

## Narrative Tools and Strategies: Representation of Trauma in *The Mahabharata*

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Received: September 06, 2021

Accepted: October 20, 2021

Published: November 30, 2021

Volume: 10 Issue: 6

Advance access: November 2021

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

### ABSTRACT

The understanding and interpretation of traumatic experiences and the issues of their representation in narratives have always been the major focus of trauma studies. The inherent nature of traumatic experiences, that “fragment consciousness and prevent direct linguistic representation” (Caruth 4), makes trauma studies more challenging as well as demanding. Researchers such as Tal (1995), Caruth (1996), Rogers (2004), Ward (2008), Whitehead (2011) and Heidarizadeh (2015), amongst others, have discussed the difficulties involved in the representation of traumatic experiences in narratives. They have also explored different ways and means for the representation of traumatic experiences. But such exploration could not fully help achieve the accurate representation of trauma, thus calls for further exploration to bring about certain tools and strategies to fill the inadequacy. This paper tends to offer certain narrative features and techniques, that *The Mahabharata* employs in its narrative for the representation of psychological trauma of the characters, to tackle the inherent difficulties in representing trauma, and thereby contributes to the enrichment of trauma studies. Drawing on narrative theory, the paper analyses how the narrative components like plot (event), character and theme and the narrative techniques like flashbacks, flashforward, frame story, events in parallel, narrative shift, multi-perspectivity, repetitive designation, epiphany, amplification, imagery, tone, use of repetitive sentence structure, hamartia, peripetia and comparison, embedded in the narrative of the epic, help represent the psychological trauma of the characters. All the narrative components and techniques have been utilized together for the same purpose. The character-event relationship has been discussed to explore how the theme of trauma has been represented in the narrative of the epic.

**Key words:** Psychological Trauma, Narrative Features, Narrative Techniques, Representation of Trauma, *The Mahabharata*

### INTRODUCTION

The term “trauma,” understood as “wound” (Marder 1) or more specifically as physical injury or damage, owes its origin to Greek. Until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Greeks used the term in the sense of physical wounds or injuries. Later, it came to imply to a distressing and disturbing experience that overwhelms one’s life. The term ‘trauma’ has gained psychological stance with the rise of the medical humanities (an interdisciplinary field of medicine that includes the humanities, social sciences and the arts) in the recent years. According to Caruth, “in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud’s text, the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). Erikson (1995), to a great extent, subscribes to such psychic turn of trauma. The psychic trauma is viewed as a consequence of a sudden, unexpected and overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows. “Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (Terr 8).

The studies on trauma primarily concern with understanding and interpreting traumatic experiences and their effects. Studies also focus on the issues of the representation of traumatic experiences. Whitehead (2011), for instance, notices how trauma theory and an interest in it in the recent years have created space for exploring different ways to understand traumatic experience and means of their representation. How the belated and indirect access to the traumatic past pose challenges for its representation has been observed by Heidarizadeh (2015). The same difficulties are also confronted by Caruth (1996). For him, traumatic experiences are difficult to be represented for these “fragment consciousness and prevent direct linguistic representation” (Caruth 4). The contemporary trauma studies actively engage with the issues of representation of trauma in narrative. Researchers such as Tal (1995), Rogers (2004) and Ward (2008) also hint at the difficulties inherent in the representation of trauma. They view that the accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved. The “gap in time and experience negotiated in

narratives” (Ward 5) often make it difficult for writing the past memories.

Trauma studies is an interdisciplinary and evolving field. It draws upon the principles of postcolonialism, postmodernism and poststructuralism and so on to devise narrative tools and strategies. However, narrative theory is not primarily considered for narrative aids under the orbit of trauma studies.

This paper argues, on the basis of the analysis of *The Mahabharata*, that the issues of representation of trauma in the narratives can be addressed with the aid of narrative theory utilizing narrative features and techniques that are not much considered in trauma theory. This paper explores how the narrative features and techniques embedded in the narrative of *The Mahabharata* help represent the psychological trauma of its characters effectively. In short, the prognosis of the selected characters’ sufferings, leading to their psychological trauma will be navigated through specific narrative tools and strategies present in the narrative of the epic. The consideration of narrative theory and its techniques for representation of trauma will minimize the challenges felt for narrativizing/representing trauma.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*The Mahabharata* as a great Indian epic continues to hold attention of scholars and researchers for being “a treatise on *Artha*, on *Dharma*, and on *Kama*” (Ganguli, 2006, “Preface” 31). Researchers have explored its diverse themes. Researchers like Kahlon (2011, 2015), Cederman (2013), Biswas (2016), Maitra and Saha (2016) and Vat and Tantray (2016) have discussed how women characters are portrayed in *The Mahabharata*. They have also focused on the issues revolved around patriarchy, traditions of gender relations, the notions of victimhood and agency. The marginalized characters such as Ekalavya and Karna have also been discussed by Sanyal (2015) to underline how they have been side-lined and victims of constant ridicule because of their low caste. Hildebeitel (2018) attempts a psychoanalytic reading of the epic. He discusses the epic through the prism of Freud and Bose’s concept of “Uncanny” and “dead mother” (Hildebeitel 33) to examine how past trauma, loss of memory and the return of the repressed immensely contribute to the formation of religious traditions. The aspects of care ethics and virtue epistemology in the context of *The Mahabharata* have been explored by Munawar (2019). Jha and Chandran (2018) discuss how both the literary and non-literary elements of the graphic retellings of the epic help represent its diverse themes. Researcher like Kaipa (2014) engages with leadership lessons, particularly decision-making skills as prevalent in the epic.

