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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Power Struggle and Political Games in the *Mahabharata* : A Brief Study through Select Characters

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Article History: Submitted-31/01/2019, Revised-26/02/2019, Accepted-28/02/2019, Published-20/03/2019.

Abstract:

The Mahabharata, remains perhaps one of the greatest stories ever written, and also much read and analysed till date. Set against the backdrop of power games, intrigues, fraudulence, greed, corruption and obsessive selfish desires, the Mahabharata can perhaps be considered a very good parameter to gauge the activities and plans of the subsequent political phases that have existed in India. The structure of power and power-politics equations inherent in the Mahabharata seem to have been handed down to the Indian political system in India as a part of the socio-cultural tradition with little or no perceptible change ever. The paper proposes to study some of the very noticeable similarities between the great epic and the present political scenario with the help of select characters.

Keywords: Mahabharata, political games, power, cruelty, glory, truth.

The Mahabharata, composed about 3,500 years ago remains perhaps the greatest story ever told, one of the greatest epics ever written. With more than two hundred thousand lines of verse, the Mahabharata is eight times longer than both the Iliad and the Odyssey put together. (Narayan intro) The nucleus of the story remains the tension between two branches of a ruling family of the warrior caste, the ups and downs in their fortunes, and a mighty battle that ensued to settle the question of supremacy, which spanned generations (192). The cruel and devious games of power and politics remain the leitmotif of this great epic. There is found a perfect balance between goodness and evil in this great classic and the moral message is very finely interwoven in the fabric of the story. Besides, the vast array of characters, representing almost all levels of social and political equations, definitely makes the epic more identifiable and contemporary to the humanity at large. The greatest abiding appeal of the Mahabharata till date is that it is built on good family fights. "The spectacle of family members gunning for each other-brother against brother, son against father and so on---feels bloodier, more visceral. It upends the natural order of things because the *dramatis personae* dispense with familial niceties and go for each others' jugular. That is why it's so

riveting. Perhaps it also appeals to our baser instincts...Haven't we all at some point wished to take a hatchet to a relative?" (Ruha *Weekend Business Standard* 9) This kind of behaviour is being observed in the political parties and business houses which have actually turned into 'political families'.

The Mahabharata exposes three sets of binary opposites: "passion and power, vendetta and virtue and devotion and deception.

(URL; www.hindustantimes.com/entertainment/bollywood/takes-inspiration-from-ramayan-mahabharata/story-8H21IyNsKXJMC5vuP89ILdl.html access 13.11.2016.) Set against the backdrop of power games, intrigues, fraudulence, greed, corruption and obsessive selfish desires, the Mahabharata can perhaps be considered the best parameter to gauge the activities and plans of the subsequent political phases that have existed in India during the three phases of power : the kings, the colonizers, and finally in the politically elected representatives. This is so because the structure of power and power-politics equations inherent in the Mahabharata seems to have been handed down to the Indian political system in India as a part of the cultural tradition with no perceptible change ever. The paper proposes to study some of the very noticeable similarities between the great epic and the present political scenario with the help of select characters.

SATYAVATI, the powerful matriarch, the daughter of a mere fisherman is the pillar of the Mahabharata. Her objection and resistance to the accepted 'commodified' and 'objectified' treatment of the female is indeed commendable considering her social status : she is the only female in the entire epic who lives her whole life at her own terms. The wonderful power acumen of Satyawati could put many political veterans to shame ; she is the female who seeks the opportunity to seize the moments of power never realizing the political hazards she herself would have to face later. Enjoying the hold and power of her body over the lustful king and getting addicted to this power she nevertheless realizes that this empowerment is temporary since Devdatta , the eldest son is already the undeclared crown prince and her children would always have to settle for the second best. Documented as one of the most vital and vicious steps taken to ensure personal gains, Satyawati triumphs as a true Machiavellian character. She not only manages to extract from Devdutt, her stepson, the promise of giving up the throne to Satyawati's first born but also makes him take the vow of celibacy lest Devdutta's child should clamour for his rightful share in the distribution of power. By doing this Satyawati secures complete assurance of unlimited and undivided power over the

kingdom. But her selfishness ruins her own chances of ruling over a strong, undivided kingdom. “Men grow to their full stature only in the environment of responsibility. Their character, as Goethe said, is formed upon the billows of the world. To realise life, they must control life ; to control it they must articulate to their fellow-citizens what intuition they have at the experience they have enjoyed.”(Harold 43)

