

Chapter – 5

Capitalist Ideologies and Traditional and Organic Intellectuals

5.1 Introduction

In the Indian context, the term ‘caste’ is defined by different critics according to their view of India’s caste structure. Nesfield defines caste as “a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community” (qtd. in Ambedkar 4). A group’s caste is determined by a shared lifestyle and vocation that is passed down through generations within the group.

The notion of caste originated in the primordial communal society, and this entails establishing the earliest socioeconomic system in human history inside a primitive communal organisation. Dr. Ketkar defines caste as “a social group having two characteristics: (i) membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born; (ii) the members are forbidden by an inexorable social law to marry outside the group.” (qtd. in Ambedkar 4).

Indian mythological stories provide insight into the ancient period’s lifestyle. Indian epics describe the ancient Indians’ caste-based structure and way of life. In the retellings of *Mahabharata* the downfall of the caste system is depicted by the authors. The generation gap is critical in debating the relevance of caste. The authors of the retellings of *Mahabharata* have emphasised the rigidity of caste. This demonstrates indirectly the collapse of caste-based thinking occurring in people’s mind over centuries. It can be seen that caste was initially not rigorous but gradually became a focal point for any issue.

This chapter examines the capitalist ideology over caste and the power they have over the public. Also explores two extremists (*Brahmin* Parashurama and *Naga*

leader Takshaka) who become rebellious against the ruling caste people. Expounds on the Naga people's migration portraying the ruling caste's influence over the lower caste as well as the ruling caste's dominance over the upper caste. This chapter also includes examples of 'Traditional' and 'Organic' Intellectuals from the select retellings of *Mahabharata*.

5.2 Capitalist Ideologies and Power of the Ruling caste (*Kshatriyas*):

The kings of Hastinapur believed that their kingdom provided sufficient freedom to the lower castes. They refused to recognize the realities of their previous status. They were imaginative, believing that their kingdom's inhabitants were not impoverished compared to the neighbouring kingdom. Duryodhana interrogates Bhishma in *Ajaya Roll of the Dice* about the poor situation of the people in their kingdom. This demonstrates that individuals from lower castes are not treated well in Hastinapur. Bhishma attributes this to the fact that all of this discrimination, caste-based system, and advantages are as ancient as this civilisation. Caste existed long before he was born, and he is only adhering to what the rule book states and what his forefathers preached. He also asserts that because it has existed for many years, he cannot alter anything in a single day or in the near future.

Bhishma expresses his ideas on the caste system here, as well as his devious attempt to evade interrogation. He asserts that he has ruled the country for a long period of time and that this obligation prevents him from bringing about any change in the kingdom. Additionally, he says that leading a country is not a simple task.

You think I made this society? I only inherited it. I am doing my *Karma*, my duty as a *Kshatriya*, and that is to rule with fairness. I have no utopian dreams of changing the world in a day. . . Oppression, discrimination and privilege, for a few, are as old as civilization. The caste system was well entrenched

centuries before my birth. I cannot topple it in a day, nor am I a social reformer. I merely ensure that the poor and those oppressed by birth do not suffer even more. I can ensure power does not go to the heads of the elite.(Neelakantan 78)

Bhishma asserts that he is not a social reformer and that, as a public servant, he desired to be fair to the populace. This demonstrates that he is not truly interested in bringing about change in society but rather in ensuring that impoverished people do not suffer much more than they already do. Additionally, *Kshatriya*'s power should not make him feel superior to the *Shudras* since this would result in great oppression. However, he is capable of being perceived in this manner. With his might, he controls everyone.

The dialogue between Bhishma and Vidura demonstrates that Bhishma possessed a higher philosophy. Neelakantan depicts this superior ideology in such a way that he laments the current caste-based society and the inflexible ideology that governs the populace. Neelakantan highlights the capitalists' ideology through Bhishma. Bhishma feels that Hastinapur is better than other kingdoms in regards to caste. The reason is Hastinapur has allowed Vidura to be the prime minister of Hastinapur, though he is born for a house maid "Bhishma looked into his Prime Minister's eyes and smiled . . . you are my nephew, but still you are a *Shudra*, since your mother was a house cleaner. Here your taunted for your caste, irrespective of your talent and knowledge." (Neelakantan 81) Thus, in Hastinapur Vidura was elevated to the position of Prime Minister and welcomed into the palace to live among them.

One of the main reasons could be that Vidura was born for Veda Vyasa, a *Brahmin*; in that sense Vidura becomes half *Brahmin*, which makes him enjoy certain

privileges. In other nations, people like Vidura are forced to reside in remote areas, where they are viewed as untouchables and unapproachable near the palace.

Additionally Vidura would not have been permitted to learn Vedas and they will purify the palace by claiming that he has defiled the palace with his presence.