The researches reviewed have explored diverse socio-cultural and political issues of *The Mahabharata*. However, the boundless dimensions of the epic still invite serious research on its various unexplored aspects. Discussion of psychological trauma and its representation through the narrative of *The Mahabharata* happens to be one such aspect that this paper attempts to explore.

## OBJECTIVE

This paper analyses the following objectives to answer the research question:

- to discuss how *The Mahabharata* represents the psychological trauma of the selected characters employing certain narrative tools and strategies
- to explore if the analysis of the epic addresses the issues of the representation traumatic experiences, thus contribute to the enrichment of trauma studies

## METHODOLOGY

Following a close reading and in-depth qualitative analysis of the epic, this paper will discuss the psychological trauma of the selected characters of *The Mahabharata*, and explore how such trauma is being represented in narrative of the epic. The discussion and analysis of the text will be modelled on narrative features drawn from the narrative theory.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The narrative theory/narratology, that began with Plato and Aristotle, primarily concerns with the study and analysis of narratives with a focus on the “form and functioning of narratives” (Prince 7). The study of narratology as a specific field of scholarship, however, begins with Todorov (1969). He used the term “narratology” for the first time to designate “a systematic study of narrative firmly anchored in the tradition of the Russian and Czech formalism of the early twentieth century and French Structuralism and semiotics of the sixties” (O’Neill 12).

Narratology “is not the reading and interpretation of individual stories, but the attempt to study the nature of story itself as a cultural practice” (Barry 215). Barry draws upon an inherent distinction between story and plot which is fundamental to narratology. According to him “the story is the actual sequence of events as they happen, whereas the plot is those events as they are edited, ordered, packaged, and presented in what we recognize as a narrative” (215). The story has a beginning, a middle and an end; chronologically followed each other. Barry (2012) observes that Aristotle leaves importance to character and action which are essential elements of a story. For him, character is revealed through action, i.e., through aspects of plot like the *harmartia* (sin or fault), the *peripeteia* (turn-round or a reversal of fortune) and the *anagnorisis* (recognition or realization). Jahn (2005) made a distinction between discourse narratology and story narratology. Discourse narratology talks about the stylistic choices that determine the form of a narrative text whereas story narratology focuses on the action units that arrange a stream of events into a trajectory of themes, motives and plot.

Propp (1928) examines the deep structure underlying any number of stories. He draws a clear distinction between the text and spheres of action of the characters. He believes that narrative is not about following the unfolding story from the beginning to the end, rather to recognize its construction in vertical storeys. He distinguishes three main levels in the

narrative work: the level of functions, the level of actions and the level of narration. Genette (1972) does not emphasize the story, but the manner and process of telling it. He proposes six particular areas for understanding the act of narration. These are narrative mood, focalisation, narrator, narrative time, packaging and narrative voice. He puts these aspects of narratives into three categories of relationship: between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating and between story and narrating. "Genette subsequently proposes a division of the analysis of narrative discourse into the verbal categories of 'tense', 'mood' and 'voice'" (Onega 275). He, Onega (2018) mentions, includes the differences between story time and narrative, disruptions of linear chronology, duration of representation and frequency of representation within the category of time. The mood of representation, for him, involves questions of distance and perspective. He coins "the new terminology for old concepts- such as 'analepsis' (flashback) and 'prolepsis' (flash-forward), or 'diegesis' (telling) and 'mimesis' (scene), and systematizes aspects of narrative (Onega 275). Jahn's (2005) suggests three broad categories for the components of narratives. These are: (1) Narration (voice), focalization (mood), and narrative situation, (2) Action, story analysis, tellability, and (3) Tense, Time, and Narrative Modes. According to him narration is of immense importance in the study of narratives. The narrators occupy a unique place in this connection. Narrators may be overt (one who refers to himself/herself in the first person ("I", "we" etc.), one who directly or indirectly addresses the narratee) or covert (one who has a more or less neutral (nondistinctive) voice and style, one who is sexually indeterminate). Focalization or mood is another essential tool of narration. It concerns with the perspective from which a specific narration or story is seen/told. Focalization can be both external and internal. External focalization refers to "the candidate for a text's perspectival orientation who is the narrator" (Jahn N3.2.4.). Internal focalization is when the narrative events are "presented from a character's point of view" (ibid.). Jahn uses Stanzel's model to clarify the concept of narrative situation. According to Jahn (2005) Stanzel used the term narrative situation to refer to more complex arrangements or patterns of narrative features. The other aspect of the narrative is narrative components that deal with action, story analysis and tellability. Jahn (2005) defines action as a sequence of acts and events; the sum of events constituting a story line. He also considers it to be a kind of "causal connectivity" between story units (N4.6.). Tellability is understood as narratibility, which is what makes a story worth telling. In the last category Jahn (2005) distinguishes between two kinds of tenses: the narrative past and the narrative present. He believes that the use of tense in a character's discourse depends on some factors like the current point in time in the story's action. He also points out that the tense of a specific narrative does not remain the same in the whole narrative. For the cause of time and time analyses, he raises three questions: When?, How long?, and How often? Genette (1980) proposed a taxonomy of three kinds of vision or what he called focalization, based on the ratio between the narrator's knowledge and characters' knowledge.

