

**Unifying the Scroll: Connecting Themes and Cyclical Echoes in
Amruta Patil's *Parva* Duology**

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Abstract:

This article analyses Amruta Patil's *Parva* duology as its primary corpus, beginning with an exploration of the contemporary necessity for graphic mythic retelling. Through a layered, visual-verbal analysis of the titles, cover designs, and page layouts, the study uncovers the vital connecting themes and structural symmetries that bind the two volumes into a cohesive architectural whole while tracing comparative parallels among the principal characters. Adapted from the *Mahabharata*, these graphic volumes reframe the first book (*Adi Parva*, or “The Book of the Beginning”) and the tenth book (*Sauptik Parva*, or “The Book of Sleeping Warriors”) of the epic’s eighteen-part macro-structure. While *Adi Parva* establishes the primordial origins of the universe and the genesis of the Pandav lineage, *Sauptik* utilises a complex retrospective structure to navigate the devastating immediate aftermath of the Kurukshetra war through the psychological reflections of its survivors. The overarching narrative frame is situated during the reign of King Janmejaya, who is presiding over a genocidal *Sarpa Sattra* (snake sacrifice) to avenge his father’s death. This ritual landscape is introduced in *Adi Parva*, where the river goddess Ganga, functioning as the original *Sutradhaar*, guides the narrative thread with detached divinity and elemental grace. This article demonstrates how that metaphorical thread is subsequently transferred to Ashwatthama, the wounded, morally compromised narrator of *Sauptik*, shifting the duology's perspective from a panoramic cosmic overview into a claustrophobic, deeply human exploration of historical trauma and karmic retribution.

Keywords: Graphic Novel, Mahabharata, Amruta Patil, Mythic Retelling, Sutradhaar, Visual Narrative, Graphic Mythology.

1.1 Introduction

Amruta Patil is India’s first female graphic novelist. Operating as both author and illustrator, Patil maintains complete creative autonomy over her visual-verbal texts. She has published four graphic novels: *Kari* (2008); the *Parva* duology comprising *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* (2012) and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016); and *Aryanaka: Book*

of the Forest (2019), a collaborative project executed alongside mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik. The critical reception of her work has been distinctly rigorous; *Adi Parva* was selected by comic book historian Paul Gravett as one of the outstanding graphic novels of 2012. Her works recurrently explore themes like memento mori, sexuality and queer identity, mythological revisionism, ecological awareness, and the role of *Sutradhaar*—thread bearers upholding the unbroken tradition of oral storytelling across generations. Her narratives have achieved global reach through translations into French and Italian. Her contributions to contemporary literature were recognized internationally through a TED Fellowship in 2009, and domestically in March 2017, when she received India’s highest civilian honour for women’s empowerment, the Nari Shakti Puraskar, presented by President Pranab Mukherjee for her “unusual work that breaks boundaries” in art and literature.

Orijit Sen, widely regarded as the pioneer of graphic novels in India, profoundly shaped her path as a graphic novelist; it was at his home that she first encountered the medium and sparked her passion for it. Throughout her body of work, Patil bases her characters and settings on photographs and collages, a technique she adopted from Sen’s influence. Her Master of Fine Arts dissertation thesis on Draupadi ignited her passion for retelling ancient epics in innovative ways.

Patil describes herself as primarily writing-driven rather than art-driven, positioning herself as a writer first whose illustrations enhance the text’s flavour. In an interview with renowned comics critic Paul Gravett, Patil revealed her creative preferences, clarifying that she does not primarily identify as a “comic artist” but as a writer: “I choose to use images along with words at this point of time—I may choose not to do so in later work” (Patil and Gravett). She echoed this view earlier in a conversation with Jai Arjun Singh, stating, “There has always been a definite keel towards the written word. I like to draw, but my applied art training makes me see illustration from a versatile, do-what’s-needed slant. My writing is more careful, more uncompromised” (Patil and Singh). These statements underscore her text-first approach in graphic novels.

