathy converse,

" U: So unfair .. to blatantly unfair .. they don't let Karna do the thing .. whereas they are letting him (Arjun) openly do the thing .. so he is not a *Kshatriya* (prince).. right ..

M: Draupadi is the one telling .. but she is the one who is getting married ...

U: Right ... she seems to be .. when Karna is going to do it .. she seems not very happy .. fine that sounds alright. it seems she waits for Krishna's signal to say no ..

M: I am not sure what it means . it might mean that Krishna knew that there is somebody else .. she wanted to marry Arjun basically .. may be she knew about Arjun .. so tried to get Karna out ... to get him out of the game ...".

The reader's distance from the text can be observed in the usage of words like "they", "seems to be", or "may be she knew", etc., and when Malathy says, "it might mean" she is careful to locate all sources of meaning in the text. Uma does react sharply to what has "happened" to Karna and Malathy responds that it could be a situational escape for Draupadi. But these two differing viewpoints and concerns exist in isolation. Both Malathy and Uma "stay" within the story and do not use any extra textual material to make sense of the story. In a direct unmediated discourse, even if the readers make references to other cultural events or draw analogies with other texts, these multiple texts remain parallel and they do not necessarily converge to enter into a dialogue, which becomes clear in Manoj (Mn) and Mohan's (M) conversation,

" M: That stuff still goes on in India .. people do that right .. I mean reverse discrimination .. right now ... my cousins are having a real tough time to get into college .. because they are Brahmins .. is that why it is such a great epic .. it has real cultural impact ..

Mn: I don't know .. I find it interesting that you make everything that occurs here to be this Brahmin non-Brahmin thing ... here in this country it has nothing to do .. which I don't think exists in this country ...

LAK: Do you see parallels to this in this country?

Mn: No .. I don't think any *Svayamavars* occur in this country .. it is just problem of race tensions .. I guess in one sense .. of people of not same background unwilling to hang out together ...

M: Yeah! Japan bashing ... I can't make any major comment .. I was just trying to figure out what is special about this girl if they are trying to win her hand ..

Mn: She is a princess ..

M: That is it ..".

Mohan sees the text as a "source" of all social evils, it has a real "cultural impact" he says and Manoj makes reference to racial tensions in America, but these observations don't necessarily aid in constructing more layers of meaning, nor do they serve as different axiological points to view to the text. After their brief references to social inequalities they again go back or "leap" back to the text and conclude that Draupadi is a princess. The detour into the contemporary cultural spaces do not necessarily alter or mediate the sense making activity. Bakhtin (1984) explains this kind of monologic thinking,

" Direct referentially oriented discourse recognizes only itself and its object, to which it strives to be maximally adequate. If in the process it imitates someone or learns from someone, this does not change things in the slightest: that is merely scaffolding, which is not incorporated into the architectural whole even though it is indispensable and taken into account by the builder " (p.187).

In a direct discourse, the text and the characters are isolated and the boundaries are tight. Therefore the reader's view of the characters are finalized and throughout the reading activity the same point is reinforced and they

extract one meaning from the text as Pankaj and Ravi point out,

" R: The model for this is if there are two persons who are equally qualified .. then there is something else .. like caste .. which is not good .. we should believe one fact that everybody is born equal .. no matter what religion .. what caste . or creed .. that is to show the world that Draupadi made a mistake by basing her judgment on caste and things like that and you should not do it in your life and that is the ideal way to go about in this world ...

P: I think if a thing like that has to be done .. I think it is better that you say it in the beginning .. and not wait till the last minute .. if that was the idea that Draupadi had earlier .. then she should have told earlier ... "

The text serves as a deterrent for Ravi. He extracts the "moral" from the story and establishes an "ideal". They do "wander" through the text and make spontaneous comments about everybody's action, but extract a "central" meaning. In this kind of discourse, the reader may substitute one text with another one, but the multiple texts don't necessarily enter into a dialogue. Therefore the editing and shuffling of the text is spontaneous as Ulupi comments,

" U: Did you see the look on Draupadi's father .. oh! my god .. I am never going to find a groom for my daughter ... (laughs) .. isn't there a someone perfect for my daughter .. in this entire courtroom ...".

Ulupi implies that Draupadi's father has the same anguish that a contemporary father has about having an unmarried daughter, and at another moment she accords them the differentiated "royal status", but the two "positions" exist in a disconnected manner. In a similar tone, Nanda and

Revathi go along with the text and when Karna is insulted they get into a discussion about caste,

" R: Caste is one part ... people are very aware of their positions .. that is contemporary .. from then on it has been coming down .. people are very conscious ..

N: You know in India every family .. they brag .. I think that is a very universal fact .. their caste .. everybody in India .. everybody is a Khatri .. where the hell did the others go .. nobody says they are Arora .. they bite their tongue .. it is so strange .. everybody wants to identify with the winning class ..".

And later on they enter into a discussion on the "freedom" that women in scriptures had.

The plot sets up a conflict between caste and gender relations in the society for the readers. When both the readers stay "within" the text they are in either complete agreement or end up having parallel views as Mamta and Renuka talk past each other,

" R: It was unfair .. Krishna says in Gita everybody is the same .. doesn't matter .. men should be recognized by their Karmas .. Karma is the same to this point .. Arjun was doing the same and he (Karna) was doing the same .. so why did he do that ...

M: I really don't know .. the fact that she can voice .. she has enough rights to voice .. I am not going to marry him .. that shows a basic authority .. a basic kind of standing ... that she can exercise .. which is good .. it was wrong on one hand .. it shows .. that she has the authority to change the outcome of a preset situation ... that is quite a lot of authority to have...".

One viewed the plot from a "caste" position and the other saw it from a "gendered" position and both their views were absolute and finalized.

In a monologic reading the characters are all "fixed" and "stable" and the reader also fixes himself or herself in

a reading position or may wander or jump from one "space" to another - sort of go along with the text. But at every moment the details of the text are "fixed". Interestingly, sometimes the readers themselves feel trapped or agitated by their own "fixed" construction of these characters and yet they are not aware of the tight boundaries they draw. The monolithic view becomes very conspicuous when the monologic reader is conversing with another who is willing to acknowledge the co-existence of multiple truths. This tension becomes clear in the conversation between Bhairav and Nagaraj,

" B: What came to my mind ... at this time .. it reflects first of all that the vileness of all the characters involved .. Draupadi and Krishna are .. practically start conspiring right now ... they use Karna's background .. as an excuse to get away .. not marry him .. they may not really ... we don't know if that is really a casteist aspersion or purely an excuse to get out of a situation ..

LAK: What do you think?

B: It could be either .. it could be either .. that was very striking there ...

N: So an extension of this question would be .. if everything is predetermined to start with ... that Draupadi is ultimately going to marry Arjun .. why all this drama .. in such a situation it looks like everybody has been made as a fool .. and ultimately what has to happen which is known to somebody is happening .. Krishna is engineering it ... then what is our role ..."

In Nagaraj's reading, Krishna - the godhead is the sole orchestrator of this plot; providence determining who marries whom and he repeatedly asks the question on the role of the individual. Yet, he wouldn't accord enough agency to Draupadi either, whereas Bhairav saw Draupadi and Krishna as co-conspirators. He saw Draupadi's action as a situational

escape, and yet acknowledged the injustice done to Karna. Bhairav later on recognizes the irony in the plot as he moves in and out of the text, whereas Nagaraj was enraged throughout. Unlike other readers, his rage was neither due to "casteism" or "sexism" implied in the plot, but how "destiny" plays a powerful role in one's life, and how the "super natural" forces seem to betray the ideal that the individual holds. For Nagaraj Krishna was the "teacher" - the ideal, and the plot seems to deflect from that ideal, and he feels agitated and raises questions to Krishna, whereas Bhairav recognizes the deviation and gains awareness about the situatedness of an "ideal". Nagaraj embraces an idealistic philosophy and therefore places the "ideal" above the individual. Bakhtin (1984) explains this philosophical monologism,

" In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher, and a pupil .. " (p.81).

Another kind of monologic thinking that Bakhtin (1984) discusses is a "unidirectional narration", which actively uses various other texts in order to strengthen the narrator's viewpoint. Here various texts point in one direction; they reinforce the narrator's idea. Mrs. Sarla engages in such a discourse to make sense of Draupadi's action,

" S: I don't know how authentic this is .. even if it is authentic .. as he rightly explains .. she is within her rights to choose who she wants .. it is her .. *Svayamvar* .. she has to choose .. and secondly if he is insulted

... I don't see him coming back and sitting down .. why don't they walk out .. these people are ready to shed blood at the slightest provocation .. this is an open insult .. so why would you sit down and want to continue the whole thing .. there is something not riding right.."

Mrs. Sarla wants to justify Draupadi's action. Initially she categorically asserts that it is her right to choose who she wants. To strengthen her argument, she directly parodies Karna's action. In a simple parodistic discourse, Bakhtin (1984) points out that "one can parody another's socially typical or individual characterological manner of seeing, thinking, and speaking" (p.194). Therefore if Karna is true to his character, that is take offense to a "slightest provocation", he should have walked out or protested, instead he comes back to his seat and Mrs. Sarla uses this action of his to ridicule and mock at him. She goes on to dismiss Duryodhan's protest to justify her view,

"S: That kind of preaching and moralizing .. is there .. that is why he (Draupadi's brother) rightly answers that it is her *Svayamvar* and it is her right .. that is emphasized .. I think that is more laudable than the thing that went before hand ... because he says is it's woman's right .. it is her right .. and if she chooses not to marry somebody of lower thing .. she will not marry ..

LAK: And it is justified ..

S: Yes .. even today we say that .. our girls .. we cannot say .. my daughter if she wants to marry somebody I cannot say you have .. it is up to her .. I can look at a person ..

LAK: If that was the criteria why didn't they state it as Duryodhan said ..

S: You don't have to state anything early on .. because bottom line is in *Svayamvar* .. the girl chooses who she wants .. whether she discards for caste reason ... whether she discards for looks .. or for any reason

see it is not written on stone ... the test is he has to pick it up and string the bow .. that is true ... what he is trying to do is bring them up to technicality .. why was it not announced before .. that is all it is....".

Mrs. Sarla goes on to point out that the true meaning of *Svayamavar* is "choose one's own groom", and therefore Draupadi's actions are within those parameters. She again enters the story the speculate another dimension which will reinforce her evaluation,

"S: Krishna is watching it all .. I mean the whole thing is initiated by Krishna at this point .. if you want to look at it that way .. but may be .. that characters are being established at this point .. the divisiveness is being set up at this point .. probably this is setting the stage for that .. for a final break"

She again steps out of the story,

"S: It is happening in today's world ... like for instance our girls .. if they choose to marry somebody .. the mother chooses somebody .. in fact we have come a step ahead ... in my mother's day .. just see and settle ... I remember my father telling me .. in wedding hall .. Indian women are suppressed we say .. I think this was the time when it was very progressive .. that is how I look at it ..".

In contrast to a unidirectional discourse in which several texts are at the "service" of the narrator, the "vari-directional discourse" is double voiced with hidden polemic and is "internally undecided and two-faced" (Bakhtin 1984). The thinking moves in multiple directions, and the narrator takes multiple view points to construct a polyphonic discourse. We can observe such a movement in Mausmi and Payal's conversation,

" M: First there is an injustice ... I think there is an injustice to Karna .. why doesn't she say so in the first place .. if she wanted Arjun in any way ...

P: I mean whether it is .. she wanted to marry Arjun .. or whether it is kind of predestined .. that is Krishna's nod .. it seems like some kind of ..".

Mausmi and Payal pose two different questions. Mausmi first expresses her sympathies to Karna, and Payal joins her later to discuss the injustice towards Karna and about caste system in general in Indian society. And then they explore possible motives on Draupadi's part, and the role of Krishna in this decision making process. Mausmi then draws the discussion to a contemporary situation which brings new insight to the problem in hand,

"M: Yeah! ... this is like average Indian situation .. even now this kind of thing .. suppose as a woman .. there is a some eligible woman in my community wants to get married .. she is like a princess .. let us say ... don't call her princess .. that is exactly what goes on .. you know .. there may be a Krishna or there may not be a Krishna .. but there is someone mediating .. there are all these men who want to marry her or something .. of equal stature or everything .. and she is still ... I can give examples of people I know .. have gone through ... like my cousin .. she is the daughter of an extremely wealthy estate owner .. this is the whole story .. any man would have been ready to marry her .. I don't know about Draupadi's history .. but this woman had a ball .. she went out with any guy she wanted .. wherever she wanted .. when she was on college ... but when it came time to get married .. she picked the person she went out with .. so Karna is like the Indian groom that she had to reject .. and Arjun is the guy she went out with .. she knows the patterns of other Gowdas (a community) in India .. that she probably marry another estate owner .. and .. so Arjun is still Bheeshma's nephew .. who is Karna .. you know what I am saying ... *Soothputra* .. she made that pretty clear .. this can be a situation for me .. as a woman I can be Karna .. I identify myself with Karna .. actually speaking .. that is exactly true .. (laughs) ... I do feel injustice done to him .. I always adored Arjun .. I still have a soft corner for him .. but I can identify myself .. things like this has happened to me .. injustice .. so I know it ..

LAK: Did you enter anybody else's shoes?

M: Dhrshtadhyumna .. as a brother ... because he spoke for his sister .. that ... I like that quality .. whether she is right or wrong .. or whatever ..

P: That is a good point I never thought about .. that is kind of different from what you expect from a male in India .. tell his sister that way .. why can't she marry Karna .. he didn't do that .. it did strike me actually .. but when you mentioned it ... ".

Mausmi's reading is unmistakably polyphonic. She changes camps, identifies with different characters, her affiliations shift as she enters newer camps, each serves as an axiological point to view the other, and she recognizes their social positioning and the trappings of each social position. As she switches camps she recognizes the characters and simultaneously applauds and mocks at them. At every moment there is a "double voicedness" to her narrative. She sometimes merges the epic with contemporary world and again she separates them. Draupadi switches place with her rich cousin who is the daughter of a rich estate owner, and given her social standing Draupadi opts to marry the man she loved. Mausmi points out that this "love" is not so pure. It is also socially desirable and convenient. In a parodistic tone she points out Arjun is not only the man she loved and therefore has to dismiss other suitors by any means, but Arjun is the suitable candidate for this princess. Mausmi jokingly says later on, he is the well traveled hero, like an "Indian doctor in America". He is the much sought after candidate, whereas Karna is the modest "local Indian boy". Besides, Arjun's heritage is suitable for her. He is Bheeshma's nephew

and the most important factor is he is Krishna's preferred candidate. Even god favors him. Mausmi introduces "hidden polemic"; she lays out all the desirable qualities of Arjun and then says, "who is Karna ... Soothputra (son of a charioteer)". Her usage of the word *Soothputra* is with a "shift in the accent". Bakhtin (1984) explains how the hidden polemic operates in a parodistic discourse,

" In a hidden polemic the author's discourse is directed towards its own referential object, as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. A word, directed toward its referential object, clashes with another's words within the very object itself " (p.195).

Every hidden polemic in Mausmi's narration produces the dialogic tension and propels her move through various zones in the text. The movement in turn creates the "polyphony" in the narrative. At every point she expresses doubt and indignation and mocks and ridicules the characters, identifies with them and finally acknowledges the irony. Her detour into various cultural spaces allows her to "open up" the text at different points. After exhausting all the possible motives on Draupadi's part, Mausmi goes on to explore Karna's motives. At this point she recognizes a dialogue in the story that she had missed out earlier. In the television production, number of suitors make an unsuccessful attempt to lift the bow and at that point Sakuni remarks that Hastinapur's "tongue has been cut", to which Karna responds that Hastinapur's tongue cannot be cut as long as Karna is

alive. Karna then goes to the podium to lift the bow and Draupadi dismisses his candidacy. This brief dialogue is missed out by virtually everyone. Mausmi's wandering allows her to pick up this dialogue and she recognizes Karna's motives. Karna is not in love with Draupadi. He only wants to save Hastinapur's honor, whereas Draupadi is in love with Arjun and has to resort to any tactic to escape from the situation. Mausmi again comes back to give "partial justification" to Draupadi's action. Bakhtin (1984) points out that a polyphonic consciousness allows the individual to "understand more deeply the extensive and well-developed contradictions which co-existed among people - among people, not among ideas in a single consciousness " (p.27). Mausmi's movement is not in one direction but she goes back and forth in many directions creating a "vari-directional double voiced discourse".

In a direct unmediated discourse the reader may condemn or condone Draupadi's action. In such a discourse the reader does not feel the need to enter into other cultural texts or use the other's discourse to make sense of the plot. Whereas, in a unidirectional discourse, the extra-textual material is used effectively by the narrator to her vested interests. In a vari-directional discourse multiple texts enter into a dialogue. The focus is on the dialogic angle and not the absolute affirmation or repudiation. (see Table 10 for distribution of subjects in various modes of discourse).

Maya Mahal (Palace of illusion) scene (Plot 2)

Unlike the previous plot in which the readers were forced to take different perspectives, this plot invited a direct response. A direct discourse can take multiple perspectives, but does not necessarily set up a dialogue between various perspectives and characters. In the *Svayamvar* scene there was a conflict between gender and caste relations in the society and the reader's allegiances kept shifting between Draupadi and Karna. The *Maya Mahal* plot is interesting in other ways. It is both comical and serious, especially when we locate the plot in the story line. Duryodhan convinces his blind father to give *Khandavprasth* (a piece of arid land) to his cousins Pandavas as their share of the kingdom. The Pandavas in turn make the land fertile and build a splendid palace - *Maya Mahal* and invite all the family members to celebrate the inaugural ceremony. The invitation to Duryodhan can have multiple layers of meaning; it is overtly a family gathering and tacitly a "slap on his face". The task of the reader is to explore the motives of Pandavas in inviting their jealous cousin, and Draupadi's reasons for making those jeering remarks and Duryodhan's reaction to such insults. The initial response however was towards Draupadi's laughter and remarks as Uma and Malathy respond,

" M: A woman laughed at him .. there is nothing wrong in laughing .. I might find it funny also .. but I think to say *Andhe ka* whatever (blind man's) is .. I don't know .. if she has been insulted before .. but seems a foolish remark ..

U: Yeah! I agree .. I feel the same way .. I mean I think she went too far in saying .. whatever .. blind man's .. first of all he is not *Andha* for sure ... I mean factually .. it is not a right statement .. he ignores the warning of that woman ..

M: Which is true .. which is *Andha* actually .. when you are told .. you have been warned right .. so you still go to do it .. it is obviously blind ..

U: It is a blind act ... but to insinuate ... I mean to suggest .. to call his father blind ... "

Most readers especially those who engage in a "direct discourse" find Draupadi's remarks "blind man's son blind" to be most offensive. For Uma and Malathy, Draupadi's remarks were unwarranted and they don't necessarily try to substantiate their views. It is simply wrong. Likewise Atul says,

"A: She is a hostess .. it is not very nice thing to do for a hostess .. it is not a very nice thing to do .. she made a joke ..".

For Atul Draupadi's action "is not a nice thing". He locates the social "niceties" or the lack of it in the character. Revathi and Nanda on the other hand viewed Draupadi's behavior as indicative of "Indian culture",

" R: That is a very vicious statement ...

N: Especially when ... nobody is blind out of choice .. or nobody is blind because they did something .. it is something that happens ... to point out somebody's physical disabilities to that person is bad enough .. but to tell their child .. the way she said it .. I think to some extent in our culture .. people say mean things and is not considered bad ... teasing in the street is very common in India .. you know if somebody has one leg ..they give him a name .. they say ... *woh langda jara* (that lame is running) .. that is very common .. *Koyi lamba ha tho lamba bolengi* (if somebody is tall they say he is tall) .. but in this culture every child is beautiful ... you don't point out somebody's physical disabilities .. you don't say to

someone .. you know you have really gone fat .. India it is very common to say .. the other person doesn't even mind it ... part of culture .. aunts will come and they will compare two sisters .. and tell the mother right in front of two girls .. you know what she is very beautiful ... it is true in India .. it just comes out..

R: Yes ... It is true in India .. there is a great premium placed on physical perfection .. not so much handsome .. but having all the faculties functioning and stuff like that .. and if it is not people will comment on it .. ".

For Nanda and Revathi the text is "stand in" for contemporary culture. A direct monologic discourse strives for the definitiveness of the character, culture, and social norms. In such a discourse both the reader and the text they are comprehending and the culture they live in are fixed. The characters, cultures and various times zones may switch places but they don't retain their uniqueness and enter into a dialogue to generate novel perspectives. Likewise, when readers completely agree with each other there is hardly any scope for newer meanings to emerge, as Shyam (Sh) and Sambhu (S) reinforce each other's views,

"Sh: If you laugh at somebody .. if somebody slips and falls into the water .. you might laugh ... you also might help him at the same time ... and you take it in good nature .. you won't call him .. you are lame ... and that is why you fell .. if the guy had polio .. and he is limping ... that is exactly what she has done here .. that is what is bad about her .. nature .. OK .. you had your laugh .. it is one of the natural emotions .. and then move on and go on and be more solicitous ...

S: Give him a towel or something .. (laughs)

Sh: Which is what she didn't do .. which is probably rubbing this guy in a wrong way .. she provoked him ...

When both the readers engage in a direct discourse and they have differing viewpoints then each of their viewpoints remain fragmented and do not necessarily "talk" to each other. They talk past each other as Ulupi and Rupak try to find justification for their views within and story and they intertwine it with their personal experiences,

" R: Actually I thought Draupadi was arrogant .. she is not .. she is just laughing .. know what she said and son is blind .. and that is mean ..."

U: Duryodhan comes into this enchanted palace and starts walking and certain things aren't the way they are and things .. like water he steps into is actually not really water .. you know he steps in and he falls in .. he is embarrassed and then to top it off Draupadi starts laughing and finally says ... the son of a blind man would of course be blind .. which aggravates him very much .. she kind of insulted his father .. she probably said at a moment of humor but Duryodhan deserved it ...".

Ulupi goes on to remind Rupak about all the nasty things that Duryodhan had done prior to this incident and therefore in her view "he deserved it", whereas Rupak insisted that those comments were "wrong". Often readers find her comments to be so offensive that they become sympathetic towards Duryodhan Mohan (M) and Manoj (Mn) react,

"Mn: Does this occur in the story that at this point they both have their own cities or whatever .. and the Pandavas are very successful .. and that is why Kauravs became very jealous .. this is one more thing that helps them .. Duryodhan comes here and he sees beautiful palace and not only does that make him a little envious .. he also falls into a puddle that he can't see ... he is not happy about it .. (laughs) ..

M: Relating to this .. I felt bad for him ... here he is trying to go through all these illusions ... and he doesn't know what to believe and what not to believe and like you say .. he is going on leap of faith .. he is like .. man ... I hope I don't fall on my face .. and he

does .. and she is there watching and he is really ... I don't know .. felt really bad for that guy ...

Mn: Yeah! .. Yeah ...

M: I don't care what kind of jerk he is .. everybody can be .. you know .. that was not cool .. you know ...".

The *Maya Mahal* scene invites direct identification. Some readers like Ulupi enter the "shoes" of Draupadi and use to opportunity to mock at Duryodhan. Duryodhan is emblematic of all "egotistic" individuals and Draupadi's sneering remarks is an opportunity to get back, as Mr. Radharam argues,

" It is natural .. she had enough reasons to put him down .. and having gotten down .. she is gloating .. she is eagerly looking forward for an occasion where she could ..".

Mr. Radharam then justifies by putting himself in her situation and said if someone tormented him he would use the appropriate moment to "get back". Very often the readers remain within the story and in repeating the story they once again experience the events that led to the laughter. They go on to discuss how Duryodhan nudged his father to give some infertile land to Pandavas and discuss other incidents when he was unfair to Pandavas, therefore Draupadi's laughter is a moment to celebrate and the justification for laughter is found within the story. Those who want to condemn the laughter, use the opportunity to point out the consequences that Draupadi suffers for her actions (In the next plot the Dice game, Duryodhan makes an attempt to disrobe her), as Mrs. Leela and Mrs. Hamsa point out,

" L: I think this is the root cause for what Duryodhan is going to do for Draupadi in the end .. because she laughed at him and then he wanted the entire kingdom or

entire people to laugh at her .. for what she has done
 .. so this is like a seed for the future .. Mahabharath
 .. fight ..

H: That is it she shouldn't have laughed at all ..
 if we did a mistake not knowing it .. she was laughing
 so hard .. making him so angry and last minute she added
 something in the fire that is already burning .. ".

When both the readers engage in a "*single voiced discourse* " throughout the reading process, the same evaluative stance is reinforced by using personal experiences and examples from cultural events. The readers then universalize and normalize their own evaluative stance. In order to strengthen their evaluative stance they may substitute one text to another and treat them all as identical. Cultural spaces and historical times can switch places, as evidenced in Ravi and Pankaj's conversation,

"R: ..the way I look at it is Draupadi pays penalty for mocking at this guy .. in the form of *Vastraharan* she has to go through that thing .. one of the reasons she goes through that is .. in our society supposed to be sober and they are not supposed mock at people .. she pays penalty for provoking ... the only thing we learn from this is anyone who makes a mistake definitely pays a penalty ...

P: ... it shows that Draupadi doesn't want to be with Duryodhan .. this particular scene clearly shows that .. deliberately she tries to mock at him .. it is totally out of place in the society that has been depicted ... a guest has been invited ... whatever .. even if you have some sort of vengeance that you want to take .. at that particular time and at that particular place .. nobody had the right to do that ... these are the inferences I derive from the .. ".

This conversation is almost a prototype of monologic thinking. The style of reading, the evaluation of the characters, their notions of society, both contemporary and the ancient, their views on women's role, everything is

absolute, and their evaluation is indisputable. At one point, I pointed out that Draupadi had been previously insulted by Duryodhan and therefore she could be taking her chance, to which they both spoke about their personal experiences when they felt "insulted by women" and experienced the same rage that Duryodhan experienced, and here is Ravi's response,

" I think men always .. try to impress women .. OK ... and if you really had to fall down .. I wouldn't fall down in front of a girl ... I don't care now .. I have seen people do that .. it is a real blow .. a fatal blow to a person's ego .. if he is mocked at by a girl ... because we come from a society where women are the ultimate .. you always try to make a woman happy or impress a girl .. so being that the case .. it is really tough .. to take .. if a girl laughs at me .. it is very natural that this guy gets enraged ... ".