In short, narrative theory concerns with the systematic study of narratives, especially its forms and functions. The narratologists are found to be primarily occupied with how narratives make meaning and for which they have explored and analysed various narrative components and techniques. The narrative components that they have discussed are: plot, character, focalization/narrative mood, narration style, narrative time, packaging, narrative voice, narrative situation, narrative vision, narrative transmission and tellability. They have pointed out the narrative techniques like flashback, flash-forward, foreshadowing, tone, hamartia, peripetia, anagnorisis and shifting viewpoints. However, narrative studies do not confine to all the narrative components and techniques that they have discussed. All literary features and techniques, employed for the analysis and understanding of narratives, can be part of narrative studies.

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF *THE MAHABHARATA*

This paper uses some of the narrative components and techniques mentioned above for the discussion of the representation of trauma in *The Mahabharata*. It will, amongst all, utilize components like plot (event) and character to examine how these components help portray the theme of trauma in the epic. It will also use the narrative techniques like flashbacks, flashforward, frame story, events in parallel, narrative shift, multi-perspectivity, repetitive designation, epiphany, amplification, imagery, tone, use of repetitive sentence structure, hamartia, peripetia, eloquent long expression and comparison. It will examine how these components and techniques help represent the psychological trauma of the selected characters of *The Mahabharata*. This paper will also discuss how both the components and techniques merge and function together for the task of communicating and representing trauma in the epic. Specifically, we will examine how characters and events merge together to communicate the theme of trauma and how the representation of trauma is done through the character-event relationship. The merge of characters and events into each other can be presented through an interlocking gyre Figure 1

The two intersecting conical spirals, as shown in the image (text added by self), represent both the characters and

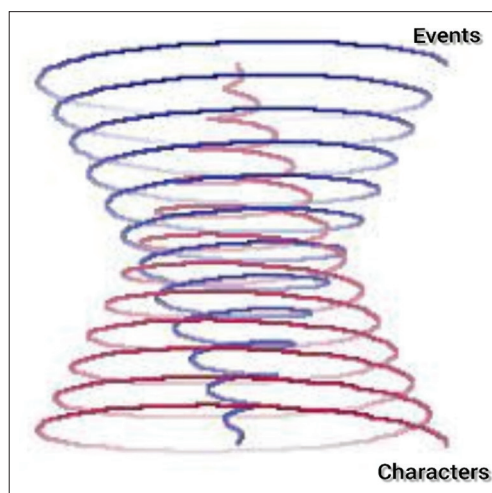


Figure 1. The double gyre

the events, in the expansion process, intersect and merge. In other words, in the expansion process, characters merge into events and events into the characters. This relationship can be applied on to the discussion of trauma in *The Mahabharata*. Both the traumatic events and characters get merged and influence each other. The traumatic events cause the trauma of the characters and through the characters the traumatic events get manifested and in the very process the theme is established.

### Pre-war Events Induced Trauma and its Representation

The game of dice and its consequences immensely affected the lives of the Pandavas and those who were directly and indirectly witnessed to that traumatic event. The Pandavas were deceitfully defeated, lost their kingdom and were sent into exile. The sudden and unexpected aftermath of the game of dice led to their endless miseries and trauma. Beneath the surface of all these mis-happenings, that the Pandavas were victim of, there was Duryodhana's ill intention to keep Pandavas away from the kingdom and to become the unchallenged monarch. The narrative of the epic has brought out this as an epiphanic revelation through the words of Duryodhana, "[t]herefore, exile thou the Pandavas without any fear. And take such steps that they may go thither this very day" (Ganguli, 2006, Adi Parva 305). In an aggressive tone, he insisted his father to act as suitable to his plan. All the events at the game of dice, when evaluated from the other perspective, may find Yudhishtira to be the cause of the psychological trauma of the Pandavas and Draupadi. The error of judgement that he made, to play the game of dice and stake everything, almost thoughtlessly, confirms to the *hamartia* of his character. The narrative technique, *hamartia*, proposed by Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), has been artfully crafted in the plot to portray Yudhishtira as a tragic character, and subsequently a trauma victim. The dire consequences of the game of dice, losing the kingdom and leaving everything for the exile, undoubtedly proved to be traumatic for them. Their change of fortune, i.e., the change of their lives from princely luxury to lives in the woods, rooted into the narrative, appeared as *peripetia* of their characters. The use of *hamartia* and *peripetia* has thrown light on the aspects of the characters of the Pandavas which brought them unintended tragic fate and psychological trauma.