Both Satyawati and Shantanu refute this responsibility. Both hold power but Satyawati desires absolute control over this power. Her husband, the weak king Shantanu represents all those selfish, greedy and visionless politicians who could go to any length to satisfy their own desires irrespective of the interest of the nation and the society at large. Satyawati reverses the boundaries of power game through her fatal charm. From the feminist perspective, Satyawati’s decisions, her choices and her selfishness are totally justified. But as the holder of a strong political position, she imparts a wrong message. It is one of supreme selfishness: the wrong kind of sacrifice that the ruler can extract from his/her subjects without bothering about the repercussions and by the time the epiphany occurs, it is too late. “Politicians are entitled to change their minds. But when they adjust their principles some explanation is necessary.” (Ratcliffe 213)The people holding power always have to be more responsible than irrational. Bound to the vow Bhishma, can neither marry to produce the rightful heir nor can he rebel against even the grossest injustice committed by Duryodhana and his followers because he is bound to protect the kingdom and since Duryodhana, with all his faults is the ruler of the kingdom : henceforth it is Bhishma’s responsibility to protect his king. *Had not the epic been differently written if Devdutta would not have turned into Bhishma Pitamah and would have got married and had children of his own?*

Satyawati’s selfish decision, quite similar to those often taken by the politicians for their progeny, has three very significant serious repercussions. Firstly, it is at her insistence that Bhishma is forced to procure wives for her son Vichitravirya in order to continue the royal lineage. This results in the emergence of a bitter revengeful Amba [who is reborn as Shikhandi] and the submissive subservience of the other two sisters Ambika and Ambalika who certainly deserved a groom better than Vichitravirya and had to surrender not only to Bhishma’s strength but also to the imposed copulation with Ved Vyasa. This trend continues in the second generation and Bhishma, the confirmed bachelor again ‘procures brides’, this time, for his nephews. The marriage alliances achieved henceforth results in Gandhari, the wife of the blind Dhritarashtra who chooses to remain blindfolded. This act can be considered the second serious repercussion because Gandhari may profess to be a ‘martyr’ but she is, in

reality a shrewd politician. She knows the best way to garner sympathy and support in her vulnerable position and appear to be 'helpless' in controlling her sons. She actually becomes the role model for the modern politicians who prefer to turn a 'blind eye' to whatever is happening around them than to be an active participant in the existing system. Furthermore, Gandhari teaches them to shut their eyes ; by doing this they protect and shield their loved ones, their party-workers, and their *bahubalis* simply because they cannot see 'anything' and thus cannot be held responsible for anything either. Instead of being a support to her husband and control her erring immoral sons, Gandhari becomes as escapist who distances herself from her responsibilities and teaches the same convenient trick to the politicians who have become not 'blind' but deaf and dumb too and continue being a dead weight rather than an asset to their country. The third grave repercussion is the adverse effect of the marriage alliances in the long term. Except Satyawati, and Ganga who had dictated their terms, marriage for female remains a political alliance between two kingdoms (or parties) where the more powerful dictates the terms. Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, Kunti, Madri, Gandhari – all were victims of this cruel system which was utilised to cement existing power structures and strengthen political relations. When alliances between political parties go wrong, they invariably damage the nation. Furthermore, in the case of Gandhari, Shakuni comes as an extra baggage. Shakuni's vehement desire to avenge the injustice done to his sister Gandhari is targeted primarily at Bhishma because Bhishma used his power for both correct and incorrect means and enjoyed complete accession not just because he was 'great' and 'noble' but because he was powerful and dominant ; cruel and ruthless too, if required. But the whole kingdom of Hastinapur bears the brunt of Shakuni's cruel plots and devious intrigues. He never failed a chance to hurt the Pandavas: bending and twisting all rules to achieve his means, forever misguiding his nephews. Shakuni is immortalised in the Mahabharata as the most villainous person ever. In the political scenario, Shakuni represents the one who is wronged and who is always bitter and disloyal at being 'cheated'. The recent trend of party-hopping, bearing grudges, feeding one's own ego, defaming the party, challenging the leader and always acting in self-interest are the qualities that Shakuni has handed to some of the political leaders in the contemporary scene.