When reflecting on the structural design of *Adi Parva* and *Sauptik*, Patil emphasizes the deliberate binary oppositions that organize the duology:

Adi Parva is full of creation stories, *Sauptik* is all about dissolution. *Adi Parva* was led by amother, a queen [Ganga]. She is the complete opposite of *Sauptik*’s awkward, wounded male narrator [Ashwatthama]. I chose not to use the obvious “feminist” narrator [Draupadi] but rather to talk about heroic masculinity using an injured, non-heroic male voice—hardly the person you’d expect as a *sutradhaar* for stories that have so much to do with heroic masculinity. Both Ganga and Ashwatthama are wild card entries. All my books (including *Kari*, which is urban-contemporary and non-mythological) have an outlier *sutradhaar*. When they speak, even an old story can never be the same again. (qtd. in V. Singh 99–100)

This narrative positioning is marked on the exterior of the texts; by utilizing the preposition "via" rather than "by" on her cover pages, Patil explicitly signals her role not as an autographic re-creator of the epic, but as an editorial medium or *Sutradhaar* presenting a graphic re-narration.

As a graphic novel, the *Parva* duology operates through the interdependence of words and images, making meaning through their combined visual-verbal architecture rather than through text alone. Scholars such as Scott McCloud define comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” that communicate information and aesthetic meaning, while Hillary Chute and Pramod K. Nayar emphasise that graphic narratives employ this multimodal form to reinterpret history, myth, and cultural memory through the simultaneous interaction of visual and textual registers. The medium therefore demands active reader participation in negotiating panels, layouts, colour symbolism, and verbal narration, enabling complex literary, psychological, and political meanings that cannot be achieved by prose or image independently. Patil’s *Parva* duology exemplifies these possibilities by reimagining the *Mahabharata* through an integrated visual-verbal language in which page design, colour, symbolism, and narration function together to construct meaning. Accordingly, this article approaches the duology not merely as an illustrated retelling of the epic but as a sophisticated graphic narrative whose visual and textual strategies collectively reinforce its themes of cyclical existence, memory, trauma, and renewal.

1.2 Need for Retelling

While mentioning “The Need for Retelling Stories” in the Author’s Note of *Adi Parva*, Patil states that “*cosmic tales are like fish tanks in their need for continuous aeration*”. She further continues that a *Sutradhaar* tradition follows the existence of multiple and cyclical worlds at a time, not geographically but within us, human beings. To define this concept, she references Diana Eck’s definition of “organic ontology,” which views the “human body as primary schema for understanding the wider cosmos” (Patil 259). This belief is expressed in her duology with the narrative of cosmic tales, which are framed not as mythology but as allegory for the upliftment of human intellect and purification of the soul. The narratives transcend literal interpretation, functioning instead as allegory, with the tales serving as guiding principles for our life’s journey and its inherent troubles. These stories mirror the human psyche, caught between vices and virtues, as it strives for reformation and transformation.

Discussing the role of mythology in graphic narratives, Patil notes that “[m]ythology and fantasy lend themselves well to graphic novels... [t]he obvious reason is because lores are so rich in metaphor and imagery. My own reason, however, is that visuals allow me to bring a different dimension to concepts” (qtd. in V. Singh 99).

Myths are relevant today, as people believe that these are their stories about their origin and ancestors, as mentioned in the second chapter of *Adi Parva*. People always want to hear stories about themselves, no matter how many times they have heard them before. And the best time for storytelling is at night, as it provides people with time to reflect on their inner selves. “*The outer sun goes out and lets us look at the inner sun*” (12).

1.3 The Weight of Words: Justifying the Title’s Mythic Charge

As a graphic novel blends visual and textual layers, Patil deliberately curates both with precision, ensuring that every linguistic choice carries deliberate thematic weight. Nothing extraneous or contextually unfit is included. As noted in *Adi Parva*, the philosophy of naming directly mirrors a character's destiny:

If a name is a promise and a prediction, how inadequate to live with just one! So much better to have a name for dawn, a name for dusk. A name in the presence of the teacher, a name in the presence of the lover. A childhood name, a coming-of-age name. A kingly name, and a name to wear while travelling incognito. (173)