The traumatic events at the game of dice have been presented, in the narrative, through *multi-perspectivity*. Different characters presented that traumatic event from different perspectives, focusing on different aspects of it. Kunti, for instance, saw it from the perspective of Draupadi with a focus to her traumatic experiences. She recollected how Draupadi was "dragged into the assembly while clad in a single raiment and made to hear bitter words" (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 186). The narrative technique, *flashback*, has been employed here for the re-enactment of the traumatic past that labelled Draupadi as a trauma victim and Kunti as a trauma witness. When Kunti said, "ever devoted to Kshatriya customs and endued with great beauty, the princess, while ill, underwent that cruel treatment," she underlined the traumatic event and its impact (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 186).

Yudhishtira recollected it, in a flashback, as an event that deprived them of kingdom and caused their exile into woods. He mentioned the entire event as: "[s]ummoned by cunning gamblers skilled at dice, I have been deprived of wealth and kingdom through gambling... they have sent me to distressful exile in this great forest, clad in deer skins" (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 15). His complaining tone not only shows the injustice perpetrated on them but also his helpless and distressing condition; leading to his psychological trauma. He also flashbaked the harsh and cruel speeches addressed to him on the occasion of that gambling match, particularly the words of his afflicted friends relating to the match at dice and other subjects.

The *flashback* of the events at the game of dice recurrently happens as the re-enactment of the traumatic past and in a subtle way it contributes to the process of traumatization. Bhimasena, while confronting Gandhari, said, "[t]hy son inflicted many wrongs on us. In the midst of the assembly, he had shown his left thigh unto Draupadi... Great were our sufferings in the forest..." (Ganguli, 2006, Stri Parva 15). The pathos, in his tone, shows that he had a terrible experience all through. He recollected the traumatic event from three angles like how Duryodhana deceitfully caused them deprived of their kingdom and wealth, how Draupadi was assaulted and how they lived painful life in the exile. The perspective of Arjuna is, however, found to be slightly different. He took everything as the result of "the unfair play at dice of Sakuni, the son of Suvala" (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 99). The *multi-perspectivity*, used in the narrative, also includes Dhristarashtra's discernment that "the diverse acts of wrong" which his "wicked son of exceedingly evil understanding perpetrated" lead to traumatic experiences of the Pandavas and Draupadi (Ganguli, 2006, Asramavasika Parva 29). The narrative technique, *flashback* is used to bring forth the event at game of dice to his mind and to haunt him of his guilt. The same perspective of the event can also be witnessed when Karna along with Suyodhana, Duhshasana and Shakuni reflected on "the woes they had inflicted upon the high-souled Pandavas" (Ganguli, 2006, Karna Parva 1). They recollected the scene of dragging Draupadi into the assembly and the insult done to her.

Draupadi, being a victim of the traumatic event, relived in the testimony of the traumatic past. While in verbal exchange with Krishna, she remembered the entire event and its consequences. She presented her traumatic situation in a more detailed and eloquent way in these words:

O Krishna, how could one like me, the wife of Pritha's sons, the sister of Dhristadyumna, and the friend of thee, be dragged to the assembly! Alas, during my season, stained with blood, with but a single cloth on, trembling all over, and weeping, I was dragged to the court of the Kurus!... they wished to make of me a slave by force (Ganguli, 2006, 2006, Vana Parva, p.31).

The eloquent expression mirrors the gravity of her traumatic experiences that she had been through. Her distressing tone shows how much she was afflicted with grief. The narrative technique, *amplification*, that has added information about her season like "stained with blood" and "with but a single cloth on," is also used here to highlight her helpless

condition and the cause of psychological trauma (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 31). Further, the event of dragging her to the assembly during her season puts her in an embarrassing situation, sweepingly contributes to her trauma. Her traumatic experience was so acute when she was to be disrobed in the Kuru assembly, in front of all present. The engagement of *flashback* technique, in the narrative of the epic, permeates the representation of events in parallel which directly contribute to the poignancy of the existing trauma. Through Draupadi, the narrative represents the parallel traumatic past which had a similar bitter experience for the victims as:

[W]ho formerly drove the guileless Pandavas with their mother from the kingdom, while they were children still engaged in study and the observance of their vows. It is that sinful wretch, who, horrible to relate, mixed in Bhishma's food fresh and virulent poison in full dose. Again, while the children were asleep at Varanavata with their mother, it is he who set fire to the house intending to burn them to death..... (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 31).

The narration of these events in parallel aggravates the trauma of Draupadi. It shows how she has been witnessing, directly or indirectly, several traumatic events. The use long and eloquent expression stand testimony to the heightened traumatic experiences. The details flow naturally, confirming to the voice of the buried self that was suppressed long. Her recollection of events sounds endless as her trauma. Here, we can find the *narrative shift* being employed to mark the shift from the voice of Draupadi to Kunti. This can be treated as a conscious narrative choice that the writer had made to grant voice to the actual victim to represent the trauma in an accurate way. While Draupadi was reporting the entire event, it was bit descriptive; full of facts. When Kunti was made to speak, the emotional poignancy was visible. No other way, perhaps, the narrative could express the pangs, her helplessness and trauma. The repetitive sentence structure, used for Kunti, reveals her ceaseless emotionally charged expression that carries her sense of trauma.