The "naturalization" of subjective feelings are clear in Ravi's account. However, what is "natural" is very selective. It is only Duryodhan's rage that is natural. The "natural" behavior takes on whole different semantic twist in the conversation between Bhairav and Nagaraj,

" B: She is acting natural .. like an immature girl .. laughing at somebody .. who fell down .. first response ... immaturity is revealed .. (laughs)

Bhairav meant Draupadi's laughter as a normal response, and his tone was very jovial. The laughter is silly and he can identify with that behavior, to which Nagaraj responded in a more stern voice,

" .. the vengeance of Duryodhan as a **normal** being is fully justified .. that a person who is hurt has not been considered hurt and on the contrary being made fun of .. is actually a humiliating phenomenon for any normal human being .. added to that being a little egoistic king .. makes it worse for him .. so he is justified as a normal human being when he takes vengeance on Draupadi ... on the contrary I could never understand the character of Draupadi at this stage ..".

In response to this comment Bhairav redefines his initial claim. He initially dismissed the laughter as an "immature behavior", and then reacted sharply to Nagaraj's comment and defended Draupadi's action.

To analyze any reading activity, Todorov (1966) proposes three categories: one is *tense*, that temporal relations in the text, the relationship between the time of the story and the time of the discourse expressed, and the second category is *aspect*, the point of view that the reader takes, and the third one is the *mood* which is the kind of discourse used by the reader. The *mood* expresses the emotional baggage, the degree of intensity with which the reader reacts. In reading the *Maya Mahal* scene, there was quite a bit of gradation in the reader's mood. Some treated Draupadi's laughter as a jovial moment (which was the case with Bhairav) and laughed along with Draupadi. In fact they referred to their own reaction to validate Draupadi's laughter. Others saw Duryodhan's fall as a "ripe moment" for Draupadi to mock at this egoistic character. Some others viewed Draupadi as being so impetuous that she "dug her own grave". Mukta and Sukumar viewed this as a "necessary plot" to "move the story" and they participated in such a movement,

"M: .. he didn't expect this .. it was a forest before .. Khandavprasth before .. those people didn't get anything from the Kuru dynasty .. and .. they could make such a beautiful palace .. and those kind of pictures ... those were beyond imagination .. none of the big kings have this kind of thing ... and he is becoming very jealous .. he didn't have any good quality that Draupadi could like him and on the other hand they

called all these people to show their .. capability ... and this kind of thing ... that was their best occasion .. right .. you can show off .. and she couldn't resist her temptation to say something ... that was a female thing ...

S: This is the turning point in the entire Mahabharath .. otherwise things were going smoothly .. and now .. (laughs) because even if .. let us imagine that .. Duryodhan is not happy with Pandavas .. and everything is status quo and they are not given any kingdom .. it does not matter for Pandavas .. because they could build such a grand palace .. and live much better than .. Duryodhan .. so everything is going to be ..normal and there will be small fights .. and between .. within palace .. so really they .. wanted momentum .. as we said .. either author or Krishna .. if you simply immerse yourself in a story it is Krishna ... if you come out of it .. it is author .. and the turning point is ...

M: Yeah! the story goes that way ...".

Mukta and Sukumar are not so interested in giving their final evaluation of the plot, but in the reading activity they repeat the story, make some additions and editions, explore alternative plots and recognize the plot as turning point in the story. In a similar mood Mr. Rajan also goes through the motions of the story and points out that the plot is not necessarily a "turning point" in the story,

"R: .. a grown up man ... slipping on a banana peel does evoke laughter .. and for one reason to take umbrage and simply because he has power over .. converts a minor discomfiture into a huge rage? ... that is about it ... may be there is a moral .. we ought not to magnify a simple infractions into a big thing and burn ourselves in the process .. that is the only thing I can think of ... ".

He then goes on to point out,

"R: If she had not laughed .. and she had executed superior control over her emotions .. the turn of events would have been any different .. I doubt it .. to the extent that the whole thing is an orchestrated event .. for god .. these are all various sub plots .. motivations or provocations you might see .. which lead

up to the big kind of thing .. if not this something else might have happened .. so I don't think any less of her..".

In the "act of reading", Wolfgang Iser (1978) explains that of the reader's objective is simply to judge the story, then the reading becomes independent of "time", i.e. neither the text nor the reader moves, whereas in a passive synthesis the reader goes along with the flow of the text. Iser (1978) draws a distinction between "meaning" and "significance" to explain the difference between passive synthesis and active reading. He writes,

" Meaning is the referential totality which is implied by the aspects contained in the text and which must be assembled in the course of reading. Significance is the reader's absorption of the meaning into his own existence. Only the two together can guarantee the effectiveness of an experience which entails the reader constituting himself by constituting a reality hitherto unknown to himself" (p.151).

A reality previously unknown to the reader is made possible in the reading activity when the reader actively constructs alternative plots. The *Maya Mahal* plot gains significance during the course of constructing an alternative plot for Sukumar, whereas the plot ceases to be significant for Mr. Rajan as he explores other alternatives. For Sukumar the laughter builds tension in the story which leads to the great Mahabharath war, whereas for Mr. Rajan the war would have happened anyway and the laughter was only a minor catalyst. In both cases there is intersubjectivity in the production of meanings. Sukumar treated this plot as a turning point in the story, and Mr. Rajan gave less weight to it. Mrs. Sarla, Anu

and Jayashree go a step further and dismiss the plot as a fabrication as Mrs. Sarla said in a surprising tone,

" Totally different characterization of Draupadi ... I think for TV purposes .. they have made it as though ... they were trying to justify Kauravas .. hatred towards Pandavas .. I think that is what they tried to justify their anger as being provoked by Pandavas ... when we read the Mahabharatha as we know it .. the only bone of contention between these people is not that these insults were hurled .. or she laughed .. only provocation was Draupadi was disrobed .. and also .. division of land .. all these (she makes a hand gesture as if to push the plot away)".

Anu expressed similar viewpoint in an indignant manner,

" A: .. the versions I have read .. I had read quite a few *Prabandans* and essays on Mahabharath .. and I never came across where she had said that .. she had laughed .. I don't remember .. Dr. Pratap Chandro Chandro .. or someone like Dr. Viswanath Roy said that .. I don't remember the exact name .. he said .. where did B.R.Chopra get this line particular line from ..."

Eventhough they dismissed the plot as a "factual error", Mrs. Sarla, Anu and Jayashree were willing to engage with the plot and decided that Draupadi alone did not precipitate the future events.

When readers "wander" through the text and tap into every possible meaning, they are not so much interested in affirming their viewpoint or "winning" an argument with their reading partners; instead they are interested in enjoying, and evaluating and realizing every aspect of the text and their selfhood. The active "wandering" allows them to see the plot at an abstract, concrete, social and mythical level, which becomes clear in Mamta's reflections,

" M: I think the whole situation is very interesting because it is multilayered .. firstly I am sure more people who are familiar with Mahabharath know exactly when it occurs .. which I am fully unaware of .. but I

am sure on some level .. the assumptions we make about our senses and reality ...I think it is all that ...the water .. the fire .. images and all that stuff .. the assumptions we make .. and in that palace everything is turned upside down .. **but the only reality to me is the social reality** .. of these two people .. Draupadi and Duryodhan .. and it is very hurtful ... what she said and he is outraged .. and just the positioning of them .. which is up there in a balcony and she is laughing her head off and he is down there .. and she is looking down at him .. literally and figuratively ... for his silliness .. everything ... everytime he encountered an unnatural phenomenon .. in that situation somebody told him about it ... he was so willing to listen to those two ... who were also menials ... and when this *Dasi* (servant) woman .. the disrespect for women is so apparent and then it is this Draupadi slaps him on his face ... and mockery and all that ... I do feel a little bit bad for him .. but my heart doesn't go out to him or her .. in this episode ...".

While Mamta saw multiple realities in this plot, her partner Renuka saw only one reality, that is Draupadi's rudeness, which in her view was very "unladylike".

The discussion between Mausmi and Payal also is indicative of a parallel conversation;

M: ... the last scene .. walking into that thing .. (laughs) ... I mean you got to be a fool .. I would really be .. his anger is justified ... I would it is like that .. I mean .. I hate to bring this again ... but it is like my cousin in the States .. now a doctor .. if someone visited from India it is little bit .. they want to show off .. how well they are .. or how good they are doing ... but malice .. I doubt (laughs) ... it is strange though why it happened .. I think these guys .. these Pandavas are just trying to show their cousins .. what a wonderful thing they have ... I mean if they converted all this dry arid land into wonderful ... but I think this palace is bit much .. it is like high tech ... especially it is like watching N.C. Hammer's video or something .. (laughs) .. I believe when you enter the garage .. it starts playing real song ... so this is something ..

P: But I think emotions in those days .. when you look back .. I mean everything is watered down ... in today's society .. you have restraints .. much more than you did .. whenever this happened .. how many years ago .. where thing were very strong .. every word said was taken as

an insult ..and you had to avenge that .. you had to take action and emotions were much .. much ... I think were stronger ..".

In Mausmi's reading there were multiple layers of meaning. She empathizes with Duryodhan for a moment. I must emphasize that the empathy was only for a moment. She did go on to say that her laughter does not justify his attempt to disrobe her. She then draws analogy with her rich cousin who may subtly "show off" her wealth, or allow her guests to take a tour in her estate. She then stepped out of her cousin's shoes and then remarked that you would want to "show off" even more if you have been insulted in the past. Payal, on the other hand was always fixed in reading the text. She fixed herself and fixed the text, and saw Draupadi's piquant remarks as explicit emotions of the ancient past. One does not observe the same kind of movement that you can observe in Mausmi's reading. For Mausmi "spaces" sometimes are synthesized into a whole and sometimes are fragmented and each space becomes both a vantage point to view the other and an instrument to "activate" the other.

The reading activity becomes interesting when the two readers have different viewpoints. In Mamta and Renuka's case their views were parallel. In some cases the arguments become quite "heated", especially when one reader takes a "conventional" view on femininity and the other is somewhat irate in such matters. Mohini and Chitra had such sharp differences. Mohini did not want to approve of Draupadi's

laughter and yet she could not attribute any "malice" to her either. Instead she said,

" she is just *Bhabhi* .. sister-in-law ... her laughter .. why not ... don't we make fun of your younger brother-in-law .. won't you poke fun at him .. you don't have to take it so seriously ... ".

Mohini was unwilling to see the seriousness of the situation and her partner Chitra was weaving multiple layers out of this plot. Mohini had a definite sense of right and wrong and this plot disturbed her and she was only willing to see it in a lighter side and would have liked to see this as a "warm family gathering". She would often say families are for fun, and her ideal was being disrupted in this plot, and Chitra was annoyed by her "fixed ideals" and here is a conversation between them that gets "heated",

"M: The way she said it .. it was pretty sarcastic .. it is an outright insult .. it is evident .. it is hurtful ... whatever front you put up .. something does affect you somewhere ...

C: but I guess she is entitled to insult him .. I just don't know if before this they had suffered any hardships .. from Duryodhan ..

LAK: Oh! yes ..

C: Right .. she is married to them .. she got ..

M: Did she get any direct insult from Duryodhan ...

C: No .. no .. by marrying them .. she has taken on their baggage .. and I guess it is .. even if she laughed and insulted him .. it is out of proportion .. in the sense it is too small .. it is not considering what he has done to them ...

M: Should you always get back ...

C: Yeah .. why not ..

M: Why do you want to get to their level .. stoop to their level .. increase .. kind of makes you provoke

them into more anger .. more rivalry .. I think it is wrong on her part to say that line .. she should have laughed and left it there ..

C: Life is not so simple ..

M: Why not avoid problems ..

C: you are not living ...

M: Already problems exist in the world ... why go after

C: They were .. probably things were fine .. they had already constructed their palace .. the palace reeked of decadence .. they were put to death (Pandavas) .. so why not .. when she saw the situation she wasn't going to restrain ...

M: But there are people who you don't have to tell them .. may be they will realize themselves ..

C: But the thrill of telling them .. that .. (laughs)".

Chitra initially found Duryodhan to be in a vulnerable position and sympathized with him, and when Mohini enters the conversation she becomes argumentative and starts almost "bullying" her.

When the reader actively wanders through the text, Iser (1978) points out that many realities about the text and about the culture in which both the self and the text are located become visible. Here is a conversation/argument between Anup who wandered freely and Ritesh who was "fixated",

"A: I was impressed that she made that comment .. yeah! .. that a woman could take .. pretty dominant aggressive dialogue .. she was not covering and running away .. she pointed at him and said ... *Andhe ka putre Andha* .. boom .. boom .. man .. I was impressed ..

R: I just think it shows ..

A: that .. she is really really a very strong person ..

R: No .. she is deliberate ... callousness I think .
pretty insulting when someone comes to your house and
you say .. because they don't see .. clearly derogatory.

A: That surprises me normally such a male dominated
thing .. a big king ... bigger king's son or whatever it
is .. this dude is coming to town .. and we have these
women in India normally .. they are quite passive .. and
here she comes out and laughs and at his face gives this
dialogue .. that means they are putting her in a certain
role .. generally they are there as meek and tripping ..
putting their veil .. heads falling into that ... there
she goes .. boom .. boom ..

R: I think she comes across as a crass woman ..

A: I like that you know .. I think it is time for
someone to act .. I don't want to give the impression
that she is justified ..

R: No it is not right ..

A: No .. now I just realized .. yeah .. given that these
guys have thrown them out .. cheated them ... and given
that Duryodhan has played a very big role and she is
bright enough person .. she knows .. then why the hell
should they get this arid land for nothing .. and they
worked hard ... to do this ..yeah! .. yeah! .. she is
getting kicks out of .. and look at this idiot .. he is
warned him and he still .. because of his grand self of
himself .. he didn't listen and went boom into it ..
hands off for Draupadi .. good show ..

R: I disagree entirely ...

A: Oh! yeah! you go to his house after accusing him .. I
want to get perspective .. and he says .. fuck off ...
he doesn't spare .. I wonder where this charity is
coming from ..

R: That is immaterial .. I don't think it is a valid
sort of point ...".

This stretch of conversation between Anup and Ritesh is
instructive in understanding the "grounds of interpretation"
for each subject. It is also emblematic of a conversation
between one who wants to dialogize the text and one who
monologizes the text. Some common linguistic expressions in
Anup's talk were, "I was impressed", they are putting her in

a role", "she is bright", etc. Such expressions bring number of subjects and concerns into the reading activity - the self, the creator of the immediate text - B.R.Chopra, the character Draupadi, women in India, social relations in contemporary culture, and finally broad philosophical concerns. Sense making for Anup takes place amidst these multiple actors and concerns. In contrast observe Ritesh's remarks, "it shows", "it is suggesting", "it is derogatory", "terribly crass woman", "I disagree entirely". The authority of the text and the reading self is unequivocal. These expressions imply that the text speaks independently and his evaluation is also independent of the socio cultural environment in which he is living. Anup uses his own personal reaction - his laughter as grounds for making sense of Draupadi's laughter and confronts Ritesh on his own reaction and what he would do if he was insulted. Ritesh's reply was a categorical, "that is immaterial". Anup brings his selfhood to make sense and Ritesh dismisses his reaction as "invalid". Ritesh makes himself invisible and asserts authority over the text and he would often dismiss Anup as being too "emotional" and Anup in turn would try to hold him personally responsible for his interpretive stance. Anup wants to make sense of Draupadi's laughter in the context of both the story (she and her family members were tormented by Duryodhan earlier) and the context of the socio cultural environment that he inhabits. He says, "it is about time they show women like this". His concerns are both about the character and about

the depiction. Ritesh would dismiss such statements as being "politically correct" or a "fabrication" on B.R.Chopra's part and he finally asserted, "I believe in some absolute truths", and listen to Anup's response on "absolute truths",

" A: what is interesting is .. do you think these absolute truths are kind of .. should be known to human being intrinsically .. because that is what makes it absolute in some sense ...

R: It is only by self examination that they are known ..

A: Are you saying that .. can imagine that a whole group of people or culture to whom this truth is not known ..

R: Yes ..

A: I would imagine that in all fairness that if there is something absolute out there .. then everybody has a shot at knowing it pretty much so ...it is not like somebody who has studied .. or a rich man at that time .. everybody should have a shot at that intrinsic absolute truth .. that is not true .. Mahabharath adds to that .. so when I see these ... I know they are playing up to this modern thing .. people are impressed by universe and stars .. I think it is quite a tacky attempt ..".

Anup and Ritesh are not philosophers by training, but their conversation seems to be a personification of Kant's "transcendental idealism" and Bakhtin's "transgredient dialogism". Ritesh argues for self contained "pure ideas" and "pure values", and Anup acknowledges "tacky attempt" both on his part as an interpreter and on B.R.Chopra's part as a director of this ancient tale. The conversation points out the acknowledged "messiness" on Anup's part and a "pretension" of purity on Ritesh's part. The multiple social realities reveal something for Anup whereas for Ritesh they are unnecessary noise. Anup, in taking a dialogic angle seems to assert in Bakhtin/Medvedev's (1978/1985) words that

"philosophical views, beliefs or even shifting ideological moods" do not exist "within man, in his head or in his soul". But "they become ideological reality only by being realized in words, actions, clothing, manners, and organizations of people and things - in a word: in some definite semiotic material" (P.7).

For distribution of subjects in various modes of discourse in reading this plot see Table 11.

THE DICE GAME: DRAUPADI'S VASTRAHARAN (PLOT 3)

Any story teller of Mahabharath will acknowledge that this is the most important plot in the epic. This plot forces the reader to come to grips with a variety of relationships - God/devotee, ruler/ruled, wife/husband, teacher/pupil, male/female, etc., and it reveals some stark realities about human weaknesses and foibles. This plot takes the reader through an emotional "roller coaster"; it is about addiction to gambling, lapse of intelligence at crucial moments, evasion of duties, and failure on the part of various authorities of the kingdom to speak out. The King, the minister, the guardian of the throne, and the teachers failed to speak out when basic codes of ethics were being violated. They bear witness to a crime, when an attempt is made to disrobe Draupadi. In modern times this plot resembles an attempted gang rape. If we view the plot from Draupadi's perspective, we see multiple realities - victimization, and intelligence on her part to find legal loopholes to challenge

her "objectification", and when she fails to find an answer from the authority figures of the kingdom, she takes a vow to avenge the insult. She declares that she will not braid her hair till she dips it in her perpetrator's blood. Before taking the vow, she delivers a harangue on the "injustices towards women" in the kingdom and demands direct answers. The plot therefore provides an avenue for the readers to sort out the "gender battle" in contemporary society.

Unlike the previous two plots which were only 5 minute segments, this plot was a whole 40 minutes viewing; therefore the readers had to go through the motions of the story. The television production aptly begins with an introduction by the *Sutradhar* (an embodiment of time, who is the story teller), who says,

"Today, the story of Mahabharath is at an embarrassing turn. On one side of respectability there is no one except Draupadi and on the other side of the line of respectability there is everyone Therefore, this is a place and time to stop and think. Because this decision has to be made by every individual in the present, and in future, whether they are on this side of line of respectability or that side. Every individual will have to enter this tragic event".

At the very outset the reader is invited to enter the plot and undertake the journey to explore notions of *Dharma* - which literally means 'what holds together' and is the basis of all order - social, moral, and political (Grimes, 1989. A *concise Dictionary of Indian philosophy*). In Indian philosophy this concept embraces truth, justice, duty, rights and responsibilities. Given the length of this episode and its controversial nature, the viewers are consciously or

unconsciously swept by the text. The movement is inevitable. The nature of the movement within the text and the "counter movement" on the part of the reader determines the reading activity. The differences between readers lies in the nature and the direction of this movement, and to track this movement, I will use the rhetorical tropes - metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony as the analytical tools.

For an active reader, the *Dice Game* provides ample opportunities to use all rhetorical tropes to understand the complexities of *Dharma*. To begin with let us look at this movement in the conversation between Mr. Radharam (Ra) and Mrs. Rukmini (Ru). In the story when Draupadi was staked by her husband Yudhishtir, the royal teacher Kripacharya and the grand patriarch of the family Bheeshma raise protests and Duryodhan insults them by reminding them that their livelihood is dependent on him. At this point, Mr.Radharam and Mrs. Rukmini stop the tape to engage in a discussion,

"Ra: One is a legal matter .. she asks .. did he lose himself first or me ... if that is the case he has no position to stake her .. that I think will come up later ... other thing is each one of them was fully aware of what is going on ... yet they didn't know how to put him down .. because he now told the royal teacher to shut up .. and now he is telling Bheeshma himself .. you have no right ... yet Bheeshma was way above Dhrtharashtra himself .. yet how come they were not able to stop this .. I would say this was the most abominable thing .. in our mythology ..

Ru: As Krishna says whenever righteousness has collapsed so much .. I have to take avatar .. so this has to happen .. otherwise in a big royal family .. Bheeshma .. he is the son of Ganga . normally we think Ganga is from heaven .. a man of that caliber.. could he not have done something ... who is he to have fed him ... if he wanted to he could have prevented this .. he is at fault ... major fault .. that is why he had to sleep in the bed of

arrows .. Duryodhan cannot even sleep without insulting him .. that egotistical he is ...

Ra: You know have you heard of this tail hook association in California .. few thousand aviators .. they molested about 20 or 30 women ... stripping them .. in public ... in America .. it is incredible ...

Ru: These days it can happen .. these days if it happens it doesn't seem so unjust .. because it is *Kalyug* .. in this epoch anything can happen no justice ...

Ra: Yes .. we have come to accept anything is .. acceptable ..".

Mr. Radharam lays out the "problem" by describing the event and intertwines it with his personal reaction to it. He says, "it is the abominable thing", and Mrs. Rukmini joins in and reacts to the collapse of righteousness and she holds Bheeshma responsible for not speaking out. At this point Mr. Radharam is reminded of a similar contemporary problem - the "tail hook scandal" in California to which Mrs. Rukmini draws a distinction between the ancient times and the present time. She uses the Hindu calendar to point out that this is the age of *Kalyug* which according to the Hindu calendar is the "dark age". This age is characterized by break up of moral values and ethics, and Mr. Radharam simply responds in agreement. Mr. Radharam draws the analogy to enter the "metaphoric" trope and Mrs. Rukmini draws a distinction in time zones and lays out the consequences of Bheeshma's silence, to enter the "metonymic" trope. They then continue to watch and then stop the tape when Bheeshma again raises some objections and Duryodhan rhetorically responds as,

"Oh! Grandfather, Yudhishtir himself put Draupadi at stake. Before he put Draupadi at stake why didn't you all object to it? Why didn't you all object to it? Why

didn't you say that Draupadi is the pride of this royal family and don't put her at stake? Why are all these questions being raised now, when I have won the game. Does anyone have answer to my question? Does anyone have answer to my question"?

At this point in the story, all the readers are discombobulated. Every reading pair (100%) stop the tape at this point. All readers are forced to discuss problems of rights and responsibilities and about legal and ethical issues. Mr.Radharam and Mrs.Rukmini try to answer Duryodhan's question and find possible answers for Bheeshma and other authority figures' inability to speak out,

" Ru: Bheeshma would not have thought that they would bring a woman to a public gathering and insult her like this .. he can only think that everybody is like him .. according to the rules of the society of that day .. he would not have anticipated to this degree .. he (Duryodhan) .. makes .. all these atrocities .. and he is asking questions?

Ra: One of the thing is .. events have happened for them too fast for them to really react normally .. they are stuck in a wheel and they are going .. and by the time they thought of anything they have reached a stage ..his question shall we say is legally right .. technically it was not possible to stop at various stages .. number one .. this stupid Yudhishtir is carrying on .. man keeps on doing this .. he thinks once he wins he will get hold of the situation and he has not been able to ... so events have overtaken all the good people ..

Ru: What they would have thought .. a game of dice .. this side will win a few and the other side will win ... Rajas (kings) for the sake of enjoyment they are playing is what they would have thought .. that they will stoop so low .. they would not have anticipated .. because their mind will not go in that direction ... they do not have a crooked mind .. once you begin a dice game ..

Ra: you always think next coin will bring you luck".

Now the readers enter the trope of synecdoche and Bheeshma, who was initially singled out and condemned gains sympathy. He is a 'stand in' for all righteous authority

figures who are caught up by the rapid change of events and find themselves in a 'technical pit' and are unable to extricate themselves out of it and assert their authority. Their inability is coupled with the foolish behavior of the individuals they are supposed to protect, as both the readers point out, Yudhishtir continues to play despite his loss. Herein lies the irony. The authority figure is held responsible for the outcome of the events and yet during the course of events there was never a moment when they could have intervened, and when they briefly intervened, the players paid no attention to their concern. Mr. Radharam goes on to discuss the "legal trappings",

"Ra: One thing is there .. they are also full of legalities and correctness .. I would say right and wrong or moral or immoral .. legally right .. there is a moral dilemma .. he has lost .. he is an adult .. he is not a tender baby ... at this stage they cannot do anything .. at time I ask .. so many times ... I feel some things are wrong .. it shouldn't be done .. but because of legal technicality ... I had to accept it ... you see in Defense .. there are two things .. one is rules and regulations .. and the other is .. customs of service .. at times there may be conflict .. depending on the situation we have to play ... which one is the right thing .. in the old days .. when I joined .. it was something like Mahabharath times .. (laughs) .. this was one of the customs of service .. you never discuss women in the mess .. there were no rules and regulations about it ... as if someone spoke it was pointed out ... so here is an example .. legal technicality wise they are absolutely right .. and things like this I have seen number of times ... when put in their position .. Bheeshma or Drona .. they are in the position of sitting judge .. they have to see the nuances of the law .. you could be burning inside .. though I have held Bheeshma in a very poor esteem .. because of this . now I put myself ..."

Mrs. Rukmini also joins him to reflect on the times when she may have unknowingly participated in "wrong doings", and with a feeling of resignation she says,

" Everything is gone here ... he gives Sakuni to play .. there itself *Dharma* has failed .. Duryodhan should have played rightfully and these fellows . play .. stake their wife .. they dragged her into the court .. *Dharma* has all at once been wiped out ..".

Their conversation begins with statements about failure of justice and their movement through these rhetorical tropes reveals various realities, both about the characters in the story, about themselves and about the world around them. In this case, both Mrs. Rukmini and Mr. Radharam were equal partners in co-constructing the text. They begin their interpretive act with a description of the event (mimetic level), and make initial evaluations and draw analogies to build an argument (diegetic level) and recognize consequences of the characters' actions and reflect upon their own views. They facilitate each other in moving their conversation through all the rhetorical tropes and recognize the strengths and trappings of various viewpoints.

In sharp contrast to the dyad that I just discussed, Mr. Rajan and Mr. Bhagirath, engage in a parallel discussion. In the previewing session, Mr. Bhagirath said that he had not and did not want to engage with Mahabharath, since the text was not about the "ideal", but about "evil", and obviously during the viewing session he was agitated throughout, whereas Mr. Rajan enjoyed the text for the complex problems that it raises,

" B: I don't think I like it now ... the only thing that is good about it .. there is cogency about the whole thing .. story value is there .. but whether it is something one wants to do in one's own life .. recreate this kind of atmosphere .. I don't ...