This layered philosophy suggests that the duology’s titles are deliberate narrative choices rather than mere coincidences. Throughout the epic, many characters bear multiple names, marking a pivotal moment in their lives. For instance, Devrat became Bheeshm, as he took the extreme oath to be celibate, an irony noted in the text: “*Ironic. A sworn celibate would end up being the patriarch figure to generations of Kurus*” (194). Similarly, the text tracks the changing identities of Ganga (as Janhavi or Bhagirathi), Satyavati (shifting from Matsyagandha to Yojanagandha), and Sarvadaman, who is ultimately crowned as Bharat. The title *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* splits into two key elements. *Adi Parva*, meaning “Book of the Beginnings”, serves as the first of the *Mahabharata*’s eighteen parvas, which covers the Kuru lineage, Pandava births, and origins as narrated by Sage Vaishampayana on the request of King Janmejaya during the *Sarpa Sattra*. “*Churning of the Ocean*” refers to the cosmic event where devas and asuras churn the primordial ocean using Mount Mandar and the serpent Anant to obtain *Amrita*, the nectar of immortality. This narrative transcends the literal, acting as a metaphor for the mind’s churning, tugged by vices and virtues, to elevate personal intellect and spiritual awareness. The title also symbolises the reader’s active role in storytelling, where engaging with the epic churns its layers to reveal philosophical and spiritual truths. This transforms reading into a discovery process, mirroring the cosmic event’s tension and emergence. Here, the ocean represents Indian mythology’s collective unconscious, brimming with archetypes and narratives. *Adi Parva* functions as Mount Mandar, the central axis, with the text’s unfolding storyline as Anant, the serpent-ropes, pulling readers toward enlightenment through interpretation. Unravelling the *Mahabharata* requires blending history, myths, ethics, and creativity—like churning *amrit* from the ocean—until “strange and luminous truths rise to the surface”. This churning thrives on polarities: *devas* and *asuras* must unite, yielding both nectar and venom. Similarly, the narrative unfolds through opposing elements—text against image, narrator versus audience, and ancient lore meeting the now—hinting via its title that it transcends mere dynastic and

historical chronicles. By linking the *Adi Parva* with the *Churning of the Ocean*, Patil signals a break from the epic's conventional focus on the cousins' rivalry and the Kurukshetra war. Instead, she ties the *Mahabharata* to a grand cosmic metaphor, recounting the origins of the universe, world, and myriad life forms. This approach elevates the narrative beyond familial strife to universal creation myths, where primordial churning births both harmony and turmoil. Patil reimagines the timeless *Mahabharata* myth through psychological depths, allegorical symbols, and a feminist gaze, drawing parallels across its stories. In essence, the title proclaims a graphic reimagining, where the epic is not a fixed text but a living, breathing process of interpretation and knowledge construction.

The title *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* divides into two resonant parts. *Sauptik*, meaning "The Book of the Sleeping Warriors", is rooted in the tenth parva of the *Mahabharata*, which recounts the nighttime slaughter of the Draupadi-Pandav sleeping sons by Ashwatthama. *Sauptik*, meaning 'sleep', blurs the line between slumber and death, illuminating themes of unconscious vulnerability and betrayal during the massacre. *Blood and Flowers* represent the cyclical and intertwined nature of life and death. They capture core dualities: death versus life, destruction against creation, human violence set against nature's uninterrupted flow. Blood represents the death, violence, and trauma of the Kurukshetra war and the subsequent night massacre. For Ashwatthama, it transcends war's metaphor, becoming his unending physical and psychological reality. Cursed by Krishna, he is fated to wander the earth, bearing a festering wound on his forehead where his divine gem was ripped out. He literally roams with blood oozing forever out of him. The blood also signifies his sin and psychological guilt—the slaughter of sleeping warriors and the attempt to destroy the Pandav lineage. In contrast, flowers represent the cyclical renewal of the natural world that continues to bloom regardless of war and violence. They embody rebirth, beauty, and life's persistence beyond violence. The visual dimension often includes portrayals of blood and flowers, suggesting the cyclical nature of life by evoking life's resurgence after death and memory's endurance post-devastation. The title perfectly represents the perspective of Ashwatthama as an immortal observer, being the only person to see blood and flowers, or death and life, not as opposites but as coexisting truths, the cycle of renewal.

While *Sauptik* offers a postmodern, perspective-driven retelling of the *Mahabharata* from Ashwatthama's viewpoint, rich with ecological and feminist undertones, *Adi Parva* utilises a layered, non-linear narrative that jumps across timelines and voices. This structural complexity echoes the sprawling, multifaceted spirit of the epic itself, honouring its dense character arcs and interconnected plots. The physical layout of the pages reflects this stylistic shift, as noted by Patil in an interview for *Hindustan Times* conducted by Soma Das: "While *Adi Parva* had rectangular frames for different incidents (similar to comics), *Sauptik* has multiple sequences occurring in the same frame, and pages devoted to text with a small illustration (Das).