Immensely talented and astonishingly beautiful, **DRAUPADI**, in the Mahabharata, is the fulcrum of the epic, who is wrongly accused for the final battle. She is considered a prize 'catch', for all males to 'possess'. All the prospective grooms harbour feelings of lust and lasciviousness from the moment they see her, perhaps, for the first time at the *swayamvar*.

Furthermore, her assertiveness and ‘her’ decision to choose her spouse does not synchronize with the arrogant self-important attitude of the powerful patriarchy. Everyone, including the great Karna joined in her ‘tryst with destiny’ at the court of Hastinapur because her ‘unnatural and “wrong” unfeminine attitude and behaviour at the *swayamvar* was intensely disliked by them. And to settle scores with the virtuous and more popular Pandavas, she became the best choice. In fact, Draupadi can be perceived more as a political agency, used for fulfilling a purpose than as a female punished for *her* crime. She is “married to the five sons of the impotent ‘Pandu’ and ‘used to demonstrate male glory’. Her marriage to several husbands is an act contrary to the law of the scripture and she is ‘designated a prostitute’. Thus, her ‘designation’ permits male chiefs to bring her ‘clothed or unclothed, into the assembly’.” (Morton 132) That is why when Vikarna, the most noble of all Kauravas stands up in defence of Draupadi, the ‘noble’ Karna promptly shut him up saying, “...what woman in any world would take five husbands? What does one call the like of her ? I will unhesitatingly call her a whore. To bring her here, whatever her state, is no sin or act that should cause surprise.” (Narayan 265)

The rape attempt and physical assault that Draupadi endured, remains till date one of the highest levels of humiliation and degradation ever meted out to the female. Draupadi represents all females : the ‘second sex’, the “other”, who have still not been allowed to ‘crawl’ out of their biological category. The female continues to remain the biggest victim of society, even before she is born. She is the “subaltern” who is marginalised, put on the periphery, almost everywhere, every time, by everyone. “The National Policy of the Empowerment of Women (2001) ensures elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.” (Singh 253) However, this does not seem to be effective anywhere in India even after sixty years of independence. *It is very important to note that since time immemorial, rape is not associated with the dishonor of the female as an individual but of the community and the society to which she belongs ; including the ‘supposed all powerful’ males of that community.* In fact rape is the ultimate physical and symbolic assertion of male authority over woman. As Susan Brownmiller very correctly states, “ ...the basic truth [is] that rape is not a crime of irrational, impulsive ,uncontrollable lust, but is a deliberate, hostile, violent act of degradation and possession...designed to intimidate and inspire fear...”(Chanda 201)