LAK: How about there are two ways in which morality can be spoken about .. one is ... something tells me what to do .. but this tells me what not to do .. so this is equally valid kind of text that teaches ...

B: It is like Magic Johnson talking about AIDS (laughs) ... or people who drink tell others not to drink .. that kind of thing .. I learnt a lesson by drinking .. so you don't repeat the same thing ...

R: The thing is .. it shows that ... you can say pride goes before arrogance .. upto that point he may have been valid ... he lured them into gambling .. they knew what the stakes were ... Yudhishtir was like a typical gambler .. I am going to win the next time .. how people lose their fortunes .. he was justified in doing whatever upto that point .. but in any society for that matter in any religion women are respected .. now he went too far in trying to seek his revenge .. depriving someone of their kingdom .. would have been the biggest revenge .. revenge on somebody who made fun of him .. a casual remark that is so deep rooted .. every religion says .. be careful about what you say ... give thy thoughts no tongue ... Shakespeare said in Hamlet ... so be careful about what you say .. it may come to haunt you in some form .. be it Draupadi or anybody ... be careful about what you say .. it is one thing to laugh at his discomfiture .. she did not have to invoke the fact that Dhrtharashtra was blind .. it was no fault of his .. some things you have to pay penalty for what you say ... from that perspective one has to be temperate in what one says ...

LAK: What about the other characters ..

R: That always happens .. when in the context of history ... Hitler was surrounded by so many people who probably knew what he was doing was wrong .. somehow or other none of them ... there is history of his senior Lieutenants descending from and taking consequences of that .. so it shows .. Abraham Lincoln said it .. sometimes more harm is wrought by good people remaining silent ... when they ought to be outspoken .. so there is a thread there .. whether it is eastern civilization or western civilization .. it does say you have to speak out for what you believe in ..

B: It is very unIndian .. the whole episode .. India is the only country ... we have got goddesses .. to being a woman like this to a public place and give her all kinds of problems is very unIndian ...".

Mr. Bhagirath seems to have some fixed notions about nation, text, ideal, and is "irritated" by the problems that this plot is posing and he finally dismisses it as being "unIndian". I asked him if he thought that Mahabharath was unIndian, his reply was, "I don't know .. I don't like it". However his dislike for the text did not restrict Mr. Rajan's reading. His discussion revolves around several topics - about the nature of gambling, about consequences of impetuous behavior, about revenge, and responsibilities. At every moment he draws analogies from other literary texts, sometimes performs them and discusses similar historical events and contemporary issues contemplates on the very nature of interpretation. When Draupadi was giving her long dialogue on injustice, Mr. Bhagirath said, "they are giving too much weight for this ", to which Mr. Rajan said,

" But the interpretation is somewhat different here from a woman's point of view ... my point is to make it into such a big dilemma ... I don't think all these people are wrong ... but she is justified ... I would be fuming if I were a woman ...".

Hayden White's (1978) explanation of Giambattista Vico's "tropological" conception of human consciousness becomes instructive to understand the differences between Mr. Bhagirath and Mr. Rajan. White explains that in Vico's scheme the movement of consciousness corresponds to the "ages of gods, of heroes and of men" (p.200). The transition from metaphor to metonymy is a transition from religious (rule of

gods) to aristocratic societies (rule of heroes), and the "movement from synecdochic constructions to ironic statement is analogous to the transition from democracies ruled by law to the decadent societies" (p.209). Ironic speech, White writes, "presupposes an awareness of the possibility of feigning, or lying or dissimulating" (p.207). The kind of law and reasoning that governs in the "primal" metaphoric state is "divine" and the consciousness is distinctly religious, compared to the "forensic and civil law" that operates in complex human societies.

Mr. Bhagirath is frustrated by the lack of moralizing in Mahabharath. He would often compare it to Ramayan in which the godhead Rama stands for the "ideal" and sets an example. "What is in there for me in Mahabharath", he would often ask. It is about decadence and therefore it has "no place" in his life. Whereas for Mr. Rajan, Mahabharath is necessary for understanding and for evaluating the complex world that we live in, and Krishna is the master orchestrator who gives multiple layers to *Dharma*. For Mr. Bhagirath there is only divinity or heroism in "truth". The only character that he would consider discussing is Karna, since he epitomizes all "goodness". He points out that he is the only "true character" and the rest are all fakes. Mr. Rajan also shares his admiration for Karna, but his concerns are about mythical, social and political realities, as he discusses about Draupadi's demands,

" In the social context this is the reality ... this is what most women face .. they are victimized for some

kind of violence and not only that after suffering from that it becomes their job to prove that they are innocent and the other person is guilty .. so in that context .. Draupadi's thing .. most people can relate to today ..".

For Mr. Rajan one could draw inspiration from the text to "fight back", and for Mr. Bhagirath the text could be ignored because it is about "fighting". Mahabharath is the beginning of decadence for Mr. Bhagirath, whereas for Mr. Rajan the text has sown the seeds for democracy. Throughout the reading 'act' Mr. Bhagirath would draw analogies to other worldly catastrophes and express his repugnance both at the authority figures in the courtroom and at Krishna. The movement stops here and the same cycle repeats. In first metaphoric stage in the tropological movement, Vico explains that "men project their own sensed human attributes, imputing them the power they see manifested in cataclysmic natural events " and viewed themselves to be "lesser creatures" (White, 1978, p.210). In such a world view monologism is inevitable, unless the metaphor pushes the individual to a metonymic and synecdochic modes.

The transition from metaphor to metonymy and subsequently to synecdoche and irony can be observed in the conversation between Vasu and Kedar. They stop the tape after Duryodhan's question that I had discussed earlier,

"K: ... this thing is just like passing the vote in UN and try to screw other people .. just nice way .. It is like whoever is having control in the UN .. they are trying to control .. that is what is exactly happening here .. actually US is trying to control .. if somebody comes and says object .. they say no .. we want to do what we want .. they dictate terms .. that is what Duryodhan did .. exactly the way US says .. if UN makes

anything wrong we will kick out of US .. he said .. you eat our food and make hole in our land? That is what he is telling Kripacharya .. you .. the same thing US does many times .. if you don't follow our directions .. we don't but in a nice way .. putting on a paper like going right procedures and if somebody comes into picture .. not to come .. it is not eventhough everybody has membership .. they don't have control .. inspite of all these guys having .. they can't do anything .. except Duryodhan .. they are following whatever he is telling..

V: Yeah .. it is a multi dimensional problem .. It is not as two nations working".

In their reading, the politics of Hastinapur is similar to the politics of United Nations, and during the course of narrative Kedar enters into the metonymic trope to discuss the consequences of power relations in the council. At a later point he says, "these guys" referring to the grandfather, and the teacher "cannot do anything, because they have pumped this fellow (Duryodhan) quite a bit", and therefore they maintain a "polite silence" or are bound by "legalistic concerns". The transition from metonymic to synecdoche symbolizes the transition from aristocratic to democratic societies and White (1978) points out that, "the identification is always made in reference to the attributes which are most sensibly apprehended, this inception invests the servile class with the humanity which the nobility had originally claimed for itself alone" (p.211). In such a mode of consciousness, power is not so overt but covert, as Kedar points out that United States in order to assert its power at United Nations will ask for "right procedures" just as how Duryodhan had demanded a legal answer. At this point Vasu takes the conversation to a even more complex realm as he

said, "it is a multi dimensional problem", which takes them to the ironic trope. The movement through these tropes facilitates the readers to draw finer strands about a complex problem.

The reader's reality of the world becomes visible in the reading act. The questions they pose about a given dilemma reveals their own definitions of society - what it is like, how it should be, what laws operate, and who legislates those laws. In a religious mode, the "divine" law operates, which of course is a projection of the individual, whereas in a heroic mode the "contractual" law operates, and the human mode understands the "prosaics" of the culture they live in and the legal law operates and an awareness of irony becomes inevitable in this mode (White, 1978). How the "contractual" and "legal" laws operate in the reading activity becomes clear in Mamta and Renuka's discussion,

"R: They had every reason to go against Draupadi ... because she made fun of them ...

M: Of whom?

R: Karna and Duryodhan .. always .. so they had every right to ...

M: What about the others .. I am sorry .. I didn't get what you are saying ...

R: When she is staked .. they got a kick .. because she has always been cruel to them ... Draupadi bullied both of them .. remember I don't blame them for that .. but the first .. it must have been stopped by Bheeshma....

M: What about putting others ... that was wrong .. I know he had this weakness .. Yudhishtir has this fatal flaw .. he is propelled by the momentum of the whole thing ... losing money is one thing .. you don't stake your family .. ".

In Renuka's reading there is a clear definition of social structure and where each one belongs. Duryodhan and his gang are the "aristocratic" men who should not be offended and for having offended Draupadi pays a price, and when things are going beyond control, Bheeshma the grand patriarch should have averted or intervened. Where the power lies and should lie is very definite for Renuka and all her questions are directed to the authority figures,

"R: Only Dhrtharashtra could have come in between .. but he didn't come .. he was just looking for his son ..

M: Did he have authority ...

R: Yes .. he is the king ...

M: He is such a wishy washy king ... throughout Mahabharath he is never ... he is completely in character here .. I am not saying that all the other times he has been a big strong character and only in this situation .. he didn't act like .. throughout he exercise his authority ..

R: He is the father of that whole family .. household...

M: I don't know why you expect him to say anything .. he never said anything anytime anyway ... throughout .. it is not his character ..

Mamta's focus is on Dhrtharashtra's "character" and knowing that she does not find it useful to hold him accountable for the events, whereas Renuka holds his "role" as a father and king to take responsibility. Throughout the reading she focused on the silence of "elders" and Mamta focused on the legal maneuverings,

" R: She challenged everybody .. she was right .. she has every right to ask since she was put in that condition .. how come Dhrtharashtra is not saying anything ... my main grudge is against him ...

M: Well it is a powerful plea .. she really challenges Dhrtharashtra and questions .. why he has not intervened .. actually she is clever .. she has appealed to the seat where authority rests .. she plays the game ... even when that fellow went the second time she says .. ask *Pithama* .. ask Dhrtharashtra .. if they agree I will come .. which means she appealing to their sensibility of how being a part of family .. she makes a passionate plea not just for her .. but also womanhood .. and human sensibilities in India .. very wonderful speech she gave .. and then when he turns her she immediately says don't patronize me .. words to that effect .. the other thing I liked was I am not a property of my husband ... she is a lawyer at heart .. she is a fantastic lawyer .. she plays the game ...".

Earlier, I had discussed Mr. Bhagirath, who in his mind inhabited a "theocratic" world and the "divine" kind of law operated in his reading, whereas Renuka subjectively inhabits an "aristocratic" world in which there is an acceptance of the "divided social order" and such a division is taken as "natural". It is not a "realization" of the hegemonic social structure, but a naturalization of the hierarchy between the ruler and the ruled. In Renuka's reading Draupadi has every right "to feel bad", but not necessarily challenge the ruler. When Mamta pointed out that Draupadi made a powerful plea, Renuka's response was "what is the use?" She is only interested in the consequences of confronting an authority figure, and by their own volition the authority figures should be "fair" to the "weak" in the society. Renuka would often say, "Why can't they take pity on her", whereas Mamta would often say, "Bravo, give them grief", and at the same time recognize her "vulnerabilities" and these expressions summarize their "realities".

In the reading of Pankaj and Ravi both aristocratic and patriarchal world view is revealed. They openly say that Draupadi deserved what she got for violating her "feminine codes". When Draupadi questions about her rights and about women's rights in general Pankaj and Ravi say this in protest,

" R: She is totally out of place .. everytime .. she says *Nari ka* (women's) .. something .. but when she did the same thing to Duryodhan way back .. I mean Duryodhan would not hate Draupadi to that extent if that incident had not occurred .. there should be something to make Duryodhan hate her so much ..

LAK: Is it on equal terms .. is it tit for tat .. is Duryodhan justified ...

P: I don't think you can say that ... but he is .. he is just not hurting .. not just Draupadi .. he is hurting .. his father .. Bheeshma .. the character is supposed to one of the best .. he is supposed to be the eldest ... he is not just hurting everybody .. so taking revenge is OK .. but the way she in which it is being handled is being out of place .. Draupadi keeps saying ... women .. women thing .. I think it is a little out of place .. is she really had an idea .. wanted to be so .. *Nari* (woman) .. things she wouldn't have done the same kind of thing .. even if she felt like laughing .. she would have kept quite .. gone inside and laughed .. but not this *Nari Maryada* (respect for women) .. if she had laughed on his face she has no right to ask for *Nari Maryada* (respect for women) .. just because as an excuse .. that sort of ..".

There is only one law that operates in this kind of reasoning - the patriarchal law. Draupadi should know her place, even if she felt like laughing it should have been in her private chambers, and having violated the "spatial codes", in their view she has no business raising her voice in public. The justification is that not only she has to pay the penalty for her previous behavior, but in this particular situation even the "grand patriarch" - Bheeshma is silently digesting the

outcome of events and therefore Draupadi's demands are not out of place.

In a direct monologic discourse, the readers may draw comparisons (metaphor) and recognize the consequences (metonymy) of actions. In such a discourse, the characters, meanings, ethics, and social relations are all fixed and in many ways accepted and reinforced. When ethical codes are violated, the victim can appeal to the authority figures. The readers therefore do not recognize Draupadi's challenge to the kingdom, or her shifting strategies, instead they see her questions as a desperate plea or as a well deserved punishment for mocking at powerful men.

The issue of law and authority and a challenge to that takes on an interesting and a complex dimension in the discussion between Kala and Purvik,

"K: I know it is Indian culture .. which I could never understand was that unconditional respect commanded because of your age .. older brother .. and also in terms of .. of course .. this is obvious .. how is she his property to gamble away ...

P: She says that herself .. it shows her wisdom and that she is actually fighting for her .. she says that ...

K: It is funny you say it is wisdom ... that is common sense .. but it is not ..

P: I think it is a very good point you said .. this unconditional respect for age .. on both side they show that unconditional respect is the correct thing .. if you notice it on the evil side is Duryodhan .. he doesn't listen to grandfather .. doesn't listen to Vidhur .. he is not giving respect for age .. and then they are showing the consequences of it .. and on the other hand they show the Pandavas brothers .. because the elder brother gambled .. why should they take .. elder brother is in addiction ... why should he give it away ... they should get up and fight .. let the elder brother become a servant of he wants .. why should

Draupadi and all that .. the fact that she comes out shows .. that ...

LAK: That is very nice .. so on one hand you see the problem of not obeying and the problem of obeying ..

P: So they show it on both sides .. if both had obeyed .. all of them obey this match would not have been continued and they had .. they are losing their dignity and they are losing their kingdom .. see another thing is it is very selfish thing when giving up the kingdom .. they don't realize and we don't realize it .. there are people affected than just brothers .. there is subjects .. the courtiers .. the kingdom .. people are living under them, she is the only one questioning ...".

The collapse of justice for Purvik is both a result of obedience and disobedience. The two opposites converge to bring about destruction. If either Duryodhan had obeyed the grandfather and the minister who were warning him or if the Pandavas had disobeyed their elder brother and protested about gambling them and the kingdom and their common wife, *Dharma* would have been upheld. In Purvik's reading the cause and effect relationship is not singular but multiple, and the multiplicity allows him to recognize the irony. Hayden White (1978) points out,

"..this kind of consciousness contains within it the seeds of its own dissolution. Just as irony presupposes consciousness of the distinction between truth and falsehood, so too the vision of an internally differentiated though legally unified human community is inherently fated to promote a decline from the condition of virtue to that of vice " (p.231).

In Purvik's view virtue and vice are only a matter of context and perspective. What is virtue at one time can be a vice at another time and at a given time in the *Dice game* Purvik points out that what could have been virtuous for one has turned out to be a vice for another.

In a very monologic reading, the text, the laws, and the characters are all fixed and it is from the fixed standpoint the reader tries to question and evaluate. A monologic reader only shows frustration at the break up of laws, but not understand the very nature of law as practiced by societies, and this tension becomes clear in the argument between Mohini and Chitra,

"M: She is questioning all ... did he have the rights to put her on .. without taking permission .. playing the dice ... those days women are supposed to be respected and kept at home ... I guess at that point he thought he would win something back .. she says why didn't the others make any decision .. they all listen to their older brothers .. even Duhshhashan listened to his older brother .. so I don't know if they could have made any differences ...".

Mohini states the events of the story and what her perceived social realities were in those days (women were respected, everybody listened to their older brothers) and the possible motives on Yudhishtir's part, and Draupadi's questioning didn't seem to make much difference for her eventhough she is angry about what happened to her, and Chitra responds,

"C: In Duryodhan's case it seems that he is definitely the most powerful of the brothers apart from being the eldest .. but that does not seem to be the with Pandavas .. though they are ..also .. they are devoted to their elder brother ..

M: More of a devotion there ...

C: Here it is obedience .. but given the situation where the elder brother's identity as a wise man is in question .. where he was believed to be a passionate creature .. rather than as a wise one .. there ought to have been more questioning of everybody's authority .. they are not questioning enough ...

M: As we said it was the rule of law ...

C: No ... now the situation is the liquefaction of law .. what is the law .. there seems to be so many interpretations of it .. there are many laws here in question .. so it is something that has to be argued out .. and in that situation these people are not argumentative .. I don't mean in the negative sense .. they have surrendered .. which is surprising .. if they are all that ... questioning authority .. yes .. when pushed to the extreme .. it is always like that .. when things are good .. nobody will want to question .. conventions .. it is only when there is a crisis ...".

The contrast in reading between Chitra and Mohini points out how a dialogic discourse utilizes the other's words, ideas and questions to expand and conversely how the monologic discourse shrinks the other's ideas. In Mohini's view the obedience to elder brother is undifferentiated both among the Kauravas and Pandavas. Respect to elder brother simply existed as a "transcultural" phenomenon in those days. Chitra takes on from this and draws a distinction. She points out that in Duryodhan's case "power" is ruthless and indisputable, whereas among the Pandavas there was a feeling of "respect" and "devotion". Mohini's response "more of devotion" indicates that she perceived this trait among them in a transhistorical manner. That is, Pandavas were always "devoted" to their elder brother. Again Chitra intervenes and makes finer distinction when she says, "here it is obedience". What was respect and devotion in the past becomes obedience in the current situation. Chitra draws these finer distinctions and again Mohini responds back converting fluid social relations into a fixed law, which leads Chitra to discuss the "liquefaction" of laws. She then carries the discussion to an abstract level and points out that only at

times of crisis the taken for granted law needs to be questioned. Mohini was always text bound, and she had fixed notions on virtues and social realities. They were often "ideal" - how things should be like and the text never came close to this ideal. The text was far too unsettling, and therefore the contents of the text, and her reactions existed as separate entities. Chitra on the other hand used effectively every question of Mohini to construct a dialogue and to go through all the rhetorical tropes. Each question was an anchoring point to move a step ahead or to explore newer meanings for Chitra and at every step Mohini went back to "square one".

A monologic reader can "problematize" and "thematize" the text in a variety of ways. As I discussed earlier, Mr. Bhagirath's mode of reasoning was "divine" and therefore he saw only one reality, that is at an hour of need God came to save his humble devotee. And that is the only beautiful moment in the text. The dialogic readers don't necessarily undermine the divine intervention but would want to treat this as a social problem to find strategies for confronting injustice, as Chitra and Mohini point out, "Krishna doesn't come like this for modern women". While Mohini's reading was monologic her concerns were with "ideals" and "proper social relations", and she would project those properties into the reading act. For Renuka social relations are and were always hierarchical and the "weak" in the society does get punished for bullying the powerful. So the lesson that she advocates

is "don't tease" powerful men. Mohini on the other hand would like an egalitarian society and is disturbed by the deviation from the "ideal". Unlike Mr. Bhagirath she does not find solace in using "divine intervention" as a solution to an ongoing social problem that affects women. In one case monologism is asserted through divine reasoning, in other it is an acceptance of social hierarchies and in the other it is the dream of *Utopia* and the following discussion shows how Chitra addresses Mohini's frustrations,

M: How can they just stand there .. I would have killed my husband .. I would have killed every one .. so what if you lose a dice game .. I mean everyone does not have Krishna to save ...

C: Exactly ...

M: I think it is ridiculous .. I mean what are we supposed to say .. I wouldn't stand for it as a woman .. I think it is the continuation of .. I can't explain ... there is no meaning in all this ... I don't think I am going to look at it and say I am going to follow Mahabharath .. I don't think it is an example at all ... I don't think I can take this as a word of god ...

C: I think it is an archetypal situation .. I don't think it is a moral tale at all ... it has zones .. where they can't be explained ... that is exactly where it is relevant to us ... it is very important to us .. and therefore should be more important than say Bible or something .. of course she having a private pact with Krishna helped .. that she is not totally humiliated .. but humiliation is there .. it is implicit and it is total .. in that she is a representative of a woman in her humiliation not in her privileged status .. it is not a problem that will go away .. the area of dishonor has shifted .. that way more and more women should be identifying with Draupadi's situation ...

M: Elders should have said something .. I don't respect them for that ..

C: It just shows that past experience wasn't at all of any help in absolutely new situation .. and to fall back on elders for help .. was a common mistake many of us make .. it should be warning that elders are not right

and perhaps as ignorant as us and it is only feeling of security that we have because of them ...".

A sharp contrast between the two readers reveals quite a bit about hidden assumptions that they have about the reality that they "see" in the text and around themselves in the world. The difference is that the dialogic reader makes concessions and creates loopholes and includes the other's words as Bakhtin (1984) points out,

" An element of response and anticipation penetrates deeply inside intensely dialogic discourse. Such a discourse draws in, as it were sucks into itself the other's replies, intensely reworking them" (p.197).

The monologic reader on the other hand is either silent about the other or omits their viewpoints or openly dismisses them as being either irreligious or immoral or as having no concerns for law and order or as being antisocial or being disrespectful towards authority figures or as having no concerns for facts. The tension between "pure facts" and "multiple realities and concerns" could be recognized in the arguments between Anup and Ritesh,

" R: I think it suggests that they want to humiliate more than anything else .. putting the crown on his feet .. and all that . is a suggestion .. that what he wants is .. he wants to humiliate the other side ...

A: I tell you one thing .. this business of rules .. I am judging in general in society .. what makes these rules .. and most of the time when rules are made ... it is more important than justice taking place .. which is to say that if there is a rule you can go by the law but still you have an unjust situation .. so I am sure this situation is clear .. that this guy has won ... but clearly injustice has taken place .. does that mean that one should obey the law eventhough it is unjust .. or does that mean .. now the time .. why the hell shouldn't Bheem come on .. jab it ... this is crap ... why should I give my wife .. defending this idea of

woman .. which is not ours to give anyway .. who are we to give this woman away ...

R: Wait ... wait ... he didn't say that ...

A: I am saying why not .. I am saying just because a rule is being followed ... shouldn't you be answering to higher justice or should the rules be important ...

R: No .. I don't think it even crosses his mind ..

A: I am saying why shouldn't it .. any of them are they idiots?

R: No .. I think while Yudhishtir was doing it nobody made any objections to it .. precisely what Duryodhan is saying ... if I had lost ... the fact is he has won fair and square ... the whole idea is to roll up the dice .. now presumably they should have been smart enough to recognize that in the first place .. right I am sorry regardless of the fact .. it is ..

A: I agree with you .. smart ... play by rule .. everything you say is correct .. legalistically .. there is injustice taking place ...".

The "empiricist" in Ritesh is only preoccupied with facts - what has happened. His concerns are about "legalities" not about legal maneuverings, and about "laws" and since Duryodhan is legally right, he deserves his prize and Yudhishtir pays the price. In his argument there is only a beginning and an end - a cause and effect. Yudhishtir knowingly went into the dice game and lost and pays the consequences. Anup being a dialogic reader is interested in "what happened along the way". The "in-between ness" has no place in Ritesh's scheme. The boundaries are clear in the stances that he takes, the language that he uses and the kind of reasoning he adopts. He is careful not to show his "rage", if anything Anup is constantly enraged by his lack of rage

and Ritesh would ask him to be "calm" and "objective". Here is some more of their discussion which gets heated,

A: You are taking a very absolute position .. which are legalistic ... let me finish ...

R: Chill out ... the first thing ... you chill out .. there is no legalism involved ...

A: Completely ... the game was rigged ...

R: Not at all ...

A: Let me give an example ... \$500 bucks .. I go to play cards .. lost 5 ... lost 10 .. lost 99 ... according to you I lost ... 499 that is cool ... my brother OK he would have told me don't make me lose all .. be careful ... the point is mistake has been made because they didn't say it .. and the point is .. just because they had to wait till the end .. doesn't mean they should not have said it earlier ... or that the mistake has not been made ...

R: Precisely .. all the way through there was a presumption ... that somewhere along the line he would win the stuff back ..

A: How is it .. how is it .. you are giving a very **literal** translation ...

R: it is true ...

A: OK ... you come with 100 bucks with your father ... you have already lost 50 ... 60 ... your father would say .. nobody warned him the point that I am trying to say is that .. according to R ... the reason .. they did not warn is because they waited till the end and then .. they were trying to come back ...

R: NO .. I don't think it was their position to warn him .. because they are supposed to be **neutral** ...

LAK: Let me intervene .. A is already acknowledging that a mistake has already been made ... but even after that he can reclaim .. am I right?

A: Yeah .. that is what I am saying ...

R: No .. I disagree with him entirely .. the fact is he knew what the rules of the game were .. Yudhishtir played them out of his own choice .. he went to their play ... that is the game .. you play by the rules .. you lose and that is all".

When the dialogic reader gets into an argument with a monologic reader, he is both burdened and in the process makes some "semantic" gains. In other words the burden of proof rests on his shoulder. In order to prove his case he has to draw analogies, point out what happens "along the way", ponder about the consequences, make amendments about their previous thoughts and abstract ideas, and extract multiple realities, and again to prove them he has to concretize them and finally recognize the irony of both the situation in the text and his own interpretive stance. The burden is that he is fighting to get his point across and the gain is he is led into a "tropological" journey and gains awareness on several matters. The monologic reader thinks he is the "victor", he "stuck" up to his point and prides about the fact that he has been consistent all along whereas the other in his view is too messy and emotional. The monologic reader is neither exhausted intellectually nor emotionally. This is especially the case when readers like Ritesh are preoccupied with "facts", whereas when the preoccupation is with "ideals" they are atleast exhausted emotionally. The strict empiricist is only interested in facts, laws, rules and principles of causality. He does everything to abide by these principles.