The *flashback* of the event served towards the re-enactment of the traumatic past that the characters were victim of. All these recollections, directly or indirectly, had a mention of Duryodhana, who was at the root of the suffering of trauma of the characters. Therefore, the narrative offers him a repetitive designation. Till the end of the narrative, Duryodhana remained as a referent of trauma of the Pandavas.

*Narrative shift* is invariably found when the individual trauma is presented. In spite of the presence of the third person omniscient narrator, the characters and the trauma victims were given voice to talk about their own traumatic experiences. This is an opted narrative choice to give autobiographical touch to the experiences to avoid falsification of the event, or what Roger (2004) said, an inauthentic version of events. This narrative technique helps to bridge the gap between the reader and the character by narrating the life-like trauma testimonies and allowing the readers to bear witness to it directly. The narrative shift is used profusely in the epic. For instance, while presenting the distressing and traumatic experiences of Draupadi, on the occasion of being humiliated in the Kuru assembly, the narrator, Vaisampayana presented the painful situation of Draupadi in the words, “[a]

nd Dussasana dragging Krishna of long locks unto the presence of the assembly--as if she were helpless though having powerful protectors--and pulling at her, made her tremble like the banana plant in a storm” (Ganguli, 2006, Sabha Parva 128). Suddenly we find a narrative shift there. Draupadi is made to express her own plight: “[w]retch! it ill behoveth thee to take me before the assembly. My season hath come, and I am now clad in one piece of attire” (Ganguli, 2006, Sabha Parva 128). This shift is probably done to represent the traumatic experiences of Draupadi in a more effective way. Such entitlement of voice to the character can be seen as a confirmation to view that trauma is a personal experience and the victim has a better knowledge of it. The use of *amplification* in her expression, providing every detail about her helpless condition, shows the gravity of the traumatic event and the profundity of her trauma.

### The War and Post-war Induced Trauma and its Representation

The Kurukshetra war is the most horrific traumatic event that the narrative of *The Mahabharata* has represented. This traumatic event affected the lives of several characters, causing psychological trauma for them. The narrative of *The Mahabharata* has made exclusive use of flashforward (prolepsis) in the pretext of the war, temporarily taking the narrative forward in time from the current point of the story, to show how the anticipated consequences of the war cause psychological trauma of the characters. Dhritarashtra, amongst all the characters, has suffered immense trauma, imagining the great carnage in the war and the death of his sons. The narrative substantiates to his traumatic experiences in a vivid way. For instance, when Sanjaya reveals that the Pandavas may opt war, against the nonacceptance of the peace proposal, as a means to the restoration of their prosperity. This very knowledge of the anticipated war filled Dhritarashtra with anxiety and tremor. He thought that all his sons would be doomed, leaving him to suffer in despair. The sense of trauma can be easily traced from his words, “I see not the warrior amongst us that is able to stay in battle before the wielder of the Gandiva. If Drona, or Karna, or even Bhishma advance against him in battle, a great calamity is likely to befall the earth” (Ganguli, 2006, Aranyaka Parva 106). His helplessness, reflected in his tone, contributes to his trauma. The *flashforward* technique, used in the narrative, takes the story yet to another level, landing Dhritarashtra as a traumatic character, terribly fraught with the idea of being destitute of sons and kinsmen. Dhritarashtra's traumatic situation, in the context of the war, is represented through the use of repetitive sentence structure like “where shall I go?”, “What shall I do” and “how shall I do it?” (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 125). The sentences are not exactly repeated, but the very structure of it, i.e., the *wh*-question structure is repeated thrice. The *repetition in sentence structure*, amply shows that his mind ceases to generate new set of expressions under the stressful situation. To fill his linguistic inadequacy, he repeats the same variety of sentences almost thoughtlessly.

The other characters like Kunti, Karna, Vidura, Bhishma and Drona have indulged thinking about the possibility

of the war and its fatal consequences. The narrative has implanted the *flashforward* technique in an apt manner to project the psychological turmoil that all these characters have been going through. In the words of Kunti, “[w]hat can be a greater grief than this that the Pandavas, the Chedis, the Panchalas, and the Yadavas, assembled together, will fight with the Bharatas?” (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 279). She was deeply concerned about the possible death of kinsmen. The regretful and sorrowful *tone* lend clarity to her concern. Karna foresees, “a great and fierce battle” between the Pandavas and the Kurus that will “cover the earth with bloody mire” (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 276). He also imagines that “[a]ll the kings and princes following the lead of Duryodhana, consumed by the fire of weapons will proceed to the abode of Yama” (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 276). His assumption, undoubtedly, surfaces his traumatic self, suffering acutely. The anticipating *tone*, used here, represents his trauma in a convincing way. Further, his sense of trauma gets vigorously represented in these lines:

Diverse frightful visions are seen, O slayer of Madhu, and many terrible portents, and fierce disturbances also...All this is an indication of defeat...The jackals yell hideously. All this is an indication of defeat. Diverse birds, each having but one wing, one eye, and one leg, utter terrible cries. All this, O slayer of Madhu, indicates defeat.... (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 277).