Under the garb of sympathy and support, the political parties have always exploited the females, raising the related issues merely to settle their respective political scores. Moreover, since the female is always seen as a 'commodity' for exchange or an 'object' for use, she becomes the best weapon for any kind of revenge that the males of any particular community want to inflict on the males of the other community or social group. Draupadi, in Mahabharata was also a victim of this power game. When the fateful game of dices was carried out by Shakuni, Draupadi's inclusion was not a part of the original plan. But as things kept happening in favour of the Kauravas, their greed as well as their desire to deeply humiliate the 'great' Pandavas also grew. Thus Draupadi as the '*daasi*' had to be dragged to the court, even though she was experiencing the delicate time of the month. She was to be taunted, humiliated, called a whore and ruthlessly disrobed in full view of the 'all-male' gathering only because she was the perfect instrument/channel through which the degradation of the Pandavas could reach its zenith. Her appeal for help was not reciprocated by anyone ; the rape victim today faces similar circumstances. The sad plight of Draupadi is the plight of the female even today. Thus under these kinds of circumstances we see the emergence of a very different kind of Draupadi, the 'subaltern' reincarnation created by celebrated author – activist late Mahashweta Devi. This Draupadi also become a victim of the power game in the present world: a poor peasant woman against the state military forces. "In the Mahabharata, Draupadi's dignity and honour are preserved by the divine intervention of the male Hindu God, Krishna."(Morton 132)

But Devi's Dopdi learns to fight for herself instead of waiting for her Saviour Krishna because she knows that there does not exist a Krishna anymore and even if it does, that Krishna will no longer come. This Dopdi will "remain publicly naked at her own insistence. Following orders from the Senanayak, Dopdi is violently raped by military guards. In defiance of this bloody act, Dopdi confronts Senanayak with the bloody spectacle of her tortured and ravaged body."(ibid) Dopdi's refusal to be clothed is an unequivocal sign of political resistance and authority and threatens the authority of the patriarchal state, which is personified by the Senanayak."(ibid 133)

EKLAVYA and **SHIKHANDI** comprise the periphery, the two most significant secondary characters of the Mahabharata; both contributing to the development of the plot not because of their nobility or their greed [as is the case with most characters in Mahabharata] but because of the unfair treatment meted out to them with apparently no fault

of theirs. Both remain parts of the two most marginalised social groups till date, the untouchable and the homosexual. Eklavya is remembered as the first ever case of an established Dalit identity, deprived of the guidance of a Guru and forced to sacrifice his skill under the guise of *guru-dakshina* only because he belonged to a lower caste. Caste has indeed been a very severe social parameter in India. “Casteism is an over-riding, blind and supreme group loyalty that ignores the healthy social standard of justice, fairplay, equity and universal brotherhood.”(Agarwal 313)The guru whom Eklavya worships is supposed to teach only the Royals : “the hierarchy classes is very rigid in caste systems and is often preserved through formal law and cultural practices that prevent movement between classes.”(Singh 224) Eklavya is not only a complete misfit in the socio-political structure but also has the potential to usurp Arjuna’s unparalleled position. This kind of challenge could not be put to the royalty; the status quo had to be maintained and thus Eklavya, as the sacrificial lamb represents all those people who have been unnecessarily marginalised, victimised, segregated and forced to lead a life of humiliation, deprivation and exploitation. Whatever steps might have been taken by the successive governments and the political parties to ensure not just equality but equity to this marginalised group, the focus is more on retaining them as dependable vote banks than their up gradation. It is largely believed that the under-privileged people have *actually* registered little progress in the last six decades. “There has been a quality of ritualistic formalism about many welfare and development scheme formulated for these [Dalit] castes, tribes and class. The financial incentives and educational reservations have bestowed little real benefit to these groups.”(Ahuja 146)The sensitivity in the politicians and law makers is clearly missing because “[T]he Dalit community suffers [more] from social and political disabilities which are traditionally prescribed and socially enforced upon them by the higher castes.”(Bhushan and Sachdeva 504)The Dalit is still a victim of the power game ; existing largely as an economically, socially, academically and politically backward caste.