1.4 Analysis of Cover Page

The front cover of *Adi Parva* depicts Vishnu reclining on Anant amid the infinite ocean, with a lotus sprouting from his navel, out of which Brahma emerges. Closer examination reveals multiple such Vishnus, affirming the faith in multiple universes and realities. The image also revokes diverse perspectives and opinions of the readers regarding the narrative and its unfolding process. The back cover features a heart-shaped *Amrit* pot, from which the nectar flows like flames, encircled by radiant jewels. This reinforces the narrative's core theme: churning the mind to yield the *Amrit* of elevated intellect and purity. The blue background of both pictures provides a sense of vastness and infinity and is centred on the origin of the universe and the transformative churning process.

The front cover of *Sauptik* shows a black-haired woman in a white saree with a red border, presumably Draupadi, standing inside the *Shree Yantra* made up of interlocking saffron-orange triangles. The white saree against a red background was used to evoke purity, in stark contrast to revenge, death and violence. Her flowing white drape trails toward the left edge of the front cover and continues across the back cover. At the back cover's centre stands a golden *Vajra*, embodying Ashwatthama's unyielding rage, with its black core suggesting inner darkness. Scattered white flowers around it symbolise purity, fragility, renewal, and rebirth. The white drape against the red background on both covers echoes the main theme of life intertwined with death in the narrative.

1.5 Themes

1.5.1 The Cyclical Essence of Existence

The duology functions as yin-yang halves, interconnected and interdependent, highlighting the cycle of renewal and destruction. *Adi Parva* embodies creation, *Sauptik* destruction: the glorious births and divine churning of the former culminate in the latter's bloody massacre and burning pyres. Their very titles evoke beginning and conclusion. *Sauptik's* subtitle, *Blood and Flowers*, amplifies this motif. Both emphasise the fleeting nature of life – kings, empires, emotions, all transient – and trace a full cycle from the rise of the Kuru dynasty in the *Adi Parva* to its fall in the *Sauptik*. Each narrative arc also forms a complete cycle on its own. *Adi Parva* opens by emphasising the *Sutradhaar's* crucial role and importance, concluding by handing the narrative thread to Ashwatthama as the successor, sustaining the cycle of oral storytelling. *Sauptik* begins and ends with the inverted tree motif and the account of Kurukshetra's final day, where Krshn urges Ashwatthama to withdraw his *Pashupat Astr*; when he fails, Krshn extracts the jewel from his forehead, completing the narrative arc.

1.5.2 The Outliers

Amruta Patil's duology adopts feminist and subaltern perspectives, echoing a revisionist retelling of the *Mahabharata* that foregrounds the identity, systemic injustices, and structural parallels of the Kuru clan's central women, while simultaneously amplifying the suppressed voices of marginalised communities. It remarks on how the important women are referred to only in relation to their fathers or geographical kingdoms—Draupadi

(daughter of Drupada), Panchali (princess of Panchala), Gandhari (princess of Gandhara), and Kunti (daughter of Kuntibhoja)—highlighting the patriarchal erasure of female identity. Furthermore, the tale reveals the deep-rooted misogyny of society. The brazen public humiliation of Draupadi and the callous refusal of Shakuntala at court are inseparable from the covert and pervasive contempt of women across the entire epic universe. Both *sutradhaars* (narrators) are structurally necessary social outcasts. Ganga is a celestial and a terrestrial being in *Adi Parva*, but she remains a perpetual outsider in both realms. Her transient presence connects the divine and human but does not completely belong to either. In *Sauptik*, Ashwatthama's exile introduces him to a rare kinship with cremation-ground dwellers, fellow outcasts uniquely capable of understanding his psychological ruination. Lastly, the text points to the systemic violence meted out to the indigenous forest-dwelling people (*nishadas*). The story explicitly deconstructs the moral purity of the Pandavs and Kunti, who escaped death in the explosive *Lakshagriha* (lac palace) by deliberately sacrificing a vulnerable tribal mother and her five innocent sons. This exploitation is mirrored in the tragedy of Ekalavya, who is first forced to sever his thumb as *gurudakshina*, only to be later slain by Krishna while serving as the military commander of Kamsa's forces.