This eloquent and long expression of Karna, added with the use of *amplification*, exhibits his trauma in a transparent way. He admittedly accepts his trauma as he rests his mind on frightful visions. The *images* like jackal’s yelling, crying of birds that have one leg, one wing and one eye and birds with black wings and red legs hovering over the Kuru encampment merely picturizes his traumatic anticipation of a great calamity. It is important to notice that the narrator has used *repeated sentences* like “[a]ll this is an indication of defeat” and the phrase, “proceed to the abode of Yama” (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 277). This repetition of expression is an indication of his overwhelming situation in which he fails to generate new ideas as well as sentences. This may be due to his lack of peace of mind and stability. This may also be viewed as his desire to emphasize his concern. He is psychologically completely possessed by the possible fatal consequences of the war that no new set of expression occurs to him. As he confronts Krishna, to express his concern, his anxiety and trauma get mentioned. The repetitive sentence structure symbolically represents the re-enactment of the traumatic event. This is exactly found in these lines of Karna:

‘For these reasons, excuse me for a moment’, seeing his wheel swallowed, the son of Radha shed tears from wrath, and beholding Arjuna, filled with rage he said these words, “O Partha, O Partha, wait for a moment.... Recollecting the teachings of righteousness, excuse me for a moment, O son of Pandu!” (Ganguli, 2006, Karna Parva 90).

Karna appears to be completely traumatic understanding his present situation as a consequence to the curse that he had received from Parshuram and the Brahmana. The re-enactment of the past event is postulated through the repetition of sentence structure. The repetitive imperative sentence

structure like “excuse me for a moment”, “wait for a moment” shows how helplessly he pleads for his life, thus expressing his traumatic situation (Ganguli, 2006, Karna Parva 90). This expression shows two narrative voices, the third person omniscient narrator and the character as first-person narrator. It is very common in the narrative of this epic that when the trauma or traumatic situations are narrated, the individual characters are made to speak for themselves, enabling to witness a fuller version of the individual’s trauma. This autobiographical stance, attached to the expression, helps represents trauma in a more prominent way. Further, the use of repetitive sentence structure may be taken for the writer’s narrative agenda to fill the breach in the thinking process of the traumatized characters.

It is to note that the narrative of *The Mahabharata* retains a balance between precision and exclusive expression of the factual details by employing *amplification* as a narrative technique. For instance, upon hearing the slain of Bhishma, Dhritarashtra said, “O Sanjaya, for peace cannot be mine, hearing that Devavrata hath been slain, --that father of mine, of terrible deeds, that ornament of battle, viz., Bhishma!” (Ganguli, 2006, Bhishma Parva 34). Here, while lamenting his death, Dhritarashtra provides added information about Bhishma, particularly about his great skill in weaponry in the same sentence. This is done in a calculative manner; to be precise and not to fall short. By the use of *amplification*, the narrative encapsulates the past glory of Bhishma and his present death. The added details, provided about Bhishma, indirectly shows how great was the loss and the complete emotional breakdown of Dhritarashtra. His great sense of trauma borne from the death of Karna can also be read from his expression, “my heart is greatly agitated... My senses are being stupefied, and my limbs are about to be paralysed!” (Ganguli, 2006, Karna Parva 7). The use eloquent expression and uneasy *tone* reveal how deeply he has been distressed and emotionally broke down. The use of amplification in this sentence also helps to understand the poignancy of his trauma. It is important to notice that the narrative lends support to portray him as a trauma victim by allowing him to adopt the repetitive sentence structure that reads as “my...”.

The narrative of the epic achieves the height in the use of *amplification* in the narration of Bhishma while grading Karna. It can be seen in the following sentence:

As regards this thy ever-dear friend, this one who is always boastful of his skill in battle, this one who always urgeth thee, O king, to fight with the Pandavas, this vile braggart, Karna, the son of Surya, this one who is thy counsellor, guide, and friend, this vain wight who is destitute of sense, this Karna, is neither a Ratha nor an Atiratha (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 327).

Here, a chain of things is added in a single sentence to show how Bhishma under-estimates and insults Karna. The terrible insult, implanted through the narrative technique, amplification, adds to the psychological trauma of Karna. Further, the *repetitive sentence structure* like “this one who is...” entitles him a repetitive designation, constantly making him a target of attack (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 327). The amplified sentence, “Duryodhana, however, at that time, deeply afflicted and deprived of his senses, and with eyes

bathed in tears, wept for the Suta's son, saying, "Karna! Oh Karna!," glaringly voices the trauma of Duryodhana caused due to the death of Karna (Ganguli, 2006, Karna Parva 94). It was truly traumatic for Bhishma to fight against Pandavas, especially with Yudhishtira. His trauma can be understood from the use of amplification in the sentence: "[w]hat can be a matter of greater grief to us than that we shall have to light against that Yudhishtira who is devoted to the service of his superiors, destitute of envy, conversant with Brahma, and truthful in speech" (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 269). The use of amplification does not seem to be ornamental but a narrative need to emphasize the psychological trauma of the characters.