Shikhandi [Amba in her previous birth], a part of the homosexual group ; the third gender,the *hizra* continues to fight for social identity and social acceptance till date. “Amba becomes Shikhandi by literally rejecting womanhood itself in her protest against patriarchy. She performs penance to win the boon of being reborn as Shikhandi so as to seek revenge by killing Bheema in the battle.As being a woman is ‘equated’ with weakness and the inability to fight in battle, she gives up her biological sex as well as the socially constructed false notions of womanhood stemming from it.”(Remarkings 45-46)

By denouncing her sex Shikhandi /Amba showed the need to move beyond a politics which is based only on sexual identities. It is important to note that Shikhandi, the *hizra* is given a position of respect and reverence in the Mahabharata only because Amba had to play a crucial role in the story. Amba became the medium for Bhisma to abdicate himself to the injustice he had inadvertently meted to her. While this ‘worthy position’ assigned to Amba is appreciable, the important question of the discrimination made between the two sexes , male and female, regarding their homosexual preferences in the rigid patriarchal structure cannot be sidelined particularly in the present scenario. This is because while the lawmakers in ancient India condemned cross-caste heterosexual behaviour more than sexual acts among persons of the same gender, modern India is not ready to relax its rigidity in either of the two parameters. This observation seems valid in the light of the decision taken by Arjuna, during the period of exile. He chooses to be a transsexual named Brihannala, teaching music and dance to Uttara, the daughter of King Virat. His decision is reflective of the important position and social non discrimination that the third gender, both male and female enjoyed earlier. Compared to that, the plight of the male transgender remains pitiable and that of the female, even worse. The suspension and the reimplementing of IPC Section 377 [which criminalises homosexuality] has made them a victim of not only social ostracization, but of economic depravity and loss of a definite identity too. The ‘queer’ males do face stigma due to their sexual orientation but the oppression faced by the ‘queer’ female is compounded due to their existing disempowerment as women within the patriarchy. In the rural areas, marginalisation is done due to caste/class hierarchies along flouting gender norms. In all the societies, “[T]he study of Politics ...is born when men begin to speculate about the rules by which they are governed or by which their ancestors were governed, when they begin to ask whether these rules ought to be accepted, or ought to have been accepted in the past, why some societies choose different rules from others, whether it is possible to find the best rules for a particular society, or whether it is possible to discover general rules of conduct which could ,or should be applicable to all societies.”(Pickles 15)The common man, including the third gender has put all these questions to the men in power: the law-makers, the elected representatives, the politicians. As “an apology to members of this community for delay in ensuring their rights”, the historic judgement by the Supreme Court in September, 2018 to “decriminalise homosexual sex”, is indeed a landmark step. The five judge bench headed by the Chief Justice Dipak Mishra announced that “ Criminalising carnal intercourse under section 377 Indian penal code is irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary” and

accepted that upto 8% of India's population, around 104 million people might be LGBT, one of the largest such populations in the world.

(URL:<https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/06/Indian-supreme-court-decriminalises-homosexuality.access> 30.01.2019.) This historic judgement was hailed heartily by the erstwhile marginalised community; things have definitely become more pronounced and legitimate: however total social acceptance is still awaited.

LORD KRISHNA is the locus of the Mahabharata ; a crusader and a true leader who ushers peace, justice and the feeling of universal brotherhood. He is related to the Pandavas and enjoys a very special relationship with Kunti, his aunt, supporting her during years of bereavement. Though he loves and respects his cousins and deeply resents the injustice meted out to them, he consistently strives to bring peace and conciliation between the two rival families. Krishna is thus loved and respected by all ; not because he has special powers but because he has chosen not to use them except on very rare occasions. He is everyone's 'favourite' not because people want to impress him but because he shows genuine care, respect and love to every human being and always puts the 'other' in front of his own self : the hallmarks of a true politician. Thus according to the definition given by noted political analyst, J.M.Keynes, Krishna can be called a liberal because "liberal is anyone who is perfectly sensible."(Robert et al 39) "[T]o behave liberally is to behave generously...It evokes ideas of breath and lightness, reason and beauty.[Thereafter] on the given assessment, 'liberalism' is, [for Krishna] the political expression of those civilized values who have long been prized in our society and judged to be desirable features of our political culture." (ibid) Krishna promotes high values; his goal is to establish justice. *His universal acceptance is a result of this liberalism and he is held in utmost regard and has many followers in his moral journey.* A unique feature of his kind of liberalism is that it "is an assortment of good things that have not been arranged in an orderly manner." (ibid)That is why some of his actions and decisions may appear strange and even disagreeable to others but since his followers have utmost faith and belief in his vision they never defy him. The consequences of Krishna's foresight and deep political perception never fail in their intended purpose. He is a born leader with immense vision.