The monologic thinker only states "what he thinks" or "what he sees out there", and if the type of monologism is "idealism" they show their feelings; but a dialogic thinker reveals "how he thinks" and speculates on "why" he thinks the

way he does. Their language is full of expressions of "doubt, indignation, irony, mockery" etc. If we make connections between Bakhtin and Hayden White's explanation of Vico's tropological movements, then only the individual engaging in "Vari directional double voiced discourse" goes through all the tropes and reaches the "ironic" mode. Bakhtin (1984) writes,

"Analogous to parodistic discourse is ironic, or any other double voiced, use of someone else's words; in those instances too another's discourse is used for conveying aspirations that are hostile to it" (p.194).

The discussion between Anu and Jayashree was full of parodistic intonations. At the very beginning of this plot when the *Sutradhar* (the story teller) tells that on one side of line of respectability is Draupadi and on the other side is everyone, they give an ironic laughter and say,

" A: And even Vidhur. I couldn't believe even Vidhur sits there and watches this. I think in .. house .. everybody OK's it .. for a woman ...

J: No .. no .. even in your own house you are a stranger .. even in your mummy's house you are a stranger .. and in your in-law house also you are a stranger .. always a stranger ..

A: Woman always a stranger .. everywhere .. the moment she is born ... **I hate this scene OK ..**".

Irony itself has multiple layers here. It is in different zones, among different characters and at different times. First of all Anu is stunned to know that "even Vidhur" who is supposed to be a personification of righteousness participates in this wrong deed. And then comes the realization of irony - even the most virtuous of men seem to

falter when it comes to women. Jayashree joins in to intensify the moment to point out the estrangement of woman in all places at all times. The story teller says "Today Mahabharath is at an embarrassing turn" and Jayashree's rhetorical response is that such embarrassment with respect to women has been transhistorical. Anu already prepares herself for the emotional upheaval of this scene when she angrily says, "I hate this scene". For both Anu and Jayashree, this plot provided an avenue to wage the "gender battle". Anu would often point out disdainfully that if a powerful woman like Draupadi can be "shamed" in public, what would it take for an ordinary woman to be degraded. Anu points out,

" A: She has been physically violated and she has been brought there physically .. and she made a very important question in that particular *Sabha* (gathering) .. she said that ... Even before having an intercourse with me ... the other person should ask for my permission .. today why am I brought to this *Sabha* without my permission ... you know it is there in the original version which I read ...

J: Yes .. total degradation of women's position ... when she is saying .. when someone wants to have an intercourse with me .. she is saying he has to ... she is really talking about the whole society .. a woman has to be asked permission and today she has come to this status ...".

After agreeing with Anu's observation about the "irony" in Draupadi's life, Jayashree takes the conversation to a synecdochic mode. Draupadi's specific question is a stand in for the whole of "womanhood". Her statement "today she has been reduced to this level" is a statement both about the degradation of Draupadi and about women's position in

general. This point leads them to yet another discussion about the collective history of women. The questions that they discussed were, has the women's position in society been descending from ancient times to modern times or have we made any gains? The answer was left open ended after recognizing the contradictory forces of history - both of Draupadi's history and collective history of women.

Anu and Jayashree co-construct a polyphonic narrative about this significant plot. They do not have one distinct theme in their reading, instead they go along with the text and at each moment create their own "side roads" and large "intersecting roads". They speak about the text, with the text, to the text and from the text. The relationship is varied. The required ingredient in a polyphonic novel is that characters are "ideologically authoritative and independent" (Bakhtin, 1984). In a polyphonic reading, the characters in the story, the creator of the story - both the original author Vyasa and the television producer, B.R.Chopra, and the actors and the readers themselves have their own distinct voice or in Bakhtin's (1984) words there is " *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world* " (p.6). When Draupadi made an emotional appeal for the injustice done to her Anu and Jayashree stop the tape and engage in the following conversation:

"J: Get up grandfather .. get up grandfather ...

A: You know I do understand that she was very depressed and everything .. but still I cannot stand her crying ... that is somewhere ... it hits my pride .. she is crying .. what a fool you know .. I understand .. I do

admit ... I do understand .. at the same time ...
 Draupadi crying you know .. you know she can't cry ..
 that sort of image you have you know .. from childhood
 we have a different image of Draupadi .. you know we
 just cannot bring her down ...

J: She is too strong a lady to cry ...

A: Yeah! .. to that level .. and here they made her cry
 a lot too much .. too much ...

J: Yeah! very melodramatic ..

A: You know she had asked her questions ... but she had
 that arrogance in her so she was asking the questions
 ... not that ...Ooooooh ... Ooooooh ... goes on .. the
 same way this lady is crying too much yaar ...

J: They had to make it filmy right ...

A: I know particularly .. it is the image of ... Oh!
Nari theri kahani yeh he .. Ankhon me pani and Anchal me
dood .. it says Oh! lady .. this is the sad tale of your
 life .. you have milk in your *Pallu* (the part of the
 saree that covers the woman's breasts) .. you feed the
 whole world and still you've tears in your eyes and that
 is the story of your life ...

J: They have made it as *Insaaf ka Tarazu* ... something
 like that .. the way she cries ..

A: That is they made out of this lady ... too much of
 this melodrama .. I don't like it .. I am angry ..
 Draupadi is saying this ..

J: That is because she is Roopa Ganguly (the actress who
 plays Draupadi) .. she can't change .. she has every
 right to ask questions .. but not cry like this .. it
 has become a Hindi cinema .. ".

After discussing in great detail about the melodrama of Hindi
 films, they go on to acknowledge that they would cry too if
 they were in the kind of distress that Draupadi was in, and
 then they treated the display of emotions as being
 strategically useful in castigating the members of the
 courtroom.

In order to understand the "psychology of art", Vygotsky (1971) points out that "sensations, emotions and passions" are not just ingredients in the aesthetic consciousness, but in the process of gaining such consciousness these feelings are transformed. The aesthetic response and appraisal causes "metamorphosis of feelings". Vygotsky explains that the "essential part of aesthetic response is the manifestation of the affective contradiction" and he refers to these contradictory feelings as "catharsis" (p.217). This term does not designate the final product but to the "flow of emotions", as Leontiev (1971) explains that in Vygotsky's scheme,

"catharsis is not simply the release of overwhelming affective attractions liberated through art from "evil qualities". It is rather the resolution of a certain, merely personal conflict, the revelation of a higher, more general, human truth in the phenomena of life" (p.ix).

The transformation of a personal conflict to the higher plane of "phenomena of life" is not an easy or a direct task, and Vygotsky explains that this transference from individual psyche to the social plane and vice versa is not directly visible to the investigator either. Instead he explains that in order to understand this developmental processes one needs to understand the socio-cultural and historical environment in which the aesthetic response and appraisal takes place.

In the *Dice game* scene, when Draupadi is forcibly dragged into the courtroom by Duryodhan's brother Duhshhashan, she pleads emotionally to rescue her. then invokes concepts such as family honor, family traditions,

blessings that the elders had given her earlier, pride, honor and dignity of the dynasty and so on. At one point she says,

" Tell me, is this the tradition of Bharatha's dynasty? If you say so I will be quiet. The dynasty I come from follow a different tradition. They will be prepared to die in order to save the honor of a woman. But every family has its own tradition. Kindly educate me about the traditions of Kuru dynasty. Please look at me grandfather. The first time I touched your feet, you had blessed me as " *Sowbhagyavathi* ", and look at the state of that blessing ".

The expression " *Sowbhagyavathi* " is a blessing that is often given to women that she should never outlive her husband. In other words she should never face the wrath of widowhood. So far in the dialogue, Draupadi shows her vulnerability and then she fiercely fights back and demands direct answers and finally becomes even ferocious and declares that she will not braid her hair till she dips it in Duhshhashan's blood. Many viewers, especially women show their annoyance or discomfort at her display of emotions. As I discussed earlier, Anu and Jayashree treat this as a "melodrama" that is so typical of Hindi films. And they move along with the dialogue they redefine the meanings of those emotions and give partial acknowledgment. Payal and Mausmi are clearly irritated when Draupadi invokes these traditional "feminine" concepts,

"P: I take objection to that word ... *Sowbhagyavathi* ..

M: There are lot of things here .. first of all she keeps on emphasizing the name of the .. the good name of the king ...

P: Yeah! .. this whole thing is coming off as I don't know ..

M: She should be concerned about other things than the good names of kings ...

P: She should be concerned about herself ...

M: Yeah .. women ... dignity .. those sort of things .. I would prefer that she said ...

P: It is more like family honor ... and family name .. and this and that the word *Sowbhagyavathi* gives me creeps .. it is this whole ... women should like die before husbands ...

M: It is a curse .. it is not ...

P: It is just .. entire womanhood is totally negated .. totally negative ...

M: She is playing the stereotype .. another thing is the fact that this particular woman thinks of herself as some sacred .. person .. sacred in a sense .. I am *Kul Maharani* .. *Kul* (queen of the clan .. clan) that is a lot of bull really ...".

When the heroine shows helplessness and vulnerabilities and invokes traditional feminine concepts, the readers cannot readily treat it either as heroine's trait, or as a "natural" reaction under the dire circumstances. Instead Draupadi's "cry" sets them in motion to discuss the history of women in general and along the way they give partial acceptance or rejection to her dialogue. Once she shows her anger, the readers begin to understand the initial helplessness. Payal and Mausmi while they reject the use of words like *Sowbhagyavathi* , they begin to realize towards the end that in an oppressive situation one may appeal to the oppressor's sensibilities and point out what is important to them. At this point they recognize the irony in waging the "gender battle".

The dialogic readers recognize irony at several instances in the plot. For instance Mukta and Sukumar like most readers speculate at great length on the "silence of elders" in this scene. They also at first condemn them for not taking a stance. At the end of the plot they come to another realization and explore possible alternative meanings for their silence,

"M: .. to me it looks like it was their convenient way to keep quiet .. otherwise they could have taken a drastic step .. and made them stop ..

S: I don't think so ... even today in military .. it is not just the soldier can say .. this is right and this is wrong .. he can say that only at the cost of his head...

M: That is why I am saying .. they were afraid they would be killed .. or sent out of country ...

S: It could also be the plot .. sometimes ... you do small favors to Duryodhan ... but now .. they can't oppose because if they do .. the Pandavas will not have any friends left in the kingdom ... otherwise .. Pandavas will be eliminated .. and anybody that favors Pandavas will be killed .. so Pandavas will never have the support from inside .. other than Krishna who could not be touched ...".

The dialogic readers contest many possible questions that the plot raises - about gambling, and its consequences, about envy, duty, student teacher relationship, about Dhrtharashtra's blind love towards his son Duryodhan. The father/son relationship leads them to discuss nepotism in general in Indian polity. All events are contested, except Karna's role in this plot. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Karna commands unconditional admiration and sympathy. He was rarely ever the "sinner", but has always been sinned against. In this plot, he does participate with

Duryodhan in avenging the insult. After Yudhishtir lost himself in the dice game he declares that he has nothing more to stake and at this point Karna reminds him that he still has that "proud wife of his", and instigates him to stake her. When Draupadi was dragged into the courtroom he reminds her that she had once publicly called him a *Soothputra*. He throws her own words from the *Svayamvar* scene (plot 1) back at her. When Draupadi challenges her husbands for staking her, Karna intervenes and says,

"These five cannot protect you. Therefore come and sit in my dear friend Duryodhan's lap. You are already the wife of five men. So what is the harm in taking on the hand of a sixth one"?

He does not stop here. He adds more fuel to the fire and provokes Duryodhan to order the disrobing. He adds,

"Any woman who lives with five men is not a wife, she becomes a whore. And what is honor and dishonor? Even if she is brought here naked, it would not be improper ".

Despite such caustic remarks, almost all the readers either ignore his comments or dismiss his comments as a creation of B.R.Chopra. They hold Duryodhan accountable for this tragic event and treat Karna as a participant in the "mob behavior", or excuse him for being in "bad company", or that he is "paying his dues" to his friend Duryodhan or refer to several previous instances when he has been insulted by Pandavas. Another justification was that he had to get back at Draupadi for the unfair dismissal of his candidacy in her *Svayamvar*. The adulation for Karna was universal. Even if the readers condemn his comments they would right away come to

his defense and point out that he does repent later on for his misconduct. He was beyond reproach.

Every other character in the story was held accountable for their silence or their misconduct and every issue in the plot was debated including Krishna's appearance in the transcendental form to "clothe" Draupadi. Some readers felt that Krishna's appearance is not so literal, but in an abstract sense it is a moment of self realization for Draupadi after she has exhausted all possible arguments and appeals, she found strength from within. Krishna's appearance takes the viewers to a "peak" emotional experience. The plot reaches a crescendo. Here he is distinctly in a "god" form - the transcendental form protecting a devotee. Most of the times he appears in an immanent form - human, friendly and mischievous. Since the dialogic reader is so capable multiple emotions and viewpoints, they would often "carnivalize" the serious moment and say that they would rather experience *Rasa Leela* - romantic play. When Krishna is in the immanent form, the relationship with him is sensuous. He becomes the flamboyant lover who stealthily goes to the pond where women are bathing and hides their clothes and thus begins the *Rasa Leela* - the romantic play. In this situation he is "clothing" a woman and the readers use this serious moment to crack a joke - break the hierarchies and talk in "body principle". If we can extend Vico's tropological movement, from the seriousness of irony the dialogic reader moves into the carnival space. This releases the built up

tension and frees them to again re-explore other meanings, as Bakhtin (1984) explains that in the carnival space, "all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images" (p.370,371). After releasing the repressed fears and anxieties, the reader again enters into a more serious realm. Dialogic readers also recognize that under tragic circumstances they would rather have god as "GOD" and not as a playmate, but under normal circumstances *Rasa Leela* would be preferred.

For all readers, this plot reminds them of some contemporary issue. The difference between monologic and dialogic reader is that the former engages in parallel discussions, whereas the dialogic reader connects the extra textual materials. For instance, Mohan (M) and Manoj (Mn) refer to many contemporary problems,

"M: Politically it reminds me of countries .. for example slave labor, just victimization .. it happens .. but no one does ...

Mn: People in this country basically you try to look in the other direction . everytime bad happens nobody wants to take any .. people in power .. you expect them to be responsible ... but everybody tries to blame everyone else .. Bush blames congress.. congress blames each other .. nobody really give a damn thing .. In the news there are so many things like rape trial .. Anita Hill - Thomas hearings..

M: What is that movie .. The Accused .. that is about this lady in the bar ... seven guys threw her and raped her in the bar and nobody did a thing .. nobody called for cop .. it was a big deal ..

Mn: Anita Hill basically came out and told the truth and her character was assassinated by like .. evil Republicans (laughs) ... but she wasn't ... I mean talking to a bunch of men who do not understand .. what

happened and not a least bit sympathetic .. to what she says ...

M: Human nature ..

Mn: People have not changed .. you can call it whatever ..2..3..4... thousands of years ago .. but people motives may be more money today .. but I don't think people basic nature ... hasn't changed that much ...".

Mohan and Manoj draw interesting similarities but they do not necessarily draw distinctions or use these comparable events to understand contiguous relations and take it to an abstract level. Therefore Anita Hill and Draupadi don't necessarily talk to each other. They only share a common event. Both of them make an unsuccessful attempt to appeal to an all male jury, after a sexual misconduct.

This plot raises so many questions about the role of citizens in the government, their rights, and their responsibilities. I collected the data in 1992, which was the election year in America and the talk about the government and its inefficiencies were the "hot" topics in most people's mind. Mahabharath becomes more interesting during political upheavals. In the interest of brevity, a discussion of all the political issues raised by the readers becomes difficult in this chapter. (For distribution of subjects in various modes of discourse see Table 12).

The Dialogue between Kunti and Karna (PLOT 4)

This plot is the least contested of the four plots. In other words there were fewer debates and more evaluations. A significant 77% of the subjects engaged in a "direct

discourse" (see Table 13), in which they reiterated their admiration for Karna and justified his anger towards his mother and condemned Kunti for approaching her son at a wrong time and revealing her identity. The *Dice Game* incited a lot of anger and confusion among the subjects, whereas this plot demanded sympathy, compassion, and admiration. If there is any anger it is towards Kunti for failing in her maternal duties. A typical reading went along these lines as Atul and Pooja discuss,

" A: Karna is obviously tortured .. I don't know at what age he finds out .. that he has been abandoned .. but as a psychiatrist I know .. there is no pain greater than to know one has been abandoned by one's mother .. that is the ultimate emotional pain .. and that is obvious .. and now you can see ... he achieves so many things .. archery .. he must have had tremendous anger towards his real mother ... he would have been angry no matter who the mother was .. it also shows how angry he was of other Pandavas .. and how much of jealousy and sibling rivalry ..

P: What he seems to be really mad at is .. he really wasn't a *Sooth Putra* and he was called that .. if she really did come and tell him not to kill Arjun then it is outrageous .. why didn't she tell her sons not to kill Karna ..".

In a direct unmediated discourse, as in the case of Atul and Pooja, there is a strong defense of Karna's anger and an abrogation of Kunti's action. Atul goes on to argue,

" A: She does not like Karna .. because as a queen mother there were several points when she could have said .. especially .. Karna was an immaculate conception .. I mean ..

P: If it is immaculate conception .. why is she so scared at admit ..".

They conclude that her actions are a clear betrayal of maternal love. An opposite argument is given by Ratna. She

points out that it is the maternal love that drove her to Karna to which her partner Vinod disagrees,

"R: I think till the end she was trying to save her honor .. as long as neither sons lives were in danger .. but at this point .. when one of her son's life is at stake .. she .. I think there was maternal love ... but I think whatever social reasons didn't allow her to show it .. in public ..

V: Don't you think that a person who .. deserts somebody .. she is not acting like motherly love .. if she did love .. why her motherly love was sleeping".

For Vinod there is a clear cut definition of maternal love and Kunti having abandoned her child at birth had no right to reclaim her child, whereas for Ratna the same desperation that drove her to abandon her child drives her even now in the wake of war to reclaim her son. She attributes guilt feelings to Kunti for her actions, whereas for Vinod it is pure selfishness. Mrs. Leela and Mrs. Hamsa pointed out that one could draw a moral from this - that is avoid teenage pregnancy and social shame, so that the child need not pay a prize,

"L: I have seen children without mother's affection and proper raising .. they have problems in focusing their attention span .. impulse control .. I see that with children who are not raised properly ... or there is divorce ...

H: Here you see a lot of things you know .. like teenage children .. lot of people give away and after .. she is coming for custody .. then why did they do it .. all these .. then kid feels I was not loved ..

L: I think he was not born the right way ... so he is angry .. then people will ask ..

H: Kunti still unavoidable circumstances she had to leave .. she was waiting for the right moment .. but too late ..".

The social codes dictate their reading. A number of subjects mention that it is beyond them to understand how a mother can abandon a child, and when I asked them if Kunti was wrong in abandoning, their answer is she should not have summoned the Sun God - Surya to beget a child from him. The mistake was not such much the abandonment of the child but conceiving the child out of wedlock. When I asked them if Kunti should have kept the child, having conceived, the answer is a firm "NO". Some common questions that the readers raise in this plot are:

- Was she an irresponsible teenager who conceived out of wedlock?
- Should she have abandoned the child?
- If so, does she now have the right to reclaim him?
- Is the timing right? Kunti reveals her identity just before the war. Therefore the debate is could she not have revealed the secret earlier?
- what social circumstances could have prevented her from declaring her past?
- Is it the desperation of war that made her approach Karna or did she have ulterior motives?

The debate is over Kunti's character as Mrs. Padmaja and Mr. Sethu discuss,

"P: once you know it is your baby .. they will feel .. due to circumstances they may conceal .. so she tells him and asks him to come to this side ... because of that all emotions .. she gets the Mantra from Doorvasa .. because she was younger .. she wanted to test it out..

S: **She made a mistake** .. it is an emotional drama ..".

They do want to sanction maternal love to her, but having made a mistake she **has** to suffer the consequences. The emphasis is on "**has to**", because the readers are interested in maintaining proper social codes, and any departure from these codes in their view would lead to chaos. A monologic reader operates in a fixed world with rigid social norms and social roles. The discourse therefore stops with the metonymy of cause and effect, that is Kunti as a mother "should" suffer for abandoning her child.

The dialogic discourse, on the other hand takes the given social relations as a starting point and recognizes various strategies that human beings adopt to encounter and modify the social structure. Sambhu (S) and Shyam (Sh) recognize complexity in this poignant scene and argue that Kunti **had to** suffer the consequences of her action,

S: Well this is a powerful scene .. again it questions .. on the whole my sympathies go for Karna in this scene .. his questions are fair ... I am sure she has been feeling all along ... but it is unfortunate that she comes at this time .. and she did come for one reason .. you are my son .. you can't kill your younger brothers .. forgive them or save them .. well he cannot see them any other way .. but she has come to barter and she is using her so called love ..

Sh: There are two stories .. one is Karna's side of it and one is her side .. I look at it two different sides ... one is I have sympathies for Karna .. I don't have sympathy for Kunti .. however I do relate to and understand the choice she made .. having made the choice she made .. I think she has to live with it ... she was in a predicament because of the social stigma .. she did what she had to do ... because of the choice she had to make she is paying a price now ... for Karna he had no choice .. this was something that happened to him .. so he is experiencing the effects of what somebody has done to him ..

LAK: What sort of emotions go through your ..

Sh: I will come to a Machavallian point later on ... I perfectly think it is right for her to go and ask her son .. she probably doesn't want to .. she doesn't mind seeing this guy being belittled .. but she doesn't want to see him die .. I mean that is an ultimate no for a mother .. she will go to any length .. to prevent both from dying .. the question that one would ask is the Machavallian part of it .. if Karna had said .. I won't kill Arjun ... would she have gone and asked Arjun .. I am not sure .. may she would .. I will give her the benefit of doubt ... even as a mother she was fully aware of her social status and the pretense she had to keep up .. there's a limit to it ...if life was involved she would probably do it .. which is what she is doing now .. in that sense I can relate to it .. and I respect that ... I don't feel sympathy for her sorrow .. she has to bear it .. it is a natural consequence .. if she is lucky enough for Karna to understand .. it is a matter of draw ..

S: Yeah ... I am sure if you were a woman .. then you would probably not be so cavalier as we may be ... everyday of her life she probably did have regrets .. I agree with your point .. I don't think she is as political as he is believing that she is .. there is some of it ..".

The readers give multiple dimensions to the problem, to the character and to their own feelings. The problem to them is "human nature" at wartime, therefore during normal times Kunti was concerned with social stigma and now she is willing to break the rules, and in that context they do applaud her for her boldness, but do hold their sympathies. They do accord maternal love to Kunti and acknowledge her desperation, but maternal love is not necessarily valorized and they recognize the political dimension to it.

In a monologic world there is only right and wrong, and as Bakhtin (1984) explains there are fixed ideas and ideals and the characters are subordinated to it. The ideals are neither context bound nor are they bound by any time, as

Bakhtin says, "it belongs to no one". Shyam viewed Kunti's action as being ethically right in that particular context. To him she is the ethical subject, and it is her actions in that context at that moment that determines the nature of ethics or maternal love, and not the other way around. In a dialogic world, Bakhtin (1993) argues that there are no ethics outside the acting ethical individual. It is the historically situated subject that determines the nature of ethics, whereas in a monologic world the "phantom ethics" determine the individual being. In a dialogic world view, the tendency to evaluate is minimized and the need to realize the human drama is maximized as Mrs. Sarla reflects,

"S: She also had to abandon because he was Surya's son .. victim of circumstances .. it shows there are so many levels of questioning .. it is mind boggling .. is mother's love greater .. or for the one's you raised .. can it be to the same for someone you gave birth to .. having seen the child there is so much conflict . she is torn ...she had an illegitimate child and had to hide him .. how much pain it must have caused her .. it is not an easy thing to give up .. there is pain ...now mentally and physically he has aligned himself .. now for him to think of them as his brother .. is a terrible thing .. now he is in such a conflict .. it may not be her intent to create such conflict .. and so he is not able to see her as his mother ... when you are younger .. your perspective in life is different .. as you grow older you become more complex .. when you are young it is cut and dry .. when she was young she was not willing to put herself out as a bad woman .. now she is willing to do that .. he cannot understand ..look at the levels of conflict .. it is a fantastic epic .. and how true it is of today's world .. surrogate mother ..mother at last minute will not give up her child .. child want to see the real father .. so many ... it is not easy ... we try to give ready made solutions .. human mind is so complex .. to this day these issues are current ..".

A monologic narrative as Bakhtin (1981) points out is "far from chronotope" and therefore appears as "dry

information and communicated facts". There is a greater concern for evaluation than realization. In Mrs. Sarla's narrative multiple chronotopes operate to give "flesh and blood" and in Bakhtin's words, "philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect - gravitate towards the chronotope" (P.250), which leads her to recognize multiple realities. There are varieties of mothers and variations in maternal love. "Mother" and "Love" are not so synonymous, they have a complex relationship in Mrs. Sarla's view. Kunti and Karna inhabit different chronotopes - one is older and is willing to face the "societal music", the other is the abandoned child who needs to vent out anger, and both are understandable but ironically irreconcilable. Mrs. Saroja also points out the irony,

"S: She is at fault ... she must have felt maternal love .. but he says mother's love is mother's love .. which mother can be away from the child he asks .. speaking justice wise this mother/child relationship is greater .. honor of family comes secondary .. but then there is damage to the whole dynasty ... then she would be spoken of as cheap .. so she had to sacrifice .. Kunti's character .. she must have suffered .. she had been sandwiched .. family honor and maternal love .. both are equal .. that is what all this teenage pregnancy .. then it is Bharatham .. today .. same .. she simply tests .. the boon given by *Rishi* (sage) .. then it happens ..".

Mrs. Saroja recognizes multiple ethics - one her personal one in which the "justice of mother/child relationship" is greater than family honor, but the personal ethic cannot exist in isolation; it has to confront a social ethic and as a result there is only an ongoing dialogue and not a final pronouncement of justice. Evaluative statements are a part of dialogic discourse but they are not the exclusive statements.

Frequently the dialogic readers do begin their discourse with "flat" evaluative statements and as they go along they are in Thibault's (1991) words, disarticulated and rearticulated. This ongoing "alterations" become clear in the following discussion between Kala and Purvik;

"P: I want to say one thing in the beginning .. one person I could never understand was Kunti .. I think she was very selfish person .. atleast for the sake of kingdom .. if she believed .. she could have told him .. and the war would have been averted .. so many things she could have done by telling him .. she completely turned her back on him .. poor fellow ..

K: I agree ..

P: I can't understand that psychology ...

K: Again it is the concept of shame that is playing over and over again ... what would happen if she did go through with it .. how would she have been perceived by the community ..