1.5.3 Vices and Virtues

Amruta Patil's duology emphasises that the eternal friction between virtue and vice frequently manifests across mythology as the structural struggles between *Devas* and *Asuras*, Kadru and Vinata, Serpents and Garudas, and Kauravs and Pandavs. This relentless strife is fundamentally non-literal; it functions instead as a projection of the mind's internal psychological turmoil. Patil insists that *Devas* and *Asuras* are purely symbolic archetypes rather than literal, physical beings (102)—with *Devas* embodying humanity's highest spiritual aspirations, and *Asuras* representing our baser, ego-driven impulses (103). The structural imbalance is reflected in the fact that human transgressions naturally outnumber virtues: there are more *Asuras* than *Devas*, more snakes than birds, and more Kauravs than Pandavs. These epic struggles are profound psychological allegories, meant to embody philosophical truths. Whether depicting the churning of the ocean (*Samudra Manthan*), the Kurukshetra war, or the cosmic origin of life, these narratives consistently portray the internal battle for moral supremacy. Through virtue, an individual rises to a higher spiritual consciousness; through vice, he sinks to a psychological degradation. These warring factions, Patil points out, are simply the internal manifestations of the human mind. Furthermore, she notes that when the Trimurti bestows blessings or grants boons, the cosmos is simply rewarding focused, concentrated action. Consequently, the divine refusal to share the *Amrit* (nectar of immortality) with the *Asuras* embodies a foundational karmic law: actions performed with misguided, self-serving intentions will ultimately be denied ultimate spiritual reward.

1.5.4 Sutradhaars

Patil echoes the conventional tradition of *Surtaadhar* in her duology by employing distinct narrators for each volume who faithfully preserve the *Mahabharata*'s essence and

message while infusing their unique influences. Patil in the Author's Note at the end of *Adi Parva* states-

"A story passed down through the ages via oral storytellers cannot help but alter. A good storyteller, like a good teacher, speaks in the language of the hour. Her only allegiance is to the essence of the tale; the essence safeguarded, she is free to improvise the narrative to reflect the time. There are many stories, and each is an individual thread. The storyteller who wields and unfurls these myriad threads is traditionally known as the *Sutradhaar*, the threadbearer".

Adi Parva features Ganga, the celestial river, in her mortal guise as *sutradhaar*, who outlines the universe's genesis, diverse life forms, and character parallels within the epic, while illuminating divine interventions in human affairs. In *Sauptik*, Ashwatthama, the cursed immortal, narrates through a raw human lens, capturing the surge of inferiority, jealousy, and hatred, their devastating effects, and the ensuing bloodshed, violence, and post-war trauma. These unconventional voices spotlight epic outliers, such as women and forest-dwellers, in the mainstream epic by subverting traditional male-centric authority. Ganga's fluidity and Ashwatthama's rage enrich the retelling without distorting its essence. By handing the narrative to a 'mass murderer', Patil forces the reader to confront the epic's moral grey areas. Ashwatthama is not a hero; he is a villain seeking redemption, making his narration inherently unreliable yet deeply honest about the ugliness of war. In essence, Ganga invites you to witness the epic, while Ashwatthama forces you to feel its scars. It decentralises storytelling through visual-verbal techniques, actively engaging readers much like classical *Sutradhaars* in Sanskrit drama and oral epics.

1.5.5 Cow

The Cow is a connecting and recurring motif in the duology. *Adi Parva* opens with the attempted theft of a cow in the narrative process. It then unfolds the narrative of the theft of the cow (Kamdhenu) by the *Vasus* and their subsequent punishment to live a mortal life. *Sauptik* continues it with the tales of the theft of the cow (Kamdhenu) by Vishwamitra, the lack of cows in the Dron family, and the subsequent mockery of Ashwatthama by his peers. Bhoo Devi is personified as a cow, and Draupadi's humiliation and her subsequent anger is compared to the anger of Kamdhenu. *Sauptik* compares the wrath of Draupadi with that of Kamdhenu. Also, Bhoo Devi once took the form of a cow. King Prithu's gentle handling of it led to the earth being named after him—*Prithvi*.