Many people describe themselves as liberal-minded but they do not subscribe to idealism as an ideology. Going by this ideology, it is only Krishna who can be actually called a 'liberal' in the true sense and other great personalities like Bhisma, Drona, Vidura and

Kripacharya do not fall into this category as they could not “ approach every issue from an impartial and rational standpoint that is unclouded by prejudice and superstition. ” (38) Krishna exhibits rare impartiality and just behaviour consistently and continuously which results in not only avoiding but settling many crucial political issues that could have snowballed into major insurgencies.

Since he is a politically correct person, Krishna’s sense of liberalism is also extended to his indulgence in the ‘much needed’ but incorrectly derived political goals. His extreme steps may be justified in the sense of justice and righteousness but were sometimes, Machiavellian in nature. However, he does succeed in justifying his ‘incorrect’ acts; bringing justice to the victimised and deliberate discriminated Pandavas did require bending the rules. Notwithstanding accusations laid towards him, it is an undisputed fact that he played a vital role in the battle of the Mahabharata, which was fought only to establish dharma, the righteous conduct.

Sanjaya, Dhritarashtra’s messenger’s plea to reconsider the immense loss of mankind in the wake of an imminent war is firmly turned down by Krishna. “Yudhistira has displayed all these years nothing but forbearance , while Dhritarashtra’s sons have displayed nothing but covetousness, and now it is time to act and seek proper remedies. The entire universe and all nature functions and keeps life growing only by a proper balance of action and reaction. Otherwise creation will collapse.”(Narayan 322) Thus *it is correct to be humble and forgiving but only up to a point and harsh decisions need be taken thereafter.*

Well aware of Karna’s parentage and understanding his immense contribution in building Duryodhana’s confidence, Krishna tries to not only emotionally blackmail but also lure Karna to change sides. He speaks to him with extreme tenderness, “...how he would be considered the successor, as soon as the war was won ; and how Yudhistira, being his junior, would be the heir apparent.” (338) When Karna refuses the offer on the basis of loyalty and friendship to Duryodhana, Krishna is openly contemptuous of him, calling his loyalty “understandable but destructive, unnatural ” (339) and warns him that since his friendship is no help to Duryodhana, he is as much to blame for Duryodhana’s unholy decision and certainty of death.

Krishna's powers of persuasive provocation, as a skilled politician is fully exposed just before the actual battle. As Arjuna proceeds towards the battle field, the thought of killing his loved ones give him cold feet. Krishna's strong reprimand is soft but very direct, "You are stricken with grief at the thought of those who deserve no consideration." (343) Krishna's pragmatic clarification of Arjuna's predicament is the essence of the Bhgwad Gita, the holy book of Hindu Philosophy of Karma. It teaches the importance of performing one's duty with complete detachment in a spirit of dedication. Those teachings hold true till date. And later, when Krishna's observes Arjuna's lackadaisical approach with regards to Bhisma, he jumps out of the chariot with his discus in hand proclaiming that , "I'll kill this great warrior myself. You will not do it, I know." (348) He uses this dialogue to incense Arjuna ; Arjuna will never allow Krishna to break his vow of not using his weapons during the war.

Political acumen, intrigue and manipulations are tools Krishna used to remove Karna, Jayadratha, Dronacharya and Bhisma, the strong obstacles from the Pandavas' march to victory. But these deaths were also a part of Nature's divine justice, each person a victim of his own particular and unpardonable moral and ethical digression: Jayadratha for his extreme cruelty, Dronacharya for his harsh discrimination, Karna for his lies and unnecessary degradation of Draupadi, and Bhisma for abusing/misusing his strength.