P: Especially in those days .. but finally she told at the wrong time .. atleast she could have confided in him .. that this is what the situation is ..".

They begin their dialogue with an evaluative statement, and they come to an agreement about Kunti's character and then go on to recognize the consequences of their alternative plots and recognize the social realities and create yet another alternative. They go on to explore Karna's character and parent/child relationships;

"P: Remember what I said about Karna .. about giving unconditional love .. he disproves that in this scene .. she is actually the only person that he actually said no .. she asked him to spare all five sons .. and he said .. I will save all four sons but I will kill Arjun .. so even if Arjun dies you still have 5 sons .. but notice in this scene for the first time .. son says no to the mother ..

K: Yes .. yes .. isn't that wonderful ... it feels wonderful .. among all my friends I am the one to say ..

you don't have this unconditional obligation to your parents .. you know anyone can mother or father a child .. it takes a lot of love and all that to raise a child .. people don't see it like that ... elder .. just because they are our parents and given us birth .. we owe them something .. that status has to be earned ..

P: I know just because you are born in the ... heat of something .. we made it into such a sacred institution .. and when you break down .. that is when .. you are able to create that separation .. that is when dysfunction seems to lessen a little bit .. you are able to separate yourself .. like I told you .. my mother is very business like .. not cold .. but very rigid ... I am not able to make that separation ... I am very dependent on her approval .. so this case it shows ... he always wanted that mother .. he did want to do something to his biological mother .. here he had it ... and now the strength of character .. is showing by tough luck ..".

In Mahabharath Karna is known for his generosity. Everyday after the "Sun worship", anyone who approaches him and asks for alms he would give away. In the story even Gods exploit this situation and demand his protective shield. Like the others Kunti also approaches him at this early morning hour, and as Purvik points out for the first time he declines her request. A majority of the subjects simply use his general charitable nature to admire Karna, whereas Purvik sees heroism in Karna's refusal. To him the mother had to be taught a lesson, and herein lies both his "humanness" and his "virtue". Both Kala and Purvik point out that maternal love is not a given, it is achieved over time. They use their own life experiences to capture the nuances of the relationship. Purvik points out that an uncritical exaltation of motherhood can only see "dysfunction". At one point when Kunti pleads to her son to understand her limitations, Karna says,

"Limitations? God can have limitations, but mother can never have limitations".

At this point they stop the tape to explore yet another idea,

"K: I don't understand this concept of mother not having limitations .. mother placed on a pedestal .. she is just human .. if god can have limitations .. why can't a mother ..

P: That is a good way to think to be able to forgive our parents .. by knowing she is a human being .. we never forgive mothers .. if father makes a mistake ... but mother nothing else ..".

Now the "humanness" of motherhood is realized. This realization also leads to reconciliation and reconstruction. Dialogic thinking, as Bakhtin (1981) has repeatedly pointed out is always in search of newer meanings and newer possibilities. The potential for reconstruction is always there, and in a true sense it allows for "ethical possibilities" - as Purvik says, "perhaps we can excuse our parents". This "excuse" can happen only if the individual can understand the social situatedness and the historical moments that they were operating in. While conducting the interviews, I was often tempted to ask the monologic readers, if their mothers were perfect. Of course professional courtesy prevented me from asking such personal questions. I would however ask if they thought that there is "pure maternal love" and they would give an unproblematic "YES". After all their "selfhood" was not in picture. Whereas the dialogic thinker does not make sense without bringing their own "self" into the picture. They bring both "self" and "culture" into their discussion - unlike the monologic reader they do not

jump from one to the other, but they actively weave one with the other, and this act of weaving becomes clear in the discussion between Anu and Jayashree,

" A: She is selfish to some extent ..

J: That is true ..

A: That is what I told her .. it shows her selfish character ... all the while she never says one word .. when her son got so much of humiliation .. and Sooth Putra .. she never ..

J: She never says anything ...

A: When it comes to Arjun .. the she really brought up ... she was only a biological mother to Karna .. may be she has that guilt ... but she was both biological and psychological mother to Arjun ... now she feels that this person can be won over ... and now she goes ..

J: This part shows one thing. Being a biological mother is not everything ..

A: Absolutely ...

J: You will have the guilt a lot .. in fact today if you have an abortion or miscarriage .. you are going to keep on feeling .. did I do the right thing .. but for the rest of your life .. but if you take care of the child that is when in your psychological mind ... you know that they need .. you played with them all along ..".

Anu and Jayashree also begin with a generalized statement - that Kunti is a selfish mother. And then they go on to make finer distinctions between biological mother and psychological mother and explore possible reasons for her "favoritism", and again they make a generalized statement and say being a biological mother alone is not enough for giving maternal love. They again draw finer strands, perhaps out of guilt, the love for the abandoned child in one's psyche could be greater than the child who already received it. This leads them into a discussion about the social circumstances that

could have prevented her from raising her child. They recognize that a mother can play all kinds of tricks and emotionally black mail the kids for her own advantage. They then go on to discuss about "illegitimate children",

" A: Yeah! because once you .. one thing which is not accepted by the society .. you have to face it throughout ...

J: An illegitimate child is always an illegitimate child..

A: Basically if you come out and say .. OK .. I have got this child .. what Neena Gupta has done .. she is an actress ... but those marriages are not law according to law or anything else ..

J: Just to give a veneer of polish .. all her (Kunti) children were illegitimate ... but they are considered *Pandu Putra* (sons of Pandu) because Pandu adopts them...

A: Only that you know ... actually in those days .. there was a very good provident system that was called *Danyog Pratha* .. you know they used to .. *niyog* .. means appoint .. appoint a person to have a child .. that happened to Ambika and Ambalika ..once a person is married they have that covering ..a person could give a name to this child .. it is legitimate ..

J: The whole them is illegitimate ..

A: That is what is the problem ... Yeah! .. he (Pandur) was cursed .. he could not have a child so what he had someone else to do it for him ... but just because he was there to give them their name ..

J: Actually it happens today ... what is all this clinics ... I mean you can have a ovum .. transplant ...surrogate mother ... it is all the same ..".

The discussion begins with the question about "illegitimate child" and ends with the process of "legitimization" in the society. By moving in and out of text they open up several parts of the text. First they recognize that Ambika and Ambalika bore children through sage Vyasa, who is the author of Mahabharath. This means that Mahabharath itself starts

with illegitimacy, and then go on to point out that Pandu (Kunti's husband) was impotent and Pandavas themselves were conceived through other gods. Kunti invokes the same Mantra that she had invoked when she was a teenager to summon Surya and she gave birth to Karna. In the same manner Pandavas were also biological sons of different gods, but they became legitimate because Pandu gave them the "covering". This leads them to a realization about the inconsistencies about "legitimacy" in the society. The "polyphonous" reading facilitates a unique "cognitive" gain. By stepping out of the text and wandering in other cultural spaces, they are able to take an outsider's perspective on the text, and in turn these spaces then becomes a "key" to open up the text at different points, that is to recognize the contradictions within the text. Going into the text again allows them to view other cultural spaces and activate them also. The discussion on sperm donation and other reproductive technology takes them to another discussion on Kunti's supposed "immaculate conceptions", and they decide that pregnancy must have been a result of actual sexual intercourse. This point is again contested as they realize that through the reproductive technology pregnancy is possible without sexual intercourse. Through this back and forth movement they "modernize" the Mahabharath and "traditionalize" contemporary society.

In a dialogic reading many realities both about the past and the present become visible, and the depths of human emotions are experienced. From a cognitive standpoint, the

reader becomes capable of opening up various zones in the text that have been "dormant", and from an ethical standpoint, there is possibility of reconstruction. The reconstructive act becomes especially useful in parent/child relationships, which is what this plot is all about.

For distribution of subjects in various modes of discourse see Table 13.

To summarize, monologic discourse frames the issues very strongly and therefore draws strict boundaries. The task of the reader is only to report, affirm or repudiate. The reader may either go with the flow of the text or maintain strict boundaries between the self and the text. In monologic discourses, self affirmation is the aim, whereas the dialogic discourse leads to self realization. In such a discourse, multiple chronotopes inter animate each other and the discourse moves through all the rhetorical tropes. In monologic discourses, the focus is on the strategies of hegemony, whereas the dialogic discourse concentrates on the strategies of struggle and confrontation. The discourse may begin with a general statement or an evaluation, and then the discourse moves. The reader draws finer strands and the interpretive act becomes increasingly complex, forming a variety of links with strands taken from personal life, culture and history.

CHAPTER 12

READERS, PLOTS AND DISCOURSE

What is a myth today? I shall give at the outset a first, very simple answer, which is perfectly consistent with etymology: *myth is a type of speech.*

Roland Barthes¹³

If we extend and adapt Roland Barthes definition, then the "epic" is also a type of speech. The type of speech varies from individual to individual and is also determined by the nature of the plots. Both the readers and the text are equal partners, sometimes readers determine the nature of meanings across the board, and sometimes the specific plot also demands a certain kind of reading. Therefore, the "type of speech" varies from one plot to another. In the previous chapter I had discussed the "modes of discourse" in each plot. In this chapter, I shall try to integrate readers, plots and the modes of discourse. The modes of discourse determine the nature of reality, both about self and the text and the relationship between the reader and the text.

The *Dice Game* (plot 3) pulled the readers in multiple directions. The nature of the problems presented in the plot and the length of the plot enticed the readers into the text and set them into motion. If we compare Tables 10 through 13,

¹³ Roland Barthes (1957). Mythologies. New York: The Noonday Press.

we observe that in this plot 37% of the subjects engaged in a "vari directional" discourse. It was difficult for the readers to exert complete authority over the text, and determine its meanings. The "disorientation" was universal to all subjects.

Some readers simply restated the story line and in a sense "escaped" from the text. A variety of responses indicate this "running away". Some common ones were, "who can understand this", "I can't make sense", "I don't want to see" and when I asked them how they would make sense the answer would be "who would want to", or "what is there to say" or "it is too tragic", or "it just happens" etc. Some readers even closed their eyes occasionally. It is virtual collapse of *Dharma*. In such a direct discourse they simply repeated the text, that is report its contents or speak to the text either directly or indirectly. In a direct discourse there are only two parties - the self and the text, and neither one of the moves. In this discourse, the readers are "text bound". The readers may make references to other similar texts, but do not necessarily observe differences. The texts could vary from Anita Hill - Clarence Thomas hearings, or the failure of Reagan and Bush administration to prevent the Iran Contra crisis, or the mentality of the jury in a rape case, or about the film *The Accused*. They may discuss each of them in great detail, but they don't become "tools" in rethinking the text and their thoughts. The reader here may state his or her opinion but does not necessarily try to prove it or

convince the other of their viewpoints. It is simply stated as a matter of fact.

In a uni-directional discourse (in the Dice Game only 11% of the subjects), the reader tries to "extract" meanings from the text, and to validate their "extracted meanings" they would effectively use various other texts. The extra textual material is effectively used to reinforce the reader's viewpoints. Here again they only draw similarities and maintain a distance from the text. The reader in this case exerts authority over the text and yet would insist on being "objective". In the Dice game all the subjects who engaged in this kind of discourse were men, who believed that there was a universal and ahistorical message in the text and they had to extract it through rational means. The extracted meaning of course varies from individual to individual, and it could vary at different points in the text for the same individual, but all of them would maintain their "distance" and imply that meanings are contained in the text. In this discourse the reader would establish strict cause and effect relationships. The argument could go along the lines, "If you gamble it will bring about your downfall; as an authority if you don't intervene it leads to chaos; if you bully you could be hurt," and they will give several other examples to reinforce this idea. The reader is interested in drawing a "moral" or a "message" from the text. Each message or a moral is "maximized", in other words they are taken to their extreme limits. For instance the same reader might point out

that women had a lot of say in the society and women were very oppressed in those days, and they could use several other texts to strengthen each of these statements. The argument could run along the lines, Hinduism was very liberal towards women, and as the Muslim rule came we lost our status, and at another point the argument could be go along the lines, Hindu culture lays out so many rules and regulations for women, or women cannot even go to heaven if they don't fulfill their "womanly" roles. Both these viewpoints are fixed in time and space. These differing viewpoints don't necessarily bring about an awareness of the contradictory forces in the society. Instead they exist as separate entities, and when confronted they would again repeat the same cycle. The *Dice Game* was especially effective in pointing out such contradictions. It was much easier to simply "extract" one meaning in other plots. But the force of this plot disrupted such single extraction. Since the concern is about objectivity, the reader makes distinctions between surface appearances and deep realities, or central and marginal meanings. Another expression that is commonly used here is "normally". They would often say a "normal person", or "under normal conditions" or "how can he make such obvious blunders" and so on.

In a dialogic reading, the readers neither "run away" from the text, nor do they exert authority over the text, and nor do they allow the text to exert authority over them, instead they enter the text and face multiple realities and

multiple problems, and therefore their discourse is distinctly heteroglot. Bakhtin (1984) explains that a discourse that moves in a multiple directions, "loses its composure and confidence, becomes agitated, internally undecided and two-faced". Therefore the reader cannot dominate the text. They go in and out of the text, and at each point they come back to their previous thoughts and alter them to give it newer meanings. The wandering does something both to the contents of the text and to themselves. In the *Dice Game* the traffic between the "text" and other extra textual materials was more frequent.

In the dialogue between Kunti and Karna (plot 4), a significant 71% of the subjects engaged in a direct discourse. Unlike the *Dice Game*, in which the direct discourse seemed like an "escape", the reader in this plot sympathizes with Karna. Some common expressions were, "I feel sorry for him", "My heart goes out for him", "How could a mother do such a thing", "It is so unfair", etc. In a direct discourse, the reader may sympathize with Karna and recognize the plight of Kunti. They could engage in a parallel discussion about children given up for adoption and biological mothers returning to reclaim them after a lapse of time. But the mother's plight and the child's pain and anger exists simply as two opposites. The characters may be treated as familiar individuals. The readers would talk to them in a direct manner, such as, "oh! don't say that to your mother", or "don't emotionally blackmail your son", and so on. They

could add to Fahi Masoom Raza's script. But the reader in Bakhtin's (1984) words maintains the "ultimate semantic authority". Two opposing viewpoints or two different perspectives don't necessarily translate into dialogic relationships, instead they are an "objectified clash of two represented positions" and the "monologic context is neither broken nor weakened" (Bakhtin, 1984). In general in this plot Kunti was judged harshly, more so than even Duryodhan in the Dice game. She violated a sacred institution and an ideal, whereas his behavior was to be expected.

In the *Maya Mahal* scene the judgment on Draupadi was also harsh. She either violated a "gender code" or she was an improper hostess or a "haughty princess". In this plot the direct discourse is only a matter of condemning her laughter or for a few to justify the laughter. This plot does not generate any major debates. However the *Svayamvar* scene sets up a conflict between gender and caste relations in the society.

With respect to readers, only 4 subjects (1 female and 2 males in Group I and 1 female in Group II) dialogized all the plots, and had multiple concerns and saw multiple realities. Mr. Rajan in Group III dialogized all the plots except the *Svayamvar* scene. Other consistent groups were:

Group I	-	4 females	and	4 males
Group II	-	5 females	and	2 males
Group III	-	6 females	and	3 males

All these subjects engaged in a direct discourse. This suggests that only 8% of the subjects were consistently dialogic, and 50% of the subjects were stubbornly monologic. The remaining subjects fluctuated in their modes of discourse. In general the variation was the greatest in Group II.

Both the "direct" and the "uni-directional" discourses are monologic. The single voiced discourse can come in many forms. First of all it could be an indifference towards the text, which was the case with Mr. Bhagirath. He simply thought Mahabharath does not teach him anything and therefore not worth engaging with. This was also the case with 4 other women in Group III. They felt that they had more to learn from Ramayan and Mahabharath was just not right.

In another brand of monologism the text is treated as a set of events or just a story. In this case the readers assume that all meanings are contained in the text and they simply report them. They are not necessarily indifferent, but they take an "outsider's perspective" and are concerned about "facts" and "authenticity". Volosinov (1973) explains that,

"Reported speech is regarded by the speaker as an utterance belonging to *someone else*, an utterance that was originally totally independent, complete in construction, and lying outside the given context" (p.116).

In this kind of direct discourse, the reader would ask mostly clarification questions, and assume "neutrality". They would rarely ever want to give their evaluation. However there is a tacit evaluation in the way they report the events. They

would use expressions such as, "it seems to suggest", "it looks like", "he probably thought", etc. There is a clear demarcation between the self and the text. They are basically "viewers" and "reporters" of the text. Interestingly even when they are paired with dialogic readers, they don't break those strict boundaries. They treat the viewing session as a "visit to a museum". The text either gives them a glimpse of the past or a glimpse of the nation. Time and geographical locations switch places. In other words, sometimes "those days" becomes "in that place" or "in India". The text is simply fixed.

The other kind of monologism is "idealism". Here the reader has some fixed notions of right and wrong and how the world should be and they would project these ideals into the text or use these ideals as analytical tools to evaluate or dismiss the characters. Both the idealist and realist fix the text. The difference is in their style of reading. For example, a reporter is likely to say, "Draupadi's laughter seems to be crude", whereas an idealist would say, "Draupadi's laughter is not right" or "that is not what a good hostess should do". The idealist brings selfhood into picture and displays anger and expresses frustrations, but the "reporter" locates all sources of meaning within the text. Both are giving the same evaluation. One locates the origin in the text and the other within the self. Therefore the self takes authority over the text. The idealist can either engage in a direct or unidirectional discourse.

Both the monologic and dialogic reader could give similar evaluations, but they differ in the way they go about giving the evaluations. The multiple chronotopes in the dialogic discourse leaves it open-ended, whereas closure is important in monologic thinking.

CHAPTER 13

TALES IN LIVES AND LIVES IN TALES

I put my tales of you into lasting songs. The
secret gushes out of my heart.

They come and ask me, "Tell me all your meanings."
I know not how to answer them.

I say. "Ah, who knows what they mean!" They smile
and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there
smiling.

Rabindranath Tagore¹⁴

These musings of Tagore forces me to ponder about the irony of my own research enterprise. I wonder how many of my subjects "chuckled" when I asked them, "what sense do you make of Mahabharath", when they might in fact be "singing" these songs through their lives. Perhaps they did "sit there smiling", and they have every right to do that. But then I have a right to ask them about the "song", perhaps "telling" me about the song may in fact reveal the depths of the song and mutually benefit both of us. It could enhance my understanding of "**their**" song and "**the**" song itself. It also gives an "outsider's perspective" - an externalization of private meanings, as Vygotsky (1987) points out, "*thinking and speech are key to understanding the nature of human consciousness* " (p.285). Private meanings and spontaneous

¹⁴ Rabindranath Tagore (1971). Gitanjali . New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

forms of knowledge, Vygotsky argues are enriched by public expressions and formalizations. The movement is back and forth. Bakhtin (1990) writes with some elegance on this "outsider's" perspective,

"To be able to experience my own acts of experiencing, I have to make them a special object of my own activity. To be able to experience my own experiencing as something determinate and present-on-hand, I have to detach myself from those objects, goals, and values which my living experience was directed and which gave it meaning and filled it." (p.113).

In this chapter, I will discuss the interrelationships between "interpreting lives" and "interpreting tales" and how stories gain meanings through lives and how lives give meaning to the stories. My concerns are not with a mechanical connections between "lives" and "stories", but how life reveals itself in interpreting stories. The relationship can appear in many forms - in the styles of reading, in the evaluative stance one takes, how they thematize the text and the kinds of chronotopes evidenced in the text and the chronotopes that ground the narrative itself. In Chapter 7 & 8, I had discussed the various categories of "life stories", and in the following discussion, I will show their relationships or the lack of it in the "reading act".

As I discussed in Chapter 7, the world serves as a backdrop for the traveler. They are detail oriented and concerned with facts, and these concerns play out in the reading act. They would often ask questions for clarifying facts to put the story in a causal sequence, and focus on the events that happened before and after, and are careful in

taking a "neutral" position. For instance, when asked for their explanation Uma said this about the *Svayamvar* scene,

"Explanation for this ... I don't know ... according to the **information** they have it is like Pandavas are dead .. right ... for practically for everybody ... unless Krishna has some details .. I don't know .. I mean I am sure that Krishna knew that .. may be he has told all these people that he is still alive .. I don't know ..".

Much of the traveler's discussion revolves around asking for clarifications and reporting the story back, and telling everything that happens around the story. Since they were watching the television production, they would often comment on the appearances, clothing, the actor's personal lives, etc. For instance Uma would make such remarks frequently,

" Did you notice this color coding .. Bheeshma is always in white .. Arjun always in White .. Yudhishtir is always in white .. Karna is in pink ... Sakuni is in black .. Duryodhan is in black ... bolstering the image of everyday .. it is subtle .. subliminal kind of thing..".

Or, she would discuss the politics of production, which corporation sponsored the event, how much money was spent, etc., but this "information" does not necessarily alter her interpretive stance. The style of talking about these issues are like that of a newspaper reporter. She says this about *Dice Game* ,

"There was a lot written about this scene before it was televised .. how spectacular it is going to be and things like that .. about this *Vastraharan* thing .. Binny (textile mills) thing .. like how they were going to show the special effects .. this was the most important scene .. may equal or more than the war scenes ... so quite a few textile companies came forward to .. to manufacture so many meters of cloth .. there was a lot written about Binny .. for whatever it is worth ... they made special kind of silk .. it was a much awaited part .. Binny made a lot of cash .. afterwards they came

up with line of silk .. that called it Draupadi's silk .. people watched it religiously ..".

I asked her if she thought this scene was spectacular or if it was that important to the story and her reply was "people like it". Notice how much of the attention is on everything around it. The parallels are striking. To define the self, the world is what is spoken about, and to define the importance of the text, it had to be located in its surrounding world. About the story, she would only repeat it or "report" it. The focus is not on the characters, or their importance in the story line, but everything that went around it. To describe their own lives, they have to speak about geographical locations, people in the world, their customs, etc, and to speak about Mahabharath, it is about commentaries, corporate sponsorships, who made money, etc. Her partner Malathy was also a traveler, and she further reinforced the search for authentic text and the need to talk about everything around it, as she says,

" I don't know if there is an original ... *Apne Maharani ke liye* (for the sake of your queen) .. such remarks .. it seems very artificial .. this seems snaps of Hindi films .. I don't know if there is any other version or this is what happened ..".

Mohan (M) and Manoj (Mn) also were also travelers and both of them are first generation immigrants. To them everything about the text was about India, and the text was a "punching bag" to vent out their annoyance with India. Mohan would often add humor to the reading activity and makes "digs" at Indian society,

"M: Doesn't this much gold look funny?

Mn: Yeah! this is too much gold .. it could be more subdued

M: That's **Indian** movies".

Throughout the reading activity, they would make sarcastic remarks like "do Indians gamble", or "are there gamblers anonymous in India", or "we thought it was holy culture". The text provided them with an opportunity to mock at India. There were two distinct themes in their reading, one was to debase the "official" version of India that their parents impose on them, and therefore they use the parodic genre to release their frustrations and the other was the discussion about American politics. The reading activity is not about "Mahabharath", but the events that Mahabharath reminds them of,

"Mn: These brothers should have told Yudhishtir to bug off and declare the entire proceedings null and void .. they are just what they are pawns .. that he can sacrifice ...

M: This whole code of honor and stuff ... Indian stuff .. I am sorry .. that is out of the window ... the other guys were a bunch of jerks .. people who have power .. around here .. we have two kinds of theories ... one is to cover your own ass .. otherwise you don't get re-elected ..right .. two . it is has not happened to me..".

The mockery is just not on India, but also on American politics, especially 1992 was the election year and the politics of Mahabharath raised quite a few political discussions. While there was a resemblance to Mahabharath in their discussion, they would not enter the story. The story was Indian, and the contents of the story generated a discussion on American politics. Frequently I would have to

bring them back to the text. The discussion on American politics does not necessarily raise newer questions about the story or about their "distant homeland". The text and the "nation" are distant to them, and yet it is supposed to be "theirs", or atleast their parents expect them to embrace it. Therefore they grudgingly "learn" about it. It is a reminder of their "Indianness". They both told me that their parents applauded their participation in my study. It meant doing "Indian things".

The traveler is the kind of reader who draws strict boundaries between texts, between themselves and texts, and between characters. They use very "totalizing " language. Some common expressions were, "entirely", "absolutely", "totally", "firmly", etc. Ritesh the traveler was paired with Anup who was dialogic. As I discussed earlier, Anup was annoyed by his "dogmatic" views, "literal reading", and "legalistic" concerns, and Ritesh would dismiss Anup as being too subjective and not having any clues for the facts and finally he was too emotional. Ritesh saw the text as a "representation" of ancient India. He would often ask questions about social relations in the past, "was polyandry a norm then", or " did women have choice in marriage then", or "does it suggest that she has a choice", and Anup would start giving multiple perspectives and Ritesh would say, "tell me yes or no". The reality of the traveler becomes conspicuous when there is such a glaring contrast.

Of the 16 subjects, who were classified as travelers in the study, a significant number (12 individuals - 75%) engaged in a "direct unmediated" monologic discourse. This style was consistent in all the plots. The other four, Jayashree was classified in a "travel" subcategory - the adventurer. Therefore her reading fluctuated between monologism and dialogism. Also she had a very intense relationship to the text from her childhood and in the reading session she was paired with Anu - who was classified as a "gendered self". These factors together contributed to her style of reading. Like wise Mukta who was also classified as a traveler had a memorable relationship with the text and she had read several versions and was familiar with the theater in India. She also fluctuated in her styles depending on the plot and very often she dialogized the text. She was paired with Sukumar who was classified in the "dialogic self" category. Shyam, the traveler was also paired with Sambhu, who was a scriptural self. He did not have such an intense relationship to the text in the past, but the partner seems to have facilitated the "loosening up", and finally Payal was also paired with Mausmi who was consistently dialogic in all her readings. Payal fluctuated according to the plots.

The traveler is also very concerned with precision and accuracy. When the partners summarize the text and edit words or shuffle them or reword or reframe them, they are quick to point out the inaccuracies. My discussion on "direct

unmediated discourse" in Chapter 11 and 12 represents the traveler's style of reading.

The biographer on the other hand is interested in the normative aspects of human life, its various stages, accomplishments and the most important factor is their concern for "good" human relationships and universal "ideals". Unlike travelers who speak the what abouts of the story and the characters, the biographer speaks in a familiar tone "to" the characters and gives a detailed account of their personalities, the events in their lives, the unfair things that happened to them in the past and so on. Here is a conversation between Vinod, the biographer and Ratna, the traveler and their styles of "reading" becomes clear,

"Lak: What has happened so far?"

R: They have been playing dice .. and he staked himself ... and then says he has nothing else .. then he is asked about Draupadi .. and he stakes her ... that is what has happened ...