The instances of *narrative shift* are extensively found throughout the narrative. When the vast Kuru army was on the verge of destruction, Vaisampayana presented the trauma of Dhritarashtra in these words, "Dhritarashtra the son of Ambika, having learnt that only a small portion of his army was alive, for all his foremost of warriors had died, felt his heart to be exceedingly agitated by grief. The king swooned away" (Ganguli, 2006, Drona Parva 7). Suddenly the *narrative shift* is noticed when Dhritarashtra said "having heard of this dire calamity, my heart is greatly agitated. My senses are being stupefied, and my limbs are about to be paralysed!" and then suddenly, Vaisampayana continued, "Dhritarashtra the son of Ambika, that lord of earth, lost his senses and fell down on the earth" (Ganguli, 2006, Drona Parva 7). The emblematic *narrative shift* cannot be overlooked here by any means. It is only through this shift, the actual mental condition of Dhritarashtra can be understood, so as his trauma which otherwise could have been inaccessible. The symbolism of the use of amplification and depressing tone adds much to the representation of his trauma. The shift is also found when the trauma of Gandhari was presented on the occasion of the death of her sons. Vaisampayana mentioned, "[b]eholding Duryodhana, Gandhari, deprived of her senses by grief, suddenly fell down on the earth like an uprooted plantain tree...she began to weep, repeatedly uttering loud wails at the sight of her son lying on the bare ground, covered with blood" (Ganguli, 2006, Stri Parva 17). Then immediately Gandhari was given voice to speak her traumatic state of being in the words, "Alas, O son! Alas, O son!... He who was formerly encircled by kings vying with one another to give him pleasure, alas, he, slain and lying on the ground, is now encircled by vultures!" (Stri Parva 17). The words of Vaisampayana, of course, presented the traumatic condition of Gandhari, but from a safe distance. The words of Gandhari seem to be decked with an intimate tone. She appears to be a victim-voice; witnessing the traumatic event, reliving in it and expressing. It is found that Vaisampayana was narrating about the Pandavas, before entering the forest while meeting a group of Brahmanas. It was a matter-of-fact description giving the general idea about the situation. Then seeing them, king Yudhishtira addressed saying, "Robbed of our prosperity and kingdom, robbed of everything, we are about to enter the deep woods in sorrow, depending for our food on fruits and roots, and the produce of the chase" (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 4). It seems how eloquently the trauma of Pandavas is represented through the voice of Yudhishtira.

The use of *amplification* and *repetitive sentence structure*, prevalent in the words of Yudhishtira, lay stress on the traumatic experiences they were undergoing.

The narrative of the epic abounds with *images* that are used to symbolically present the sense of trauma in the characters as well as to represent that. Dhritarashtra has already been traumatic about the war and its fatal consequences. When he imagines Bhima in full aggression fighting in the battle against his sons and kinsmen, he was sure that Kauravas will be destroyed. The way Bhima smashes his army, all his hundred sons will be slain in a short while. This scenario has filled him with extreme anguish and terror. His traumatic state of mind is represented here: "[a]s a blazing fire in the summer season., when urged by the wind, consumeth dry grass, so will Bhima, mace in hand, and united with Arjuna, slay all on my side!" (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 125). As blazing fire destroys everything that comes on its way in a short time, similarly Bhima, Dhritarashtra thinks, will destroy his army. The image of blazing fire causes and intensifies his sense of trauma. The *flashforward* technique can also be found to be used to push him into utter anxiety and apprehension of total destruction of Kurus. His distressed and helpless condition, after the death of all his sons, is presented with an imagery of a "tree shorn of its branches" (Ganguli, 2006, Stri Parva 1). The tree image may also show his hopelessness after losing all his sons like the branches to a tree. He looked cheerless, being afflicted with grief and overwhelmed with anxiety. Finally, he has lost his power of speech, the most essential thing for him as branches to the tree. His traumatic situation thus gets better representation through the incorporation of image in the narrative of the epic.

The distressed and fairly traumatic condition of Draupadi is presented through the use of befitting images in this passage:

Having received that heartrending intelligence about the slaughter of all her sons, she became exceedingly agitated. Trembling like a plantain tree shaken by the wind, the princess Krishna, arrived at the presence of Yudhishtira, fell down, afflicted by grief. Her face, adorned with eyes resembling a couple of fullblown lotuses, seemed to be darkened by grief like the Sun himself when enveloped in darkness (Ganguli, 2006, Sauptika Parva 11).

The images of nature, used in the passage, serve as an objective correlative to represent the mental condition of Draupadi that is completely shaken and fallen. Her sorrowful face is represented as the Sun enveloped in darkness. The darkness stands for the darkness of her mind and fathomless miseries and uncertainties that is enveloping her life. All these images stand as a testimony to her traumatic condition. The destruction of Yadavas, which is traumatic for Krishna, is presented through the "signs that indicated the perverse course of Time" and "the day of the new moon coincided with the thirteenth (and the fourteenth) lunation" (Ganguli, 2006, Mausala Parva 2). This imagery is an indication for their destruction, transpiring as per the curse of Gandhari. The images of such awful omens contribute to the trauma of Krishna.