Krishna *did* use his divine powers to help Arjuna fulfil his vow of beheading Abhimanyu's killer, Jayadratha, before sunset. As the sky darkened, Jaydratha emerged triumphant certain that the time limit had passed. " ...Arjuna felled him with a single arrow. Now the skies brightened again. *It was still day light ; a false sunset had been created by Krishna, holding up his discus against the sun.*"(353-354) Krishna had adopted this strategy; maybe a wrong strategy but it was justified considering Jaydratha's final fatal blow to the young, unarmed, unprotected, injured Abhimanyu. *At times, the rules have to be bent to achieve the ends, especially if justice has to be achieved.* Krishna's advice of unsettling the 'unbeatable' Dronacharya is endorsed by even Yudhisthira, the most truthful man ever born, as an essential political strategy. Krishna, well aware of Drona's Achilles heel, suggested announcing Aswathama's death. Giving deep thought to this proposal and considering it mandatory for the victory, Yudhistira said, "I will go and speak to Drona. If this piece of falsehood takes me to hell, I shall deserve it, but our cause is compelling. *Krishna, I trust you. When you make a suggestion, it must be accepted.*" (356) Likewise, Karna's demise was not

brought by Krishna alone, although he once again helped Arjuna take a critical decision. Seeing Karna stuck at his chariot wheel, “[A]rjuna hesitated, since he did not really like to take advantage of this awkward moment, but Krishna urged, ‘*[W]aste no more time, go on, shoot...*’ (358)

Krishna taught Arjuna *to forget ethics and take advantage of the critical moments and avoid procrastination at crucial junctures*. Aware of Bhishma’s boon of voluntary death as well as his skills, Krishna realized that as long as Bhishma defended the empire, the battle could never be won by the Pandava. So he had to resort to use Bhishma’s own misdeed as his nemesis. Bringing Shikhandi to stand in front of Arjuna was an extremely effective strategy. “Bhishma realized that his end had come- he could neither fight nor shoot his arrows at Shikhandi, as he knew this warrior had been born a woman.”(350)*Krishna was only an instrument leading Bhishma to his final salvation; just as the correct paths should be shown to even the most respected or the most loved by those in power.*

The deep hatred and anger Duryodhana felt towards Krishna made him defiant and openly accusing as he lost all his loved ones one after the other. He called Krishna a cheat and refused to consider him a god. “Your base tricks, Krishna, have brought these warriors their victory. Drona, Bhishma, Karna and Jayadratha would not have been destroyed but for your deviousness. Don’t you feel repentant and ashamed?” (361) Krishna gave a calm but fitting reply. “Your greed and hatred without reason have brought you and all your supporters to this pass...Don’t talk of my trickery, without which you and your friends would still be burdening the earth. I have put an end to it...” (ibid) Krishna is ever cautious with the hypocrite Dhritarastra and hands him an iron statue instead of Bheema which is promptly crushed to pieces, followed by crocodile tears. When accused of trickery also by Gandhari, he replies like a true politician telling her that “this [the war] was all the consequences of your sons’ karma.”(363) He adds ironically that she should be happy now that her sons are purged of their sins and enjoying the status of a warrior who died historically, in the heavens above.

Krishna can easily be considered the best politician ever born. A careful study into his life could change the life and destiny of many politicians. His behaviour, his gentle persuasiveness and his art of rhetoric are worth emulating and the *politicians down the ages have always tried to ape him, not learn from him*. Krishna’s intentions could also be interpreted as those of a crafty, manipulative, conniving, shrewd politician. But his sense of

justice and his desire to establish the correct moral values cannot be ignored either. Krishna is remembered more for his ‘miracles’ than his apparent digressions. His digressions have to be accepted because whatever ‘wrongs’ he committed was to establish ‘dharma’ and to abolish ‘adharma’; most of the politicians today seem to be doing the exact opposite.

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