V: First thing is.. you talk idealism later .. first of all I don't agree playing these kinds of things .. that is not good ... past time .. whether it be kings or whether they are enemies .. and then if you start playing one should not go to the extent .. you lose money .. and individuals .. without the consent of his brothers... and he should not have ..".

Ratna reports and Vinod evaluates. She talks about what has happened, and Vinod gives his opinion. The traveler focuses on "right information" and the biographer's concerns are with "proper behavior" and being good. The sense of right and wrong is very strong in them.

The traveler might go into the story's past events to gather information to situate the specific plot, whereas the

biographer goes into the past to construct the hero's character, their peculiarities and their accomplishments. They would cheer their accomplishments and salute their good qualities and show their disapproval when they falter. In response to the *Svayamavar* scene Ulupi reflects,

" I thought her gave her the signal .. that is what it looked like to me ... he made a nod .. but what is sad about this .. this man is continuously .. shot down .. again and again ... and in that sense I don't think Arjun was even worthy of winning that because Karna could have done it ... to me that is really sad .. he is not the hero ... here we have Karna too .. who is exactly .. if we look at it .. Karna and Arjun are exactly the same ... except Karna is on the other side .. I think Arjun too arrogant .. sorry .. at this point ... I think before .. the point where Krishna tells him Bhagavad Gita .. then he is humble ... beyond belief ... but I think at this point ..he is just as arrogant ..he just lucked out .. that is all I can say ... ".

First of all if we compare this with the traveler's account, observe the number of times "I" comes into the picture - "I like" , "I think", or "I feel", etc. The biographer's reading style is to go through the motions of the story, identify with the characters - of course the good ones, and denounce the "bad ones". It is the action that determines good and bad, but characters themselves don't qualify as good or bad. It is the ideal that determines the character. If the character does not fit the "ideal" that they are supposed to be they question the character and not the nature of the ideal. For instance they would be surprised at Yudhishtir's weakness for gambling and their typical response would be "Yudhishtir is supposed to be .. all *Dharma* .. good guy .. why is he doing this" and if the reading partner says, "well people do have vices" or "even nice people have bad

qualities" , their response would be "but then he is made out to be so good in the story". The same cycle continues and the biographers cannot "pull" themselves out of it. For a biographer individual life is subordinated to the idea of life, and likewise in the reading activity, the "ideal" determines the character. The biographer's life story is full of "tracks" and "paths" of right life, and even if their own lives don't adhere to those "paths", the "paths" are important, or sometimes their life paths are automatically translated into the "paths of life". The paths and tracks organize their lives and the world around them. Therefore Yudhishtir's nature cannot be reconciled, there is a "track" about *Dharma* which he personifies and an event that does not fit the ideal. The biographer uses the ideal to question the character.

The biographer empathizes with the characters and is capable of picking up the nuances of human emotions, as Ulupi comments on Draupadi's remark,

" But she doesn't say it in a vicious way .. didn't seem that way ... of course Krishna said ... it didn't seem it was ... you know .. very .. like oh! ... because you are a *Sooth putra* .. I am not going to marry you .. you know it wasn't vicious in that sense ..".

The various plots reminds the traveler of "public events" or films or other cultures as a unified whole. The biographer often draws analogies to human relationships, social norms and such dynamics are used to understand and evaluate the events in the text as Nanda comments on Draupadi's laughter,

" he has not so far done anything .. to her per se ... when you think of girls in India .. you are always

taught that ... you don't have to ... like .. my mother always said that you never really .. even with relatives you don't like .. you don't come out and be rude ... we have a saying in our language .. that you have to live in your clan ... you cry inside but on the face you smile .. so like aunts and uncles .. this kind of relationships .. in most families ... in weddings .. they are dancing and hugging up ... but the undercurrents of real viciousness going on .. you still have to maintain ... and the one who really comes out and blurts out is not the favored one .. so she shouldn't have ..".

The biographer's attention is on the normative aspects of life and social codes. The laughter is not judged on just right and wrong, but based on the codes that govern familial relationships. The societal relationships also mediate their reasoning. In the *Dice Game* scene they would often direct all their questions to the authority figures and show their outrage for failing in their duties. The biographers are strictly duty bound. Of all the subjects they were the ones who were most agitated during the viewing session. Since personal relationships are so important to them, they would wonder why Draupadi was not asking her husbands first. In their view she should first direct her questions to her husbands, and not question the kingdom as its subject. In the *Maya Mahal* scene Mohini's response was, "c'mon jaar .. she is only the sister-in-law joking .. can't he take it lightly". Mohini liked to see the plot as a family gathering where each one is teasing the other. These are the kinds of alternative plots that are constructed by the biographer. Love, warmth and fun is what families are all about.

Life begins at "home" for a biographer. Even in their evaluations of the characters, they would use proper "family

environment" as a yard stick, and you find expressions such as, "had Duryodhan been brought up properly he would have been different", or "you are a product of your upbringing" or "children who are abandoned and neglected do carry anger with them". For a biographer Mahabharath tells them "what not to do", and they would use every tragic moment in the story to point out the importance of "good behavior". Herein lies the biographer's brand of monologism.

The biographer's life tale is really about their personal lives, their close relationships, their accomplishments, and their failures. Their home is their world. Therefore their reading activity translates into applauding kind deeds, and disapproving unfair actions. They were uniform in their evaluation in all the plots - Draupadi was wrong in insulting Karna, she should not have laughed, Duryodhan violated some fundamental ethics and some of them also said that Draupadi brought it upon herself and the worst of all is Kunti for betraying motherhood. This does not mean there are no variations. Subjects do vary in their definitions of "ideal" and "good". But personal relationships mediate the construction of an ideal.

There were 9 biographers in all, and of them 8 subjects engaged in a "direct" discourse. But their discourse is qualitatively different than the "travelers". The traveler's style is more denotative and objective and the biographer's style is more emotive and subjective. In one case the brand of monologism is "realism", that is reality exists out there

and in the biographer's case it is "ideological monologism". Bakhtin (1984) explains that a true dialogue becomes impossible in an "environment of philosophical monologism", because there is no recognition of individual ideal, but the concrete individual is subordinated to an abstract ideal. Bakhtin (1984) writes,

" Idealism recognizes only one principle of cognitive individualization: error . True judgments are not attached to a personality, but corresponds to some unified, systematically monologic context" (p.81).

There is yet another difference between the most travelers and biographers. That is in their history of engagement with the text. Most of the travelers were "travelers" in the literal sense. They rarely stayed in one place for a stretch of time. Some of them traveled and lived in many parts of the world, and in their childhood, the encounters with Mahabharath was either heresy or abridged books or for the most part their knowledge was from comic books. Reading Mahabharath was a way of maintaining "Indianness" or "learning" about culture and transmitting such knowledge to future generation. Their recollection of Mahabharath was also "denotative" - as a story. But the story has an added baggage, it is consciously perceived as "culture", and the culture in turn is distant and static, or if I may borrow V.S.Naipaul's word, the culture is "frozen". Their view of India - its customs, people, is either based on the time they left India or on their occasional visits for a week or two as travelers. Along with the nation and culture, Mahabharath also has the same status - distant, static and

frozen. In the traveler's discourse temporal categories are poorly developed. Everything is a spatial conception. Their own situatedness in the "culture" which is on the surface, and their past engagement with the text which has been through books or comic books mediates their reading activity, and determines the spatio-temporal relations in the text. The time and space of Mahabharath, as I discussed earlier switch places. It is sometimes about the "ancient" world and sometimes about "India". The switching takes place almost automatically.

In Bakhtin's scheme (1981), chronotopes are not just time and space relations in the text but they are also the very grounds for representation by the author. we cannot understand the spatio-temporal relations in the text without considering the cultural space and historical time that the author inhabits, and the chronotopes becomes even more complex as the readers bring their own. Travelers own chronotopes - that is the individual's situatedness in the cultural matrix determines the relationship to the text and what the text means.

Paradoxically, the traveler's engagement with the text in the past was not so intense, but their search for "authenticity" in the current reading is very intense. In a way they are the "visitors to the museum", and they want to make sure they are getting their "money's worth" - that is "true artifacts". But these so called true artifacts are received from other contemporary constructors - comic book

writers, or family members who tells the story, and the individual himself is a participant in this construction, and then they achieve the status of an "ancient epic". And these constructed artifacts becomes "Indian past " or "Indian culture", which they should know and they also say that they would want to teach their children about "Indian culture". The constructed past in this way is converted into the absolute past.

The biographer's history with the text has been different. Of the 9 biographer's 3 of them in Group III (age above 50 group), did not care about Mahabharath, since it was not the "ideal" text. All of them asked me why I was not studying Ramayan, since it teaches you about kindness and sacrifice. However they participated in my research and like most biographers denounced all the "bad deeds". All the biographer's contact with Mahabharath was through "oral tellings" in their childhood, and therefore the viewing session also resembled "oral tellings" - talking directly to the characters, cheering them, reprimanding them, and so on. There was spontaneity in their reading, and Mahabharath did not have the external sense of culture to them. Most the biographers were recent immigrants, and "India" or "culture" is not so distant to them. The transformation of the text is automatic, and at the subjective level there is no concern for authenticity. In fact in the "previewing session" when they recollect Mahabharath, they would often tell instances when their grandmother or grandfather would amend the story

to suit the occasion. Therefore their concerns are not with "facts" but about "ideals".

While the biographer is preoccupied with "ideals", and evaluates the individual accordingly, the "clan self" sees the individual, based on their heritage and therefore they assume that societies are demarcated by class and caste and would imply that this is the "natural" way. The clan mind set reveals itself especially in the *Svayamvar* scene as Mrs. Anusuya reasons,

"Draupadi's reaction to Karna trying to overcome the task set by her father to win her hand is typical I think .. because she is a princess .. she is brought up to be a princess .. she is not supposed to descend to the level of a commoner .. she only knows that he is not a prince by birth .. and she is clear in her views .. somehow the desire to stay with your own kind and your own level is the society seems to be universal characteristics ..".

The clan self treats rivalry between two families or two dynasties as natural, and would treat Draupadi's comments to be natural and "right", as Mr. Murugan said, "she very boldly .. said .. horseman's son and refuses him". He reasons that marriage is a life long relationship and it is important to know the bridegroom's background, his heritage, his status, and his family. Without such credentials a woman cannot enter into a marriage. In the *Maya Mahal* scene, Mr. Murugan sees rivalry between two families and not between two individuals as he says,

" Duryodhan when he was invited to magical palace .. he comes as a guest ...to ill treat guests . it is not nice .. but still ... in order to take revenge .. he made a bungalow .. and where there is water he put his foot .. to spite him they bring him and show off ..because when

they were exiled they lived off as beggars .. so they want to humiliate this .. so they do this ...".

In Mr. Murugan's view Pandavas built that splendid palace only to invite Duryodhan and show him that they have a better palace. He says, in two "big families" and such insults take place frequently. The blow is not for Duryodhan but to his dynasty.

Mrs. Sarla dismissed Draupadi's laughter as a creation of B.R.Chopra and her reasoning was, "how could she .. coming from such a great family act so foolish". The characters are held accountable not by who they are but where they come from. It is the lineage that matters and not the individual. I am not suggesting that this was the only kind of reasoning, but such voices of "clan" pride appears in the narrative frequently.

There were only 4 subjects in this category - all of them in Group III. Two subjects consistently engaged in a "direct" discourse. They differ from the biographers in their reasoning styles. The other two subjects, Mr. Radharam and Mrs. Sarla were for most part dialogic readers. Both of them had a very intense relationship with Mahabharath in their childhood. They read several books, listened to many story tellers and their household was full of story tellers. Also Mrs. Sarla's recollection of her "heritage" in her life narratives was the matriarchal one, and giving weight to matriarchal world was not possible without a critical assessment of the world - which is patriarchal. Much of her criticism came from a "gendered position".

The "seeker's" world is a "developmental path". The search is for "true and authentic" knowledge. The authenticity is not factual like the traveler, but the unchanging eternal truth about humanity. They are the objectivists, and the seekers for most part engaged in a "uni-directional" discourse. They would use expression such as "if we look at it microscopically", or "analyze this carefully", or "we need to constantly query this". The text is some kind of fruit that has the eternal "truth", and their task is to extract that "truth". Expressions such as "the essence of it", or "deep down" indicate their concerns for surface manifestations and deep truths. Another common feature of the seeker was that, they would want to ignore the dynamics of the story, all the changing events, but they would say that they are only interested in the underlying philosophy. All the seekers were exposed to Mahabharath in a variety of ways. They had read, they have heard, and they have seen dramas, and they are interested in the common denominator in these various versions.

The "scriptural", the "gendered" and the "dialogic" selves were the ones who for most part engaged in a "vari directional double voiced" discourse. Unlike the other categories, dialogism defies any specific linguistic style or a specific ideology. There are always competing ideologies and varying political concerns. These concerns interestingly produce the fluctuations among the readers. The subjects in these three categories of "self" total to 15 and all them

constructed a polyphonic discourse in the *Dice Game* . The rate of dialogic reading was the least in *Maya Mahal* scene. Many of them felt that either it was too trivial or light hearted to invite a serious discussion, and some argued that Draupadi was justified in her laughter. Like wise in the *Svayamvar* scene, they simply asserted that Draupadi is rightfully exercising her fundamental choice in choosing her partner. It is a women's choice, they say, and such rights in their view is not debatable and it is not too serious to recognize any "irony" in the situation either. Interestingly such a views were held by the dialogic readers in Group III, whereas the younger ones were concerned about caste and gender conflicts in the society, and such multiple concerns and politics created the dialogue.

In the dialogue between Kunti and Karna, the rate of "dialogism" increases, out of 15 subjects 12 of them debated both sides and the other three felt it was too unfair to Karna. Here again, the younger group (look at Table 13), was more concerned about castigating teen age mothers or mothers in general and this "gendered position" gave them the critical angle.

The dialogic readers contact with Mahabharath in the past was varied. All of them recalled oral tellings in their households and in addition to that they had read several books and seen dramas and were sensitive to differences. I am not implying that exposure to multiple modes translates into

dialogic reading, but there is a correspondence between multiple exposures and dialogic reading.

There is a uniqueness to the readings of the scriptural self. Their style is distinctly "performative". To make sense of one story they have to "perform" several other stories. It is literally a performance. While watching the *Maya Mahal* scene, Mr. Rajan stopped the tape and performed a line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*,

"Give thy thoughts no tongue, nor any unproportioned
thought its act,
Give every man the ear but few thy words,
Take each man's censure but reserve their judgment,
Beware of entrance to a quarrel but being in it bear it
that the opposed may be beware of thee ".

Such performances point out both his viewpoints and the "irony" is dramatized and felt by the listener. Such instances are frequent in the narratives of scriptural self. while he was viewing the dialogue between Kunti and Karna, he narrated a whole segment from Alexander Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Then he draws parallels between both the stories in which "knowingly the mother makes an impossible demand on the son". The narration builds tension and not only reveals their interpretation of the plot, but also offers an invitation for the other to join in. Their narration is filled with citations from various literary texts, both Indian and western. For instance Sambhu narrated a Arthurian legend to make a point. The various literary texts are effectively used to open up a discussion. Whether it is King Arthur or Edmund Danders or Hamlet, or other literary characters, they have an active conversation with the

characters in Mahabharath. They also use Vedic hymns and Upanishadic verses as interpretive tools. For the scriptural self, the literary texts are not the only texts that they use, but they are an integral part of the interpretive act. Even contemporary events have a quality of "literariness", in their narrative. The gendered self frequently uses women's lives and women's histories to create the critical angle. Since the plots themselves generated gender conflicts, it is difficult to identify specific features in their narrative. The "gender politics" in the society and in their lives were definitely distinct themes in their narrative. For instance, a certain problem or a violation could be viewed as a "human problem" and the reader could create a critical dialogic text, whereas one could also take a "gendered" position and for critical interrogation. Of course the "human" and the "gendered" are not identical and a discussion of that topic is beyond the scope of this chapter. But for the moment, I am only arguing for the dialogic play in both the narratives. Besides, in dialogic narratives such axiological points keep shifting to discuss any fixed patterns.

In chapter 10 I had discussed that 67% of the subjects did not recall Draupadi or didn't have much to say about her. She did not qualify as a "full blown character" to discuss. However in the reading session, she is held accountable as a character. In the viewing session she is in a context and the evaluation is based on that context. Whereas in the recollection, she does not qualify as a character. There was

no set pattern to make an adequate comparison between the memory and the reading.

To conclude, the "reading act" is an intersection of several histories - that of the individual, the culture, and their contact with the text in the past, and the history of the text itself.

CHAPTER 14

KNOWLEDGE, HISTORY AND SELF

It moves. It moves not.
 It is far, and It is near.
 It is within all this,
 And It is outside of all this.

Isa Upanishad¹⁵

This verse is taken from *Isa Upanishad*, which discusses the paradoxical nature of reality - it is both transcendent and immanent, it has both the centrifugal and centripetal forces and these forces determine the underlying unity and diversity of the world. This stanza also "speaks" so much about the Mahabharath (the known) and the self (the knower). Mahabharath is both about the absolute past and about contemporary present. It is so far and yet so near. It is the "grand story of India" (*Maha* means great and *Bharath* is the Sanskrit name for India), and yet can freely talk to various stories from other parts of the world. It is about two sets of cousins feuding over a piece of land and often individuals liken this to the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel, it is about gender politics, teenage pregnancy, reclaiming abandoned children, about gambling, and about

¹⁵ Isa Upanishad, Stanza 5. In Indian Philosophy S. Radhakrishnan and C.A.Moore (Eds.) (1957) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

global politics. All these contemporary problems seem to be in Mahabharath, and yet to recognize it and fully understand it we have to look "outside" of it. Knowledge of it is not so automatic, the "Self" needs to intervene to make the connection between the "insides" of the Mahabharath and the "outside" world. The intervention by the self does multiple things simultaneously: it reveals and creates knowledge both about the text, the world, and the self, and creates newer stories for all of them. It sets the *Chakra* - the wheel of Mahabharath in motion and the individual also is set in motion to "evolve". Such a development is a partnership between the text and the self; the self moves the text and is moved by the text. In that both are active, and both need each other, as Nietzsche (1983) argues, "we want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life" (p.59). A salutation to the grand tale of Mahabharath is meaningful only to the extent the individual uses it to understand today's complex world and its problems and the "self". An unproblematic salutation and celebration of the grandeur of the text makes the individual too passive and the activity in Bakhtin's (1990) words becomes too "religious" and in Nietzsche's (1961) view it is the consciousness of a "camel", that "debases" itself. By the same token if the individual fixes the text and determines its status in the society - as an artifact in a museum, the activity becomes "cognitive" (Bakhtin, 1990) and according to Nietzsche (1961) it is the consciousness of a "lion", that "wants to capture freedom and

be the lord". If one can "recreate" and "reevaluate" the given, then the aesthetic activity begins, which in Nietzsche's view is "childlike". Such an activity facilitates the understanding of both the self and the other.

A dialogic consciousness seems to facilitate such an understanding. To understand a given aspect of the text, the dialogic reader undertakes quite a journey - to various cultural spaces, which includes personal lives, lives of other heroines and heroes, life of the same heroine at different points, lives of people around them, and different time zones. These spaces are not simply explored, after exploration they become "tools" for reactivating the text. The reader does not simply go "into" these spaces and time zones, but they become instruments "in" her hands. There are both passive and active moments in this journey. At the exploration stage, these various "spaces" and "times" dictate the movement, and then when they become instrumental, she is the active agent.

An active movement from one concrete text to another concrete text, Vygotsky (1990) explains produces the "abstraction" and in turn recreates the concrete. Vygotsky points out that an "imaginative" act does not stop with the abstraction, instead it uses the abstraction to explore newer territories, as Vygotsky (1990) writes,

"Abstraction is for it only an intermediary link, only an episode along the path of development, only a turning point in its movement toward the concrete. Imagination, in our perspective, is a transforming, creative activity directed from the concrete toward the new concrete" (p.84).

An abstract principle extracted from one concrete text is not left dangling in the air, instead it is used as a key to open up something else and the movement continues. Any finalization of the thought only stops that movement. Bakhtin (1990) makes a similar point about the role of abstract thought in aesthetic consciousness,

" A thought as such contains, inherently, the energy of extraspatial and extratemporal infinitude, in relation to which anything concrete is only fortuitous, a thought can provide no more than the direction for seeing something concrete, but a direction that is infinite, a direction incapable of consummating whole" (p.209).

In my previous chapters we observed that the dialogic reading demonstrated such a movement. Drawing similarities with other events or texts is the first step, which starts the "tropological" movement, and from the metaphoric trope the individual goes on to recognize the differences which leads them to establish contiguity relationships, and from the metonymy the problem becomes a "stand in" for a broader philosophical problem and such an abstraction again leads the individual back to the "self" and to the "text" to recognize the irony. Sometimes a "carnavalesque" moment is created to break the barrier between the self and other, or between "inner and outer" experience, and finally between god and human. Such moments were especially created in the *Dice Game*, after Krishna appears in a transcendental form. They would rather experience *Rasa Leela* - the romantic play. The laughter and the break up of hierarchies releases the built up tension and the serious journey again begins. In the carnivalesque moment there is no "seeing", there is no

outsidedness to it, it is pure experience, as Bakhtin (1984) writes,

"Laughter must liberate the gay truth of the world from veils of gloomy lies spun by the seriousness of fear, suffering, and violence" (p.174).

The *Dice* game builds such ambivalent moments - the fear of being physically violated and the need for rescue, in that Draupadi is both fortunate to have had Krishna come and rescue her and unfortunate to have been in that position. When individuals remind themselves of the *Rasa Leela*, the fear is released and externalized and it is no longer a property of the self. Further, the laughter also "renews" and "rejuvenates" the reading activity.

Simply being "text bound" does not reveal the depths of the text and does not produce newer knowledge about other things simultaneously. If we take Vygotsky's explanation, there aren't enough "tools" acquired to activate the given text, and create a dialogue. Through a dialogue multiple texts activate each other. A passive movement or a "leap" from one text to the other does not facilitate true cognition either. Each exists as an isolated unit and they are not energized. I had discussed such parallel discussion in my earlier chapters, and when each text exists independently, they only remain to be separate viewpoints, and do not aid in creating newer ideas. The cognitive gain can be achieved only if all the parties involved are active and such a discourse in Bakhtin's terminology is polyphonic. Passivity by any one party makes the relationship too hierarchical and creates a

hegemonic discourse, and such a discourse either reports or validates or denounces. There is either indifference, or acceptance or a dismissal.

Such a monologic world view not only restricts "cognitive gain", but also hinders various "ethical possibilities". A dialogic reading considers both the past, the present and the future. Since the narrative is so pregnant with time, it looks at various possibilities, or tries to open up "loopholes" for confrontation, reconstruction and reconciliation. For instance in the *Dice Game*, a monologic thinking can only show outrage at the humiliation that Draupadi suffers, or in some cases they say she brought it upon herself. Whatever the case is, there is only one emotion, and a persistent questioning of why authority figures fail to answer her. While dialogic thinking explores such a question, it is also paying close attention to her strategies for confrontation. The focus is not just on what happened to her, but how she is confronting the "heavy handedness" and how the silent authority figures may avert such happenings in future. Such a possibility does not necessarily translate into justifying their silence. That was not the case in the dialogic narratives. It was both repudiation and a suggestion for future action. Like wise in the dialogue between Kunti and Karna a monologism only shows sympathy towards one and anger towards the other. Whereas dialogism in addition to that saw Kunti's action as a "necessity" at that moment in her life. They saw that such a

moment did create emotional turbulence for both the mother and the son, but it also tied loose ends for both the mother and son, and allowed the possibility of a close relationship. Such reconciliation were intertwined with their own personal relationships. The reconciliations is neither blind, nor heroic, but it is human, after a full understanding of the history, and such a historical necessity is the hall mark of dialogism as Bakhtin (1986) writes,

" .. nothing can be done with the historical event, with the abstract historical recollection, if it is not localized in terrestrial space, if one does not understand (does not see) the *necessity* of its occurrence at a particular time and in a particular place" (p.38).

Accounting for the past and creating "loopholes" for future serves yet another function in understanding history. The history neither engulfs the individual nor does the individual ignore the past, and Neitzsche (1983) points out that it is important for the individual to know "when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically", so that the later may provide an opportunity to create newer history. Neitzsche writes, " *the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of people and of culture*" (p.63). The selective process gives weight for both the individual and to the past.

Now coming to the problem of understanding history, I want to argue that understanding itself has a history. This history includes the nature of self-understanding which in turn is determined by various other cultural and historical

forces. Understanding self is not so automatic, and it is achieved through the aid of the other, and therefore as Morson and Emerson (1990) point out the "crucial values for real selves are non fusion and inter action" (p.184). A complete submersion in the culture denies any "outsideness", which was the case with the "biographer", and an extreme "outsideness" denies any possibility of fusion, which was the case with the "traveler". And these forms of "self" definitions establishes a certain kind of relationship to the outside world and subsequently to the cultural texts. As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a correspondence between understanding self and understanding the text.

In addition to the history of self, there is also the history of self's engagement with the text. Exclusively formal encounters, defines the boundaries of the text. Such boundaries of course are artificial constructions. And casual oral tellings produces an informal relationship and the individual spontaneously talks to the text, and a combination of both allows the individual to interrogate and accept the text. In addition to that we need to consider the independent history of Mahabharath itself. Each generation does not simply inherit the Mahabharath, but along with it they also receive the "cultural memory" of the previous generation and in understanding the received text, we also write present day concerns and conflicts of the society into it. If one recognizes and understands the existence of the present moment, in reading the past, then both the past and the

present becomes alive, otherwise the past becomes "antiquated", and antiquated history becomes a useless ornament, as Neitzsche (1983) writes,

"Antiquarian history itself degenerates from the moment it is no longer animated and inspired by the fresh life of the present. Its piety withers away, the habit of scholarliness continues without it and rotates in egoistic self satisfaction around its own axis" (p.75).

Mahabharath as an epic does have a "high status" in the society, and even individuals who are either disturbed or confused by it would still acknowledge it as a "national treasure" or a "glorious past". It rightfully has the status that an epic should have in a society. A mere glorification of it or treating it as an "Indian past", or an "Indian text" or a "national treasure" neither does any justice to the self nor to the text/culture.

The antiquity is only an artificial creation, because Mahabharath flows through various cultural spaces through different historical times and any "fixed antique" is created only by arresting this flow. Every antique has its own cultural space and time written into it and to "dehistoricize" history for Neitzsche translates into producing an Egyptian "mummified consciousness". Such a consciousness denies any connectedness and transference to the present and Nietzsche problematizes such a knowledge as he writes,

" .. to the extent that knowing certainly does not want to admit any transference, but wishes instead to cling to the impression without metaphor and apart from consequences. The impression is petrified for this purpose; it is captured and stamped by means of

concepts. Then it is killed, skinned, mummified, and preserved as a concept" (cited by Shrift, 1990).