The narrative of the Mahabharata is packed with several stories within the main story. This *frame-story* technique

can be seen as a narrative choice of the writer to present the situation of the main story in a clearer way. Sometimes, the frame story is used to compare the character's situation in the main story to that of the others. Here, this technique is found to be used to give a fuller view of the trauma of the characters, by bringing together the events of verisimilitude. In order to compare the traumatic situation of Pandavas, the narrative includes the story of Nala- Damayanti. It is narrated that Nishadha king, Nala who was virtuous and wealthy "was deceitfully defeated by Pushkara, and afflicted with calamity, he dwelt in the woods with his spouse. And, O king, while he was living in the forest, he had neither slaves nor cars, neither brother nor friends with him (Ganguli, 2006, Vana Parva 114). This *frame-story*, caught in a flashback, helps in representing the trauma of the Pandavas in a vivid way. When compared, the trauma of Pandavas get legitimate reference, helping the reader to understand how grave was their trauma. Duryodhana's traumatic situation, towards the end of the war; when he resided in the lake, was compared with that of Indra. When the mighty Vritra, terrible to the gods, was killed, Indra was overpowered by the sin of Brahmanicide on account of having killed the three-headed son of Twashtri, Vritra. "And he betook himself to the confines of the worlds, and became bereft of his senses and consciousness. And overpowered by his own sins, he could not be recognised. And he lay concealed in water, just like a writhing snake" (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 19). The use of *frame-story* in the narrative of the epic helps to bring about a comparison between the present characters and the characters referred and such comparison seems to establish a comprehensive understanding of the psychological trauma of the characters.

The narrative has employed *flashback* to bring back the traumatic past of the character to his/her mind and show how that event can be traumatic. In the context of war, when Krishna was soliciting Karna's support for Pandavas, for the sake of Kunti, he mentioned, "she abandoned me as soon as I was born... Kunti, however, abandoned me without thinking of my welfare" (Ganguli, 2006, Udyoga Parva 272). Karna, through a flashback, revisited his painful past, registered in his mind. The complaining tone, in this sentence, shows how disturbed he was. He had always been traumatized because of the ill treatment and humiliation he received from others due to his low caste. The act of Kunti, therefore, can be taken for the root cause of his trauma. Duryodhana, in a flashback, remembers the words of Vidura in these words:

Without doubt, this had been foreseen by Vidura of great wisdom, this great carnage of Kshatriyas and of ourselves in battle. Reflecting on this, the king, with heart burning in grief at having witnessed the extermination of his army, desired to penetrate into the depths of that lake (Ganguli, 2006, Shalya Parva 29).

This remembrance pained him so much and led him to be a trauma victim. He is witnessing the distressing situation in the battle as already hinted by Vidura. He is left alone, without a companion. His helplessness contributes to his trauma. The use of amplification emphasizes his sense of trauma. Further, the image of penetrating into the depth of lake reveals his acute insecurity and helplessness. The narrative also pres-

ents the trauma of Arjuna when he recollects Drona's fatal end. The flashback technique appears handy to capture his psychological turmoil, as found in his words:

My preceptor had all along been under the impression that in consequence of my love for him, I could, (for his sake) abandon all,—sire, brother, children, wife and life itself. And yet moved by the desire of sovereignty, I interfered not when he was about to be slain. For this fault, O king, I have, O lord, already sunk into hell, overcome with shame. Having, for the sake of kingdom, caused the slaughter of one who was a Brahmana, who was venerable in years, who was my preceptor, who had laid aside his weapons, and who was then devoted, like a great ascetic, to Yoga, death has become preferable to me to life! (Ganguli, 2006, Drona Parva 463).

The recollection of the traumatic past event affects Arjuna very much. The *flashback* of the incident fills him with a deep sense of guilt and thus traumatizes him. The amplification, used in the last sentence, clearly points out how much he was afflicted with grief. The image of Drona being seated in yoga posture abandoning his weapons and slaying him in this posture haunts Arjuna very much. He could not have peace of mind thinking of it.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how the narrative features and techniques embedded in the narrative of *The Mahabharata* help represent the psychological trauma of its characters. It has utilized the narrative components like plot/event, character and theme to discuss the psychological trauma of the characters of the epic. It has also used the narrative techniques, such as flashbacks, flashforward, frame story, events in parallel, narrative shift, multi-perspectivity, repetitive designation, epiphany, amplification, imagery, tone, use of repetitive sentence structure, hamartia, peripetia and comparison, as effective tools for the representation of trauma. The analysis exhibits how the epic narrative accommodates all the narrative components and techniques together for communicating the trauma of the characters. The paper's offering of the character-event relationship and the conjunction of the narrative components and techniques as vehicles for out letting the traumatic experiences of the characters postulates an expansion of the scope of trauma theory, moving beyond the challenges of representation.

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