1.5.6 Keeping the tradition alive

By integrating ancient myths into a graphic medium, Amruta Patil renders these complex narratives highly accessible and straightforward on the surface, while simultaneously demanding active reader engagement to uncover their deeper, latent meanings. She deftly filters the epic text of the *Mahabharata* through a postmodern lens, highlighting urgent feminist critiques, ecological anxieties, and the devastating realities of postwar trauma. To ground this modern reinterpretation, she employs the classical tradition of the *sutradhaar*, utilising distinctive narrators who consciously reshape the mythic history

through their own personal, subjective lenses. Significantly, character and divine names purposefully retain their traditional Sanskrit phonetics—such as Krshn, Shiv, Dron, Karn, Kamsa, and Pandav—eschewing the anglicised, vowel-ended variations like Krishna, Shiva, Drona, Karna, and Pandava. This linguistic fidelity is mirrored visually, as she carefully clothes her figures in traditional, historically minded attire suited to the geographical and cultural settings of the epic landscape.

1.5.7 Myths as memories

The *Parva* Duology unifies through recurrent themes, recasting the epic as a meditation on existence. This mirrors Joseph Campbell's assertion in *The Power of Myth* that myths are fundamentally rooted in human memory and dreamscapes. Campbell famously posited that dreams are private myths, while myths function as public dreams—both serving as profound expressions of the collective unconscious. Its two *sutradhaars*—Ganga in *Adi Parva* and Ashwatthama in *Sauptik*—are both immortals, though Ganga boasts divine origins while Ashwatthama wanders eternally, cursed for his sins. Ganga recounts myths as timeless and impersonal; Ashwatthama, as raw and personal. His narration is non-linear, jumping between memory, myth, and immediate pain. Together, they transmute myths into lived memories: Ganga flows gracefully like river silt, carrying narratives effortlessly onwards, while Ashwatthama relives the massacre in perpetual torment, mirroring his curse.

1.5.8 Unnatural Births

The duology highlights that nearly every major protagonist in the epic landscape shares an unnatural birth or extra-human origin, creating a universe marked by direct divine-human interaction. The text tracks the fire-born origins of the twins Draupadi and Dhrishtadyumna, the mantra-blessed births of the Pandavs, the manifestation of the hundred Kauravs from a preserved mass of flesh split into individual jars, and the extra-uterine births of Dron, Kripa, and Satyawati (born from an *apsara* transformed into a fish). Ganga is a celestial being who marries a human king, Shantanu, and gives birth to Bheeshm or Devavrat. Satyawati, the second wife of King Shantanu, was born from a fish. Patil employs these unconventional origins to allegorise the emergence of internal virtues and vices. The origin of the offspring of Kashyap and the other key characters allegorises the birth of virtue and vices inherent in living beings and the effect of our actions on our lives. They are structural enactments of the opposing forces of human consciousness. These tales happened in a remote mythic time, but are near enough to determine the current psychological realities.

1.5.9 Identity

Amruta Patil's duology presents individuals as adrift and fundamentally lacking direction when they are either unable or unwilling to recognise their roots. This structural emphasis on identity and genealogy forms the vital framework for Sage Vaishampayana's narration of the *Mahabharata* to King Janamejaya, a recitation requested during the catastrophic *Sarpa Sattra* (snake sacrifice). In the *Adi Parva*, Ganga observes that subsequent generations stopped speaking of the great war to avoid resurrecting its collective trauma. However, this enforced silence inadvertently catalysed a severe loss of identity and ancestral belonging in the eras that followed—a psychological vacuum acutely visible in King

Janamejaya. This crisis of origin is sharply contrasted through the figures of Arjun and Karn in *Sauptik*. While both warriors grappled with the void of an absentee biological father, this lack of paternal validation left Arjun entirely unbothered, whereas Karn consumed his entire life in a desperate, agonising search for his true heritage. This literary duality mirrors the contemporary world, where the rapid currents of globalisation and modern life frequently alienate individuals from their cultural foundations. Within the ecosystem of the epic, those who consciously accept their roots ultimately unlock greatness, while those who obsessively chase an elusive or fabricated identity are condemned to systemic suffering. Janamejaya's modern existential crisis stems directly from this institutional amnesia; he was raised in a profound historical vacuum, as the text notes: "Janmejjaya was raised in a family that didn't talk history, except by allusion" (143).