Mahabharath preserved as a "national concept" or a "dry philosophical concept" does tend to lose its epistemological, social and political value and ceases to aid in the "development" of the individual. If one can go with the flow and change the course of flow, the grandeur of Mahabharath can be experienced, and simultaneously can understand self and culture. Mahabharath is such a dialogic text, it is full of loopholes and constantly invites interpretation. It challenges the individual, and does not provide clear cut answers. And that is where the beauty of Mahabharath is. The characters in Mahabharath are always facing such ideological battles. What is virtue at one time becomes a vice at another time. Every category established at one time in the story is contested and erased at another point. A tendency to monologize the text only results in missing the "artistic value" of the grand epic. Being alluded by the grandeur of text may produce enjoyment but not necessarily an understanding, and locating the text in a "distant" past denies both understanding and enjoyment. The historically effected consciousness is capable of recognizing its own role in the interpretive act, and its own history of understanding, as Gadamer (1991) writes,

" Understanding the word of tradition always requires that the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness-i.e., that it merge with the question that tradition is for us" (p.374).

Without questioning what the "past" is for us at the present moment, tradition only becomes tyrannical. This is especially the case in Indian culture. Tradition holds a sway; and by and large it lays out the code for human conduct. It is not a "thing" to be learnt, but instruments for questioning, such a questioning can occur only if both the self and the text are alive.

To conclude, the understanding of history is possible if we can understand the history of understanding and use the opportunity to create newer histories.

SOME CONCLUSIONS ...

The goddess of knowledge does not smile upon
those who neglect the ancients.

Bhartrhari

This dissertation has been my attempt to recognize the role of "history" in "understanding history". This study is about understanding an all pervasive cultural text. From a cognitive standpoint, my interest is in the "defamiliarization" and the "familiarization" of culturally central texts. If Mahabharath is a part and parcel of everyday life, the question then is how do we give meaning to everyday life? In order to address this question methodologically, I tried to examine the "interpretive styles" in "reading" lives and reading familiar texts. Therefore personal identity and self awareness is at the center of the interpretive act.

In Chapter 13, we saw the relationship between "authoring self" and "authoring text". Each category of self establishes a certain relationship to various cultural entities and its own past and the cultural past, and such a relationship mediates the interpretation of Mahabharath. Just as how individuals select certain aspects of their lives and the world around them to write their own life stories, they select certain aspects of Mahabharath in the meaning making activity. The variation among the readers lies in this

selective process. The unique speech genres that individuals use determine the thematic content, linguistic style and the evaluative stance that they take towards their own lives and those of the epic heroes and heroines. Therefore the "reality" about Mahabharath is refracted through the individual's interpretation of "everyday reality" as Lotman (1990) points out,

" The spatial picture of the world is many-layered: it includes both the mythological universum and scientific modeling and everyday 'common sense'" (p.203).

Therefore, there is a constant tension between Mahabharath as a cultural historical text and Mahabharath the "metalanguage", which includes the "scientific modeling" and "common sense". The scientific modeling determines the aspects of the text that are brought under scrutiny and the individuals' own sense of "common sense" discounts or ignores certain aspects of the text. What is highlighted and what is ignored clearly varied. For the traveler, reading Mahabharath was like taking an excursion into the "past" or to "India" and reporting about them. The focus is on what each of the characters do and what they are like. Evaluation is implicit and subjectively denied. Whereas for the biographer, the reading activity is not a 'trip' to the past, but the text exists in the immediate present. Therefore they talk to the characters in a familiar tone - cheering them and reprimanding them. The seeker on the other hand is keen on "digging" into the text to find "eternal philosophical truths". They are not interested in the story or in the

characters, but in the "immortal message". The dialogic readers on the other hand were not interested in extracting one theme, but engaged in a lively debate between themes and between ideologies. The traveler uses expressions of "antiquity" to fix the text, whereas the "clan" individual uses expressions of "glorious past" to fix the text, whereas the seeker wants to extract "eternal truths" from the past to make sense of the present, and the biographer simply converses with the text and moves with the text. This study showed many types of monologism.

The dialogic reader also begins the interpretive act like the monologic reader, by either making an evaluative statement or a generalized statement about a character or about an event. But the discourse moves; it moves through various rhetorical tropes and it is in this movement that we can find the "developmental" angle. The polyphonic reading which involves movement through various texts and cultural spaces and times, and this movement allows the reader to bring various aspects of the text under scrutiny. As a result, the initial generalized statement or evaluation acquires finer strands and the interpretive act becomes increasingly complex, forming a variety of links with strands taken from other texts.

The readers' "active" journey through these time zones and cultural spaces facilitates their development of aesthetic consciousness, and in turn enriches the text. If we treat the text as a "*Semiosphere*", in Lotman's (1990) terms,

the various zones in this sphere get activated as result of the movement through various other spheres. An "inactive" movement on the other hand treats each space and time as isolated units and does not facilitate the recognition of multiple realities. In the active understanding, the epic comes in contact with the living present and in turn aids in the development of meaning making. An active conversation between the epic heroines and heroes and the contemporary readers reveals the depths of the lives of epic characters and the readers. From this study, I have learnt that an active reading involves "weaving" the chronotopes of the ancient past and the contemporary present. Such a weave both unites the past and the present and yet each retains its unique flavor and identity. The weaving act makes both the cognizing subject and the text to be comprehended active, and in Bhartrhari's words the "ancients" are not neglected. They actively facilitate the construction of knowledge.

This study also pointed out the benefits of using various other cultural materials in constructing "selfhood". The lives of ancient heroines and heroes and lives of "others" in contemporary society aids in the development of self. The various others in the past and in present serve as axiological point to interrogate the self, and these vantage points in turn produce multiple layers of self. The narratives in this study suggest that the greater the complexity of the cultural matrix within which the individuals locate themselves, the finer are the strands that

they draw about themselves and about the surrounding world. Likewise, they locate the epic text in a complex world to draw finer strands and to "weave" an intricate basket. The strands are taken both from the personal lives of the weaver and from surrounding culture and from history. My own "development" comes from identifying the strands and understanding the "intricate semantic" work.

Understanding a familiar text, is not only a function of "selfhood", but also a function of individual's engagement with the text in the past. At the dissertation proposal stage, I thought that exposure to various versions of Mahabharath and an intensely oral engagement with the text would produce a dialogic reading. The study suggests that, that is not the case. As I discussed in Chapter 9, a significant number of subjects encountered the text through oral tellings, but only fewer subjects engaged in a dialogic reading. The benefit of the oral tellings is that it makes the reading activity spontaneous. For instance, the biographers and the seekers talk freely with the characters, but a spontaneous conversation does not necessarily translate into a "dialogic consciousness", as Bakhtin (1990) points out,

" Ethical and aesthetic objectification requires a power point *d'appui* outside itself; it requires some genuine source of real strength out of which I would be capable of seeing myself as another" (p.31).

A spontaneous interaction with the text does not facilitate the "outsideness" in the reading activity. The knowledge of the text is automatic, and as Vygotsky (1987)

points out the "weakness of the everyday concept lies in its incapacity for abstraction ", and the abstraction from one text facilitates activating other concrete texts. Exclusively oral encounters were limited in their ability to connect or inter animate other texts. Interestingly in this study, some of the subjects who were classified as "dialogic selves" had very formal or limited encounters with the text in the past, but nevertheless were able to dialogize the text, whereas the monologic selves despite their multiple exposures and active engagement with the text in the past did not produce a polyphonic reading.

I had also anticipated that the "gender" of the reading subjects would influence the reading activity. In other words, since the plots themselves raise gender issues, I anticipated greater dialogic tension between male/female reading partners. The study does not support such an assumption. Differing interpretive styles between partners produced greater friction and in some cases such differences facilitated dialogic reading. A mere male/female dyad did not indicate any differences in "gendered position", for critical interrogation of the text. There was however an indication of patriarchal viewpoints in assessing Draupadi and such assessments were done by both men and women. These findings seem to reiterate what Donna Haraway (1989) has always argued, that not all women are feminists and not all feminists are women.

Another hypothesis of mine was challenged by this study. I had anticipated that the individuals who had an intense engagement with the text would want to be the "gatekeepers" of Mahabharath, and make claims about the nature of the epic text. That again was not the case. These subjects simply enjoyed yet another interaction with the text and used their previous knowledge to dialogize the text. Whereas the individuals, who were not so seriously involved made claims about the nature of Mahabharath, and how individuals should approach the text.

Personal Reflections

This project is the result of my encounter with Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). My reading of his distinction between the epic and novel, lead to a series of questions about the interrelationships between the past and the present. Bakhtin's discussion of both the epic and the novel seemed to "fit" the way epics operate in Indian society. Therefore I wanted to study the "fluidization" and the "canonization" of the epic. In Bakhtin's scheme, the epic genre produces the distance between the epic characters and contemporary readers. Bakhtin (1981) writes,

" The epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present" (p17).

In this study, I have tried to explore the processes by which the "epic distance" is created. The outcome of this project is that I have understood more about "understanding the past". Understanding the ancient past involves both

"dislocating" and "relocating" the past. Based on this study, I would like to suggest that understanding the ancient epic text involves traversing in and through various temporal zones; that is dislocating the past and drawing parallels with the elusive present to anticipating the future of both the self, the text and the culture at large and again relocating the text in some "arbitrary past" after making all the additions and editions and reshuffling the text.

This dissertation has been my attempt to recognize the importance of the "ancients" in my intellectual growth. Like most Indians, I grew up with Mahabharath. The text was simply taken for granted, and I have tried to convert this childhood nostalgia (spontaneous knowledge) into a scholarly inquiry. Reading this first line from Bhagavad Gita - *Dharmaksetre Kuruksetre* - (the field of righteousness is a battle ground) was a daily ritual and today it has become more meaningful. I have realized through various other scholarly traditions that "truth and justice" are not given but achieved. And this achievement is not possible without considering how the "past" has dealt with similar problems and how the "others" deal with similar problems. In this dissertation I have tried to recognize and realize the importance of history in knowledge construction.

I have been enriched and humbled by this experience.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLSCHEDULE 1Pre-Viewing Session

NAME: _____ (First name only)

CODE NO: _____

INTRODUCE THE PROJECT TO THE SUBJECT.

My name is Lakshmi Bandlamudi. First of all, thank you very much for participating in this study. I am a graduate student in Developmental Psychology and currently I am working on my dissertation. As you know *Mahabharath* is often talked about as a major epic in Indian culture. My project is to understand how people of Indian origin think and talk about this ancient epic. I am not testing what you know about Mahabharath even though I may require some information and ask you some questions. Rather what I am really interested in is what this epic means to you. Therefore I would really appreciate if you can be as open as possible and be spontaneous. The information that I am gathering is totally anonymous. Your names will not be mentioned anywhere. In fact I don't need your last name. When I write up my dissertation I will be using pseudo names. You are however free to withdraw whenever you want. However I would appreciate if you stay through the whole phase of data collection.

GET THE CONSENT FORM SIGNED

CODE # _____

CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (first name only) agree to participate in the study (in all the phases) conducted by Lakshmi Bandlamudi. As mentioned by the researcher, I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study whenever I want to. I will try my best to be as cooperative as possible.

CODE # _____

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. First name:

2. Sex: a. Female _____ b. Male _____

3. Languages Known:

4. Age: a. 20 - 40 _____ b. 41 - 60 _____

5. Education:

a. High School _____ b. College _____ c. Professional _____

6. Occupation:

7. Marital Status:

a. Single _____ b. Married _____ c. Divorced _____ d. Widowed _____

8. Do you have any children? If yes, how many and how old are they?

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 how religious do you consider yourself to be?

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
Not at all Somewhat Very Religious

10. How long have you lived in USA? _____

11. How often do you visit India?

12. When was the last time you visited India?

13. How long was your stay in India last time?

14. Do you plan to go back and live in India?

a. Yes _____ b. No _____ c. May be _____

15. Are you a member of any social, religious or professional organization that is specific to Indians in United States? If so, please name them.

a. Religious

b. Social

c. Professional

d. Political

16. Do you read any Indian newspapers or magazines?

a. Yes _____ b. No _____ . If yes name them.

17. Do you watch Indian television programming?

a. Yes _____ b. No _____

17a. If yes, do you watch the whole program or particular segments?

a. The whole program _____
 b. Only the news _____
 c. Only the entertainment part _____

18. Do you rent Indian movies from video rental stores ?

a. Yes _____ b. No. _____

18a. If yes, in what languages and how often do you watch them?

	Frequency		
Languages	Weekly	Monthly	Sometimes

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLPART INarratives on 'SELF'

This in-depth interview is designed to generate some narratives about 'self'. The objective is to examine how individuals make sense of their life experiences and how they locate themselves in the cultural matrix. The task is to get the subject to reflect on variety of relationships; self/other, self/culture, ethnic culture/American culture, being an Indian in America/ and being an Americanized Indian when visiting India. Allowing the subject to speak about the dynamics of biculturalism is simply a way of getting them to reflect on their sense of connectedness to various cultural entities and to examine how 'self' and 'culture' gets semioticized. The following questions simply serve as a guide and provides a structure in terms of the topics to be covered. Specific questions will be generated in the interview process itself.

Interview Protocol (Turn the tape recorder on)

1. So far you told what you do, what activities you participate in and so on. Now can you tell me something about yourself?
2. To begin with can you tell me something about your childhood? What was it like?
3. Can you tell me something about major events in your life?
4. Lets us suppose you were writing your autobiography, what are some of events in your life that you would talk

about? Who are the people who influenced you the most? Why and how?

5. In general, what are the things that interest you culturally, and how do you go about fulfilling such interests?

6. You have been living here in United States for _____ years. How do you find life here? In what ways are they similar and different from life in India?

7. To what extent do you consider yourself to be westernized and to what extent do you think you have retained your Indianness? How do you maintain ties with Indian culture?

[IF THE SUBJECT HAS CHILDREN, REPEAT THE SAME QUESTION TO GET THEIR VIEWS ON THEIR CHILDREN'S IDENTITY]

8. You said you participate in _____ cultural activities. What do these activities mean to you?

9. You said you visit India _____ (frequently, regularly, etc). Can you share your thoughts on how you feel when you visit India?

(IF THE SUBJECT HAS NEVER VISITED INDIA EVER SINCE THEY CAME TO UNITED STATES ASK THEN HOW THEY FEEL WHEN ENCOUNTER A RECENT IMMIGRANT. IF THE SUBJECT IS A RECENT IMMIGRANT ASK THEM HOW THEY FEEL WHEN THEY ENCOUNTER SOMEONE WHO HAS LIVED IN UNITED STATES FOR A LONG TIME)

PART II

History of Understanding

(History of self's engagement with the epic text)

a. FAMILIARITY WITH MAHABHARATH

1. Now coming to Mahabharath, could you please name as many characters as you can from Mahabharath?

(USE QUESTIONNAIRE I TO CHECK OFF.)

2. Could you tell me briefly the story of Mahabharath ?

3. What do you think is the most important part in Mahabharath?
3.a. Why do you think so?
4. What is the second most important part of Mahabharath?
4.a. And why?
5. What is your favorite part of Mahabharath ?
5.a. Why does this part appeal to you?
6. How well do you think you know the whole story ?
7. If you think you know some parts very well, which parts come your mind?
8. Why do you think these parts stand out in your memory?

b. Modes of Exposure to Mahabharath

1. How did you come to know Mahabharath?

CODES

a. ORAL STORY TELLING.

- was it ritualistic telling?
- was it just told as a part of day-to-day conversation?
- was it told to get a point across?
- who told it?
- how did the person telling the story feel about the story then?
- how did you feel about the story then?

b. FILMS

- which ones?
- who did you see them with?
- did you engage in a conversation after the film?
- with whom?
- what did you talk about?
- in which language did you see the film?

c. FOLKLORE

- where?
- how much did you participate in it?
- did you watch the whole street drama or just take a glimpse at it while walking on the road?
- what did you think about?
- did you engage in a discussion about folklore with any of your family members or friends?

d. DRAMA, THEATER, DANCE

- which ones.
- did you just watch them or did you participate in them?
- in your childhood did you act as any of the characters in Mahabharath?
- how often did you see these plays? (in childhood)
- how often do you see them now? (in adulthood)
- do you see any differences in these dramas or ballets that you saw in your childhood and the ones that you see now?

e. BOOK

- did you ever read?
- which book?
- when did you read?
- did you or do you have a book at home? (Find out if they had any superstitions about having a book at home.)
- which language and by whom?
- an abridged text or a detailed one?

f. AMAR CHITRA KATHA (comic books)

- have you read them?
- do you read them for your children? (if they have children. Otherwise find out if they buy these comic books for children in their families, like nieces and nephews)

g. Television

- which one?
- If B.R. Chopra's production how many episodes did you watch?
- In India or in USA.
- Did you want to watch more?
- who did you see it with?
- did you talk about it?
- what did you talk about?

2. If you have seen, heard or read so many versions of these stories from Mahabharath, tell me in what ways are they similar and different from each other?

c.SIGNIFICANCE OF MAHABHARTH FOR SELF

1. What does Mahabharath mean to you?

Code the data according to these categories. The subject can fall in one or more categories. Also find out if there is a shift. (For example it may have been learnt as a religious text but now it could be a fun story.)

- religious text
- philosophical treatise.
- as a way of socialization.... sort of indoctrination into the cultural system.
- as a way of maintaining cultural ties to India.
- entertainment
- as a way of looking at life

(MAKE MORE CODING CATEGORIES IF NECESSARY)

PART III

SIGNIFICANCE OF SPECIFIC CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

1. Now , I would like you think about Draupadi and Karna in Mahabharath. When you think of these two characters what stories come to your mind?

- Who are they?
- What do you think of them?
- Do they symbolize anything to you?
- What is their importance in the story?
- Do these characters remind you of any one you know? If so, in what ways? How are they similar and dissimilar?
- How do people that you know think of them or may think of them?
 - Do you like these characters? Why and why not and in what ways?

CODE # _____

FIRST NAME: _____

RATINGS ON EACH MODE (Done by researcher)

	Very low	Low	Average	High	Very High
	1	2	3	4	5
a. oral	---	---	---	---	---
b. film	---	---	---	---	---
c. folklore	---	---	---	---	---
d. theater	---	---	---	---	---
e. books	---	---	---	---	---
f. comic books	---	---	---	---	---
g. television	---	---	---	---	---

QUESTIONNAIRE I

CODE # _____

Ask the subjects to just name as many characters as they can
from Mahabharath. (CHECK THEM AS THEY RECALL)

	*	NAME	PART PLAYED IN EPIC	EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER
1.		VYASA	-----	-----
2.		BHARATHA	-----	-----
3.		SHANTANU	-----	-----
4.		GANGA	-----	-----
5.		BHEESHMA	-----	-----
6.		SATYAVATI	-----	-----
7.		AMBA	-----	-----
8.		VICHITRAVEERYA	-----	-----
9.		DHRT HARASHTRA	-----	-----
10.		GANDHARI	-----	-----
11.		SAKUNI	-----	-----
12.		PANDU	-----	-----
13.		KUNTI	-----	-----
14.		MADRI	-----	-----
15.		VIDHURA	-----	-----
16.		KRIPACHARYA	-----	-----
17.		DRONACHARYA	-----	-----
18.		ASWATHHAMA	-----	-----
19.		DRUPAD	-----	-----

	NAME	PART PLAYED IN EPIC	EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER
20.	DRHUSHADHYUMMA	-----	-----
21.	KARNA	-----	-----
22.	YUDHISTRARA	-----	-----
23.	BHEEMA	-----	-----
24.	ARJUNA	-----	-----
25.	NAKULA	-----	-----
26.	SAHADEVA	-----	-----
27.	DRAUPADI	-----	-----
28.	SUBHADRA	-----	-----
29.	ABHIMANYU	-----	-----
30.	DURYODHAN	-----	-----
31.	DHUSSASAN	-----	-----
32.	VIKARNA	-----	-----
33.	VASUDEVA	-----	-----
34.	BALARAMA	-----	-----
35.	KRISHNA	-----	-----
36.	_____	-----	-----
37.	_____	-----	-----
38.	_____	-----	-----
39.	_____	-----	-----
40.	_____	-----	-----

* "NAME" is when the subject gives the name of the character. "PART PLAYED IN EPIC" is when the subject refers to a certain character in relationship to other characters. " EVALUATION OF THE CHARACTER" is when the subject recalls a certain episode and evaluates the character. For example recalling "Drona" is naming the character, whereas saying "you know, the teacher of Pandavas and Kauravas" will be referring to the part played by Drona in the epic, and saying something like "you know, the teacher who makes an unreasonable demand on that hunter" will be evaluation of the character in a story.

(THE NAMES IN **BOLD** LETTERS ARE THE ONES THAT THE POTENTIAL SUBJECT MUST RECALL IN ORDER TO BE RECRUITED. ATLEAST 18 OF THE 20 NAMES HAVE TO BE RECALLED)

SCHEDULE II
PROTOCOL FOR VIEWING SESSION

Instructions to the dyads

Thank you very much for being here today. Now you will be watching a few segments from B.R. Chopra's television production of the Mahabharath. First you will watch 2 short segments - about 5 minutes each,

- Draupadi's *Svayamvar* (choosing the groom) scene
and

- *Maya Mahal* (palace of illusion) scene

and then 1 long episode which lasts for about 40 minutes,

- playing the dice game which concludes with Draupadi's
Vastraharan (disrobing Draupadi)

and another relatively long segment that lasts for about 15 minutes.

- dialogue between Kunti and Karna

First of all, I would like you to watch the tape carefully and think aloud and engage in a discussion about what you have watched. However there are some rules.

- as you are watching the tape you may make brief spontaneous comments.
- however if you need clarifications or need to make lengthy comments please put the tape on pause and then continue the discussion.

- I will not engage in a discussion with you. If you need clarification, you may ask your partner
- the same rule holds good if you need a certain dialogue to be translated.

Instructions to self

After each viewing session, ask each member of the group to briefly narrate what they have seen. After each one has narrated the segment ask them to engage in a discussion. As far as possible try not to interfere. However when you see differences of opinion, ask the group to engage in a debate. Ask the members to explain their position. Look for how they substantiate their viewpoints. End the discussion by asking each member of the group to summarize their thoughts on what they have viewed and discussed. Tell them that they will be contacted soon over the telephone to get their thoughts on this project after few days, that is within a week.

SCHEDULE III
Post Viewing Session

This brief interview will be conducted over the telephone or in person according the convenience of the subject a few days after the viewing session. The objective is to give some time for the subject to think about the segments that they watched and the discussion they engaged in.

1. First of all, thank you very much for your participation. I would like you to briefly share your thoughts on the project.
2. Other than what we discussed while viewing the tapes are there any other thoughts that you would like to add?
3. Have your ideas about Mahabharath changed since you saw the segments and had the discussion?
4. If you have any questions about my project, please feel free to ask?
5. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

PLOT I
Draupadi's Svayamvar Scene

One of the princes makes an unsuccessful attempt to lift the bow.

The King looks worried.

Duryodhan bows his head. Karna looks at Duryodhan

Sakuni: Hey! what is the use of bowing your head?
Hastinapur's tongue has been cut.

Karna: When Karna is here Hastinapur's tongue cannot be cut.

The King looks worried.

Karna approaches the podium. Bows to the King and the King gives his consent. He approaches the bow.

Draupadi looks anxious.

Krishna looks uneasy.

Pandavas who are disguised as brahmins in the palace are also looking anxious.

Karna lifts the bow.

Krishna looks anxious.

Drupad smiles.

Karna lifts the bow and the audience and cheer, "Hail to Karna, the King of Anga".

Draupadi looks at Krishna.

Arjun nods his head in admiration.

Krishna signals to Draupadi. He nods his head suggesting her to say something. Draupadi says, "wait! My garland is not for any Soothputra (son of a charioteer).

Karna: If that is the case, then your wedding garland will fade away waiting for the right suitor, O! Princess.

Karna walks back to his seat.

Duryodhan: Rivers, warriors, and sages have no caste and creed, Maharaj Drupad. In your gathering, my dearest friend

Karna has been insulted. If this is was one of the criteria for *Svayamvar*, then such a rule must have been stated before the *Svayamvar*.

Dhrshtadhyumma: The Prince of Hastinapur, by talking in such high pitch need not insult his hosts. Karna, the King of Anga is our guest. But he has to understand the rules of this heritage. The disciple of Drona, Duryodhan, who can know any better than you. Like friendship, companionship also has to be between equals. And my sister, Draupadi, born of fire says, her garland is not for someone who is born to a charioteer, then her marriage to a son of a charioteer will not take place. And while leaving the king of Anga said the right thing. I have been thinking that in this *Svayamvar*, Prince Duryodhan, Prince Duhshassan, Jayadrath, and Maharaj Jarasandh are present, and what is the task at that altar that is so difficult. Some valorous prince has to be blessed by the garland in my sister's hand. Looks like the art of archery has died with the son of Kunti, Arjun at the palace of wax. Isn't there a single valorous person in this *Svayamvar*, who would take a vow, to protect the glory of India's art - archery?

Arjun who is disguised as a Brahmin walks to the podium.

THE TAPE STOPS HERE.

PLOT II
Maya Mahal (Palace of Illusions)

Duryodhan enters the *Maya Mahal* .

Duryodhan (thinking): This arid Khandavprasth is made into Indraprasth (this refers to both the name of the place and symbolically represents the heavenly abode), and in this Indraprasth a palace of illusion too? Splendid is the craftsmanship of Demon Maya (King of Demons). Amazing!!! It is a beautiful scenery.

He walks towards the scenery thinking that it an open space, but hits his head against the wall.

He sees yet another scenery and says, "no, no".

A servant comes from the garden that Duryodhan mistook for another opaque wall, and she says to Duryodhan, " Hail to the Prince".

He hesitatingly walks through the garden.

He comes across a path that looks like water. Again, another servant walks on that surface, and later Duryodhan hesitatingly walks on the surface the seems like water.

He approaches another path that looks like fire and stops and says, "Fire?". The palace servant says, "let's go Prince. This is not fire".

As he walks in the palace, at one point, a servant says, " Be aware, Prince. There is water ahead of you".

Duryodhan responds, " Water Where is water? Hmmm, even the servant tries to joke with me".

Duryodhan walks ahead and falls into the puddle.

Draupadi who is standing in the terrace sees his fall and laughs and says, "blind man's son is blind".

PLOT III
The Dice Game: Draupadi's Vastraharan

Sutradhar: (story teller): Today, the story of Mahabharath is at an embarrassing turn. On this side of the line of respectability, there is no one except Draupadi, and on the other side of the line of respectability there is everyone - son of Ganga, Bheeshma, Guru Drona, the royal teacher Kripacharya along with everyone else. Sons of Pandu are also on the other side of this line. Therefore, this is a place and time to stop and think. Because this decision has to be made by every individual in the present, and in future, whether they are on this side of the line of respectability or that side. Every individual will have to enter this tragic event. Let us start again today's journey with the guard sent by Duryodhan.

Sakuni: You have lost everything, O! Emperor.

Duryodhan: Now, Emperor of what and where, O! Uncle.

Sakuni: What will you stake now dear Yudhishtir?

Yudhishtir: Now I will stake my dear brother Nakul.

Sakuni: What do you want dear Duryodhan?

Duryodhan: I need a nine.

Sakuni: Nakul has become a slave.

Yudhishtir: Now I will stake my dear brother Sahadev.

Yudhishtir: Arjun!

Sakuni: Valorous Arjun.

Yudhishtir: I stake my brother Bheem.

Sakuni: Nephew, Mighty Bheem, dear Bheem.

Sakuni: dear Bheem - slave now O! King.

Yudhishtir: Now I will put myself at stake.

Duryodhan: I need this throw, Uncle.

Sakuni: Certainly, nephew.

Duryodhan: I need a nine now.

Sakuni: NINE!

Yudhishtir: Now we have to end this game, because I don't have anything to stake.

Karna: How can you not have? That doe eyed, self respecting Draupadi that you have.

Vidhur: O! King, in this court your daughter-in-law's name is being referred to with such disrespect. And after hearing this you still keep quiet?

Duryodhan: O! Brother, so you want to put Draupadi at stake?

Yudhishtir: Yes.

Duryodhan: Uncle, I need a nine.

Sakuni: NINE!

Duryodhan: Draupadi is my slave from this moment, Yudhishtir.

Duryodhan: (in her chambers to her servants): Please ask that gambler whether he lost himself first or me.

Kripacharya: O! King. It is my duty as a teacher of royalty that orgy, hunting, and gambling, these are the things that destroy both the human being and humanity.

Duryodhan: Royal teacher! If I were the loser these golden words would have never been uttered by you. This is like creating a hole in the plate that is feeding you. Please sit down royal teacher, I said, sit down.

Bheeshma: When the bamboo tree's life is coming to an end it yields a fruit. Duryodhan is such a fruit to the politics of this kingdom. Even then, if you can think, please think. Draupadi is the royal daughter-in-law. Insult to her is an insult to this royal family.

Duryodhan: O! grandfather. Draupadi is no longer the royal daughter-in-law. She is my slave, my slave, and she will reside with the other slaves in my palace. In the same manner she will perform the tasks like the rest of them.

Bheeshma: My loyalty is towards the throne of Hastinapur, not towards Duryodhan's stubbornness.

Duryodhan: And on that throne is seated my father.

Vikarna: I am in agreement with grandfather. Any insult to our sister-in-law is an insult to the whole dynasty of Bharatha.

Duryodhan: Vikarna! I don't want to hear anything from you about self-respect and respect. Sit down. And I don't like these crowns on the heads of my slaves. Take these crowns off your head and lay them at my feet. Remove these crown and lay them at my feet.

Servant: Hail to the prince.

Duryodhan: Why did you come alone.

Servant: O! Prince, the daughter-in-law does not want to come here till she receives an answer from Maharaj Yudhishtir.

Duryodhan: (slaps the servant) By calling a simple slave as Maharaj, are you insulting the kings and emperors who are residing here. What did that slave say?

Servant: O! Prince, what she wants to know is whether the king lost himself first or her.

Duryodhan: Go tell that wife of five men that she should come here and ask the question herself. GO!

Servant: Whatever you say. O! Prince.

Draupadi: What answer did you get for my question.

Servant: Maharaj was quiet. But the Prince said that you go there yourself and ask the question.

Draupadi: Then inconvenience yourself once more for my sake. Go there and tell them that Draupadi will only honor orders of her elders. If grandfather wishes that the pride of Kuru dynasty should appear in the gambling house, I will definitely go there. If uncle orders this, I will honor his command. If Kakashreee thinks that it is appropriate for me to appear there, I will definitely do so. But if these people do not wish, then I will not go there.

Servant: The Prince will send me back again, O! Daughter-in-law.

Draupadi: Can't you inconvenience your self just a little for the daughter-in-law?

Servant: As you wish, as you wish daughter-in-law.

Duryodhan: Who is she to ask any questions of the Kuru elders? I have won her and she will have to honor my orders and come here.

Bheeshma: For God's sake, please stop this gambling game right here.

Duryodhan: The king cannot do such injustice to me, O! Grandfather. Yudhishtir himself put Draupadi at stake. Before he put Draupadi at stake why didn't you all object to it. Why didn't you all object to it. Why didn't you say that Draupadi is the pride of this royal family and don't put her at stake? Why are all these questions being raised now? When I have won the game. Does anyone have an answer to my question? Does anyone have answers to my question? Duhshassan!

Duhshassan: Yes brother.

Duryodhan: This guard is a fool. You go yourself and grab her hair and drag that woman of five husbands to this palace.

Duhshassan: I will go brother.

Duhshassan: (to Draupadi in her chambers) Come. We have won you.

Draupadi: Learn to honor a woman's self-respect, son of Gandhari Duhshassan. Don't insult her womb.

Duhshassan: Will you go or shall I drag you forcefully?

Draupadi: Don't take me there in this state Duhshassan.

Duhshassan: Today you are nothing but a slave.

Draupadi: Don't, don't. I have not even had a cleansing bath. Stop it Duhshassan. Stop it. I can't appear in this state in front of even household members. I have not even taken the blessings of Queen mother. And you are forcefully dragging to a full court room. People who know me will recognize me. But those who do not know me how will I explain to them. Will you tell them that this unfortunate woman is your father's younger brother, Maharaj Pandu's daughter-in-law. On the way if you encounter the Queen mother and she asks you what you are dragging, what will you tell her. Will you be able to tell her that you are dragging the pride of Kuru dynasty to the courtroom.

Duhshassan: Come. Learn to speak respectfully to the princess, you slave.

Draupadi: The Pandavas will never forgive your blunder and my insult. Even if they want to forgive you I will never permit them. From today onward I am not their pride, but an open wound to their insults.

SONG:

- That low character has crossed all limits of respectability.

- The pride of royal family is being dragged amidst a court full of people.

Duhshassan: O! Brother. Here is Draupadi, the woman of five husbands

Duryodhan: What did you say? "A blind man's son is blind?"
Duhshassan, place this slave on my thigh.

Bheema: For this insult of yours, if I don't break your thigh, I am prepared to be your servant for seven more lives.

Duryodhan: Try to forget the language of rulers.

Karna: Don't worry friend. To learn something and to forget, it does take some time. All these people will gradually forget that they are rulers.

Sakuni: And slowly but surely they will learn to live like slaves any way dear nephew.

Karna: What is to be seen is how long it will take for this woman with self-respect who insulted in a full courtroom by calling me a charioteer's son, to call her son as slave's son.

Draupadi: Lowering your eyes is not a solution to this problem grandfather. I, daughter-in-law of Kuru dynasty, wrapped in one piece of cloth, without taking a cleansing bath is seeking your blessings, and I want to know what blessings will you give me today. You are the oldest Kuru, a valourous warrior, an absolute scholar. Tell me, have you taken a vow to just protect the Kuru dynasty throne. Is there no importance to the pride of Kuru. It does not suit a great warrior and a person like you to hide his face. Look at me. Look. I am a question mark to the pride of Kuru. Look towards me. Look at the state in which your daughter-in-law been dragged into. Tell me, is this the tradition of Bharatha's dynasty? If you say so I will be quiet. The dynasty that I come from follow a different tradition. They will be prepared to die in order to save the honor of a woman. But every family has its own tradition. Kindly educate me about the traditions of Kuru family. Please look at me grandfather. The first time I touched your feet, you had blessed me as, "Sowbhagyavathi ", and look at the state of that blessing. This injustice took place in front of you and you are letting it slide by. Does this not mean that you are a part of this injustice. If that is not the case, then pick up your bow and tear these tongues which dared to commit the crime of addressing your daughter-in-law as a slave. You are sitting under the shade of a sinful tree. Please get up. You have the knowledge of the scriptures. Tell me, the person who has lost himself in a game of dice, what right does he have to stake someone's independence and self-respect. I need an answer to

my question, and this shameful silence of yours cannot be an answer. Because this question is not being asked by just Draupadi. This question is being asked by womanhood. This question is being asked by Prithvi, who is the mother of every living being. The future of this country which got its name from the Great Emperor Maharaj Bharath is asking this question. Show me the path O! Son of Ganga, grandfather Bheeshma.

Bheeshma: Daughter...

Draupadi: No! I am not talking about relationships. I am talking about that insult which has melted into tears and are rolling down my cheeks. If the wife is a property of the husband, then my husband lost me when he lost himself. Then how was I put on stake. If the wife is not a property of the husband, then how did my husband without my permission put me at stake. What does your tradition say about this issue? And kindly do not address me as a daughter. If I was the daughter of Bharat's dynasty you would never be so silent with such ease. Call me your daughter-in-law, because I want to see while I am standing in this court, if your tongue will tremble while you address me as your daughter-in-law.

Arjun: Answer Panchali's questions grandfather.

Draupadi: What answer can grandfather give. He himself is a question mark.

Draupadi: (to Dhrtharashtra) The daughter-in-law of your brother Pandu is seeking your blessings. You are very fortunate that you are born blind. Because, if you would have seen in your own court, your own daughter-in-law's state you would have definitely become blind.

Dhrtharashtra: Don't say anything to me, daughter, daughter. Neither did Yudhishtir seek my permission to lose nor did Duryodhan before winning you seek my permission. Take your question to Yudhishtir himself, who put you on stake and insulted the honor of the dynasty of Bharath.

Draupadi: Whatever you say. Before I take my question to him I would like to seek the blessings of Dronacharya, my father's friend, since I have a question for him also.

Draupadi: (To Drona) You had sent a message via uncle Vidhur saying that since I am the daughter of your friend Drupad, I am your daughter, and since I am married to your disciple Arjun, I am your daughter-in-law. And today in this court how do I seek your blessings, as a daughter or daughter-in-law?

Drona lowers his eyes.

Draupadi: Even you have sealed your lips.

Draupadi: The royal teacher Kripacharya?

Kripacharya also lowers his eyes.

Draupadi: Uncle. What does the ethics of Mahatma Vidhur say in this matter? You are famous for speaking bitter truths. Atleast you do not be silent. Does any husband have the right to lose his wife in a game of dice? Does a slave have a right to stake anyone else's independence?

Vikarna: Sister-in-law is saying the right thing.

Duryodhan: Vikarna!!

Sakuni: Whoever wants to speak, let them speak, nephew. Whatever has to happen has already happened. Dear Yudhishtir has already lost Draupadi.

Draupadi: Who is he to lose me. Even if he has the right to lose his wife, I am not only his wife. I am the wife of all five sons of Pandu. He alone does not have rights over me. Before he put me on stake, did he ask your permission to stake your wife. Did you permit him? The great archer who shot the fish and won me in the Svayamvara, did you win me in the Svayamvar so that one day the oldest son of Kunti would stake me in a game of dice. In this world, there have been other gamblers, but no one has even staked their mistresses. You men actually watched your wedded wife being staked. Shame on your bravery. Shame on you.

Bheema: Why don't you answer her brother. You are the symbol of Dharma in this world. I swear on Shiva, if you were not who you are, then I would have chopped the arms of the person who staked Draupadi in the same way one would uproot a tree.

Sakuni: Today, finally my desires have been fulfilled nephew, because there is split amongst the Pandavas.

Vikarna: Like the way white ants eat away the tree, and like how disease eats away the body, sister-in-law's insult will turn into white ant and eat away the tree of Bharatha's dynasty. The clout of greatness under which we are all living will also be destroyed. Grandfather, father, uncle, Guru Drona, royal teacher Kripacharya, King of Anga Karna, please answer sister-in-law's question, because the answer that you will give will open the door for either fortune or misfortune to Hastinapur. And also answer my question. Does the husband have the right to lose his wife in a game of dice? And if you do not answer my question even today, this question will follow you in the lives to come. In order to answer my question you have to repeatedly take birth, repeatedly take birth.

Bheeshma: Yudhishtir did not do the right thing by putting Draupadi at stake. But it is an established norm that the husband has an authority over his wife.

Draupadi: Authority? What is the explanation of authority? Is it not true that it is the duty of the husband to protect the honor of his wife?

Karna: These five cannot protect you. Therefore come and sit in my dear friend Duryodhan's lap. You are already the wife of five men. So what's the harm in taking on the hand of a sixth one?

Arjun: One day, I will punish you for your impertinence Karna. I will punish you.

Duryodhan: Shut up. You dare to talk to my dear friend? I will cut your tongue.

Karna: Let him speak. He has just become a slave, slowly he will learn. Any woman who lives with five men is not a wife, she becomes a whore. And what is her honor and dishonor? Even if she was brought here naked, it would not be improper.

All the Pandavas: NO!!!

Duryodhan: My friend is saying absolutely the right thing. What is honor or dishonor for a whore or a slave? Duhshassan, strip this slave, let me see how the slave that I won looks like.

Bheema: Duhshassan: If you dare to touch even her clothes, I swear on the pride of a warrior that I will break your arms.

Duhshassan: Tell your wife of five husbands to remove her clothes on her own. If not I will have to touch her.

Duhshassan proceeds to pull her saree. Draupadi after some resistance calls out for Krishna and Krishna appears in the transcendental form to provide the saree for Draupadi.

Dialogue Between Kunti and Karna
Plot IV

Kunti visits Karna by the riverside early in the morning when he is worshipping the Sun God.

Karna: *Pranam Devi.* (Salutations Maam). Please sit under the shade of that tree and tell me how this son of Radha can be of service to you. Please be seated here. It seems like you are not affected by Sun's heat.

Kunti: The heat is burning very strongly inside me .. very strongly ... I I have come to seek something from you.

Karna: I know that Maam, whoever comes to me comes to seek something from me. But before you make your request, will you give me your *parichay* (introduction with one's past history and the relationship they are seeking with the one that they are introducing themselves to), because the way you have sought your request, is not the style of a seeker. I felt as though today is the first time you are seeking something from someone. If you don't know how to seek, then don't seek, command me.

Kunti: No, no, to command you, I have no right. To give you a command, the right only exists with your mother, Radha. I bow to that lady to whom a son like you calls mother, and who is able to receive the blessings of that mother.

Karna: Do you know her?

Kunti: Who is there in the whole land of Bharath that does not know your mother?

Karna: Leave the land of Bharath alone. My mother.... I myself do not know who she is. My mother as soon as she gave birth to me, abandoned me and left me in Ganges. But this lady whose name you have just referred to is not my mother. She is more than my mother. The lullabies that my mother should have sung for me, I heard from that lady. The same woman's tender hands patted me. In the same woman's fragrant lap I fell asleep. Even today, when my soul's wound start hurting, the same woman envelops me in her tender love. Even then, my life seems empty. In my heart, that place for a mother is still empty, right? who never accepted me. Every now and then, I wish I might be able to find her, and after touching her feet I would ask her, Hey mother, tell me what my fault is? Tell me for what sin I am being punished.

Kunti: And if your mother would explain to you her limitations, what would you do?

Karna: Limitations? God can have limitations, but mother can never have limitations.

Kunti: Mother can also limitations, *Radhaye*, mother can also have limitations... I know your mother's limitations.

Karna: You know her? You know my mother's limitations? How do you know it?

Kunti: The way I know .. because... because.. I am that troubled mother .. who ... who had to give up her first son (cries).

Karna: You!!!!

Kunti Nods.

Karna: You are my mother?

Kunti: Yes, son ... yes.

Karna: Then I salute to the Queen Mother of Indraprastha with all due respect.

Kunti: Son!!!!

Karna: Don't call me son. I am Radha's son *Radhaye* .. *Radhaye* .. and you are the Queen mother Kunti .. the mother of great warriors like Pandavas. How surprising it is that Queen mother Kunti has come to seek something from this son of a charioteer. Seek Queen Kunti. Seek. To be of service to you is a great honor to me.

Kunti: Son!!!

Karna: But don't seek from me as your son.

Kunti: But why shouldn't I seek from you as a son ... Karan. You are my son, you are my son.

Karna: Was I not your son when you abandoned me? And even today it is not your mother's love that brought you here. Some ulterior motive of yours brought you here to me .. some selfishness of yours brought you here to me.

Kunti: You are the altruistic, valorous Karan. How can you be so harsh? How can you be so harsh son?

Karna: This is not harshness mother. This is not harshness. This is my heart's grief. Grief. All my share of mother's love you distributed to those 3 sons and Madri's two sons, and you call me cruel. This Sun's son Karan was being insulted by the world by being called as a charioteer's son and you kept your mouth shut...and today ... and today, how

come you remembered the son you abandoned. What do you want from this unfortunate abandoned son? Whatever you want to ask, ask for it and return quickly to the palace, because if someone sees with this charioteer's son, they may ask you, "Oh! Queen, what are you doing with this charioteer's son. Because you will not be able to tell that person that I have not come to meet a charioteer's son, but to see my son. The limitations that you had on the day you gave birth to me, the same limitations still remains today...today too...

Kunti: For a few moments, please abandon the armor of your bitterness, Karna, and place this head in my lap, in my lap son, so that I can stroke your head ... Karna, my son...Karna, my son.

Karna: This is the head of Radhaye, Queen mother. This is the head of the charioteer's son Radhaye. This is not fit for your lap. By placing my head in your lap, I don't wish to sully it.

Kunti: Don't talk like that son. Don't talk like that.

Karna: I am not your son. By calling myself your son, I can't insult the love of that woman, Queen Mother Kunti, who took your place and raised me. You have not come here as my mother, you have come as a shield to Arjun. If you had come as my mother you wouldn't have come here. From the residence of Mahatma Vidhur, you would have embarked on your chariot and commanded your charioteer, "Hey, charioteer. Take me to my eldest son Karna's house". Upon alighting from your chariot you would have instructed the door man, "Go. Go and tell Karna that his mother is here to kiss his forehead and give her blessings". But you did not do so. Because you do not wish to give me anything. And for this reason, you have chosen this time and this place, where I would not let anybody who seeks something from me return empty handed. You didn't come here to honor me as your son. You came here seeking the gift of life for Arjun. And for this reason, shed the veil of maternal love. Ask whatever you came here for. Did you not notice my armor and earrings that day, in the playground. And if you did recognize, why did you not admonish Bheema and Arjun, when they addressed me as a son of a charioteer. Why didn't you tell them not to speak in an uncivilized manner about Radhaye. And why didn't you tell my two younger brothers that I was not a charioteer's son, but son of Kunti. Why didn't you order them to touch my feet and seek my blessings because I am their elder brother. It is not so mother. It is not the case that I have no feelings for the woman who gave birth and abandoned. I used to think about you and wonder how you were, and my imagination took many forms of you. I was longing to touch your feet. Sometimes I would cry thinking about your helplessness which forced you to abandon me. Otherwise can a mother give up her son? Thinking about this would reduce the sorrow in my heart. But today,

you have converted maternal love into *Rajneethi* (rules of kingdom), and opened all the wounds of my heart. *Aap mamta lekar ne aye he. Aap katori me mamta ke chand ke chaye lekar aye he.* (You have not brought maternal love, but you have brought the illusion of love. The expression here refers to a popular theme in Indian tales and in culture that when children cry for the moon, parents bring a vessel containing water so that the child can see the moon's reflection in the water and believe that it is the moon). Today you have crossed all lines of injustice. Mother, mother, mother. This word melts like jaggery in my mouth. Do you know that all my childhood was spent yearning to call you mother. But your maternal love was satisfied with five sons and today you have come to grant me the right to place my head in your lap. Whereas you very well know that this unfortunate son of yours cannot accept this honor. When I needed you were not there. You left me to bear the thorny path of insults on my own. And you left watching me bleed and today for the sake of your sons you needed this relinquished son of yours, then why should you get him, tell me mother why should you get him, why? Tell me mother, why should you get him?

Kunti: Karan, my son. (tears roll down her face and Karna kneels down at her feet)

Karna: By taking a shower in the river of your tears, I am blessed.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS IN VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF "SELF".

CATEGORIES OF SELF	GROUP I 20 - 30		GROUP II 31 - 45		GROUP III 50+		TOTAL
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
I. TRAVELER	4	3	1	5	-	3	16
II. BIOGRAPHER	1	2	2	1	1	2	9
III. "CLAN" SELF	-	-	-	-	2	2	4
IV. SEEKER	1	-	3	-	-	-	4
V. SCRIPTURAL	-	-	2	-	2	1	5
VI. GENDERED	-	3	-	1	-	1	5
VII. DIALOGIC	2	-	1	2	-	-	5

							48

TABLE 2

LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TEXT

GROUPS	LOW		AVERAGE		HIGH	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
GROUP I (20-30)	4	2	2	4	2	2
GROUP II (31-45)	7	3	2	2	-	4
GROUP III	5	2	1	1	3	2
	16	7	5	7	5	8

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP TO THE TEXT

GROUPS	PERSONAL				IMPERSONAL			
	EMOTIVE		MULTIPLE		DENOTATIVE		OBJECTIVE	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
GROUP I (20-30)	3	-	3	2	2	2	-	4
GROUP II (31-45)	4	1	1	4	3	1	1	3
GROUP III	1	2	2	1	5	2	1	-
	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
	8	3	6	7	10	5	2	7

TABLE 4

"TEMPORALITY" IN RECALLING THE TEXT

CATEGORIES OF TIME	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
I. ATEMPORAL	2	4	4	1	4	3
II. MONOCHRONIC						
- narrating time	2	-	1	1	-	1
- narrative time		1	3	3	1	-
III. TRANSTEMPORAL	-	1	-	2	2	-
IV. HETEROCHRONOUS	4	2	2	1	2	1
(N=48)						

TABLE 5

VIEWS ON DRAUPADI

OPINION	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
I. EVENT ORIENTED	4	1	-	-	1	2
II. DISLIKE/DON'T CARE	1	6	5	4	5	3
III. COMPLEX	3	1	4	5	3	-
(N=48)						

TABLE 6

VIEW POINTS ON THE SVAYAMVAR SCENE (PLOT 1)

OPINIONS	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
1. NO VIEW	5	4	5	5	5	4
2. CHOICE	-	-	2	1	3	-
3. ARROGANCE	-	3	1	1	1	1
4. CASTE	-	-	1	1	-	-
5. COMPLEX	3	1	-	1	-	-
(N=48)						

TABLE 7

VIEW POINTS ON MAYA MAHAL SCENE (PLOT 2)

OPINIONS	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
1. NO VIEW	1	2	4	3	4	2
2. DRAUPADI WRONG	2	4	4	1	2	1
3. PRODUCTION	1	-	-	-	1	-
4. DURYODHAN DESERVES	1	-	-	-	-	1
5. SIGNIFICANT PLOT	1	1	1	1	-	-
6. COMPLEX	2	1	-	4	2	1
(N=48)						

TABLE 8

VIEW POINTS ON THE DICE GAME (PLOT 3)

OPINIONS	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
1. NO VIEW	-	4	1	1	-	-
2. DRAUPADI'S PENALTY	-	2	-	-	1	-
3. ELDER'S SILENCE	1	1	-	-	-	1
4. DICE GAME	-	-	1	-	-	-
5. KRISHNA AS A SAVIOR	-	-	2	1	5	3
6. OUTRAGE	3	-	2	1	-	1
7. COMPLEX	4	1	3	6	3	-
(N=48)						

TABLE 9

VIEW POINTS ON THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN KUNTI AND KARNA (PLOT 4)

OPINIONS	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
1. NO VIEW	-	3	2	2	3	2
2. SYMPATHY FOR KARNA	2	-	3	2	-	1
3. KUNTI'S ACTION CONDEMNED	1	2	1	1	3	-
4. SOCIAL FACTORS	2	2	-	-	-	-
5. COMPLEX	3	1	3	4	3	2
(N=48)						

TABLE 10

MODES OF DISCOURSE IN SVAYAMAVAR SCENE (PLOT 1)

	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
I. DIRECT	6	6	8	4	6	4	71%
II. UNIDIRECTIONAL	-	-	-	2	3	1	6%
III. VARI-DIRECTIONAL	2	2	1	3	-	-	17%

(N=48)

TABLE 11

Maya Mahal (Palace of Illusions) Scene (Plot 2)

	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
I. UNMEDIATED							79%
- Dismiss plot	2	-	-	-	1	-	
- Condemn Draupadi	2	6	7	4	5	4	
- Justify Draupadi	1	-	-	2	3	-	
II. UNIDIRECTIONAL	2	-	-	3	-	-	10%
III. VARI-DIRECTIONAL	1	2	2	-	-	1	11%

(N=48)

TABLE 12

MODES OF DISCOURSE IN DICE GAME - VASTRAHARAN SCENE (PLOT 3)

	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
I. DIRECT	4	5	5	2	6	3	52%
II. UNI DIRECTIONAL	-	1	-	4	-	-	11%
III. VARI DIRECTIONAL	4	2	4	3	3	2	37%

(N=48)

TABLE 13

DIALOGUE BETWEEN KUNTI AND KARNA (PLOT 4)

	GROUP I		GROUP II		GROUP III		
	F	M	F	M	F	M	
I. DIRECT	4	5	7	8	7	3	71%
II. UNIDIRECTIONAL	-	1	-	-	-	1	4%
III. VARI DIRECTIONAL	4	2	2	1	2	1	25%

(N=48)

TABLE 14

DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS IN MODES OF DISCOURSE ACCORDING TO CATEGORIES OF SELF

	DIRECT UNMEDIATED DISCOURSE				UNIDIRECTIONAL DISCOURSE				VARI DIRECTIONAL DISCOURSE			
	PLOTS				PLOTS				PLOTS			
	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV
(%)												
TRAVELERS	100	88	69	81	-	12	12	6	-	-	19	13
BIOGRAPHERS	90	100	89	100	-	-	-	-	10	-	11	-
CLAN SELF	50	100	50	50	50	-	-	-	-	-	50	50
SEEKER	50	75	50	100	25	25	50	-	25	-	-	-
SCRIPTURAL	60	60	20	60	40	20	20	-	-	20	60	40
GENDERED	40	60	20	40	20	20	-	-	40	20	80	60
DIALOGIC	20	-	-	20	-	-	-	-	80	100	100	80

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