1.5.10 Cyclical Echoes

Amruta Patil's duology structurally pairs characters to illuminate their profound thematic similarities and stark psychological contrasts. For instance, the archetypal figures of Kadru and Vinata are explicitly linked to Gandhari and Kunti. This is achieved not only through the evocative chapter title "Reptilian Mother, Avian Mother" but also by visually illustrating them in analogous iconographic positions. Similarly, Ganga and Satyawati share a celestial lineage—one a river goddess, the other the daughter of an apsara—and both marry King Shantanu after imposing strict, non-negotiable prerequisites upon him. Satyawati's trajectory further mirrors that of Shakuntala; both are the foster daughters of sages, born of apsaras, whose foundational romances unfold on idyllic riverbanks before they marry into the Kuru clan. This web of fosterage and premarital motherhood extends to Kunti and Satyawati, both of whom receive potent boons from wandering rishis, resulting in secret firstborn sons before their formal marriages into the dynasty. The text also explores the burden of filial piety through structural foils: Puru and Bheeshm both take extreme, self-sacrificing vows to satisfy their fathers' desires, while Kadru and Yayati represent the dark inversion of parenthood, ruthlessly cursing their offspring when they refuse to submit to their wills. In *Sauptik*, the narrative explicitly sharpens the rivalries between Bhim and Duryodhan, and Karn and Arjun. Bhim and Duryodhan, born on the exact same day, share identical physical builds and master the mace. Conversely, Karn and Arjun are bound by archery yet defined by the shadow of an absentee biological father; while this abandonment fractures Karn's life into a perpetual, agonising search for identity, it shapes Arjun's destiny far differently. Ashwatthama directly mirrors Duryodhan; both harbour a consuming hatred for the Pandavs (specifically Arjun) and suffer from the emotional neglect of their ambitious fathers. This paternal failure links Dhritrashtra and Dron, both of whom compromise their moral integrity and choose a path of ruin to appease their sons. Ultimately, King Janamejaya's vengeful *Sarpa Sattra* (snake sacrifice) serves as a macrocosmic mirror for all characters in the epic who consume themselves seeking retribution for their lost loved ones.

1.5.11 Revenge

Revenge is a central motive in the *Mahabharata*. Many pivotal events unfold because characters pursue vengeance for humiliation, injustice, or the deaths of loved ones,

and the innocent often pay the price. In the *Adi Parva*, King Janmejaya organises the *Sarpa Sattr* to slay Takshak in retaliation for his father's death, slaughtering countless innocent and unrelated serpents. Similarly, in *Sauptik*, Ashwatthama murders the innocent sleeping Draupadi's sons to avenge his father. Dron seeks retribution against Drupad for breaking his childhood pact of sharing the kingdom with him, and Drupad, in turn, conducts a yajna to beget a son destined to kill Dron. Humiliated by the mockery at the illusion (*Maya*) palace, Duryodhan engineers the dice game that leads to the Pandavs' disgrace and Draupadi's public humiliation.

1.6 Conclusion

In the graphic medium, Amruta Patil's *Parva* duology reimagines the *Mahabharata* not as a static epic in cultural memory but as a living, changing narrative that speaks to contemporary concerns. This study shows how Patil establishes a complex web of visual, verbal and thematic correspondences that link the two volumes into one cohesive whole by reading *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* as a single artistic enterprise and not two separate texts. This shift from Ganga's grand cosmic account to Ashwatthama's fractured, trauma-filled view is a deliberate transition from creation to dissolution, from collective myth to individual memory, thus reinforcing the cyclical worldview that supports the duology. The analysis also shows how motifs such as the sutradhaar tradition, cyclical existence, identity, revenge, unnatural births, and the symbolic interplay of blood and flowers connect distant episodes and highlight the psychological, philosophical, and ethical dimensions of the epic. Patil's visual strategies like her cover designs, page layouts, colour symbolism and non-linear narrative sequencing add meaning beyond the written text, making mythology a full visual-verbal experience that actively involves readers in decoding the narrative. The duology does not merely adapt the *Mahabharata* but re-visions it through feminist, ecological and postmodern perspectives while being rooted in the oral storytelling tradition and cultural ethos of the epic. In the end, the *Parva* duology shows that myths survive not because they are fixed, but because every generation reinterprets them in ways that connect with its own intellectual and emotional realities. Patil's work is a fine example of how the medium of the graphic novel can preserve the core of ancient stories and at the same time expand their interpretative possibilities. The duology foregrounds the interdependence of myth, memory, trauma, and renewal to affirm that storytelling is itself a cyclical act of cultural continuity, inviting readers to participate in the perpetual process of reinterpreting the past to illuminate the present.

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