. . . had you been in one of those kingdoms where Parashurama's writ rules, you would be living far from the capital city, untouchable, unapproachable, illiterate, ignorant, and no better than a pig. That is caste for you; not suffering these little taunts from jealous people. If my capital were Muzaris or Madurai, instead of Hastinapur, I would now be washing my palace with cow dung and urine to cleanse the ground polluted by your footsteps.(Neelakantan 81)

This incident highlights the “idea of Pollution” with the presence of lower-caste people in the upper caste residence. This “idea of pollution” is one of the characteristics of Caste which has a religious essence in it as claimed by Senart “The “idea of pollution” has been attached to the institution of caste, only because the caste that enjoys the highest rank is the priestly caste: we may therefore conclude that the “idea of pollution” is a characteristics of caste only insofar as caste has a religious flavour” (Ambedkar 5)

This demonstrates that Hastinapur provided a minimal opportunity for lower caste individuals. Nonetheless, Vidura is granted this privilege solely because he was born as a stepbrother to Dhirtarashtra and Pandu. Other low caste persons in neighbouring kingdoms do not have the same privileges. In Hastinapur, the lower castes are treated similarly; they are told that their presence within the palace is banned and that if they do enter, the entire palace is scrubbed and purified.

Vidura is permitted to enter the palace since refusing him would be equivalent to challenging the identity of his lineages and his grandmother Satyawati, who was

also of a lower caste, a fisher woman. She has entered the palace and been granted the title of Queen. According to Bhishma, the system was not as rigorous as when Satyawati married Shantanu. The system got increasingly rigorous throughout time, and it has now become a major issue in all of the kingdoms.

Vidura stood silent, thinking that the kind of education he himself had received would now be impossible for any *Shudra* boy things had changed so much for the worse in this land no one with the baggage of low cast like him could Aspire to be even a clerk in government service let alone the Prime Minister of Hastinapur merit no longer counted every position was based on caste (Neelakantan, 85).

Neelakantan makes an attempt to demonstrate how the caste system has become increasingly strict in a very short period of time. Discrimination and ideology based on caste were spreading quicker in people's minds, and upper-caste began to rule the lower caste people. Upper caste *Kshatriyas* developed a sense of superiority, which led them to discriminate against members of the lower castes. They also forbade the lower castes from approaching the area where they dwelt. They were kept at a great distance from their kingdom, and all the lower caste people acknowledged their existence and began living among their circle once they were born. This acceptance of their state of being is what Gramsci claims as Hegemony. "As Gramsci had made clear, the bourgeoisie is different from other ruling classes of the past in one important sense. Its rule is based on the concept of hegemony, that is, rule by consent." (Sinha 25) They did not attempt to reach the capital; their lower caste attitude or ideology taunted them not to approach their capital and fight for their rights. Additionally, they were denied the opportunity to approach the capital and advocate for their rights.

Lower caste people have established an atmosphere conducive to their survival. They were kept out of the kingdom and were prohibited from entering; untouchables were punished for entering the capital. The lower castes feared such punishments and did not wish to die. Thus, they isolated themselves from the city and developed a way of life in this manner. They accepted their fate and lived accordingly, despite their powers and the misery of being isolated from the general population.

When Duryodhana was taken in for trial for murdering his cousin Bhima, there was no witness to the occurrence save for an untouchable Jara. When Bhishma requests a witness during that investigation, Yudhistira informs him that the witness is an untouchable youngster who is not permitted to enter the palace. His presence will pollute the area, and these untouchables are not permitted to even stroll along the road leading to the palace. However, in an exceptional situation, untouchables were permitted to enter the *Saba* in order to bring justice to their sides. To obtain permission for an untouchable to enter the palace, *Brahmins* petitioned the king to impose a penalty on them.

Allowing a *Nishada* to enter a palace was considered a sin in ancient India. If they are forced to tolerate them, they must do something to compensate for or remedy their transgression. “We have discussed the matter and the learned scholars are of the opinion that the Untouchable may be allowed in as an exceptional case. There are provisions for it in the *Shashtra*. But the king will have to do penance for this sin. A thousand *Brahmins* will have to be fed and given gifts to them...” (Neelakantan 155-156) In this episode, it is clear that an untouchable is allowed entry into the palace for their benefit. The king likewise takes the punishment to ascertain the truth and render an accurate verdict.

Bhishma was represented as a person who is unconcerned about a person's caste. Since he desired only justice and adhered to the path of *Dharma*, which disregards a person's caste or religion, the only thing that mattered to Bhishma was a proper justification and punishment for the sinner. It is a well-known fact that Bhishma is the embodiment of *Dharma*. Bhishma is implicitly maintaining a caste consciousness in his psyche by doing so. He is neutral and respects all caste members equally by adhering to *Dharma*. He places no particular emphasis on *Brahmins* because of their caste supremacy.

When a *Brahmin* wants to punish a king for allowing an untouchable into *Saba*, Bhishma objects. "The king will do no such things," Bhishma pronounced, his voice shaking with anger. If you wish to bring forward a witness, do so without conditions attached..." (Neelakantan 156) He requests that they produce witnesses or the court be dismissed. He is averse to paying the penalty in order to expose the truth, but King Dhirtarashtra surprises him by agreeing to pay the penalty. This demonstrates that, as a result of his son being taken in for trial, he is willing to go to any length to defend his son's innocence.

This demonstrates unequivocally that an upper caste has all the loopholes necessary to establish their so-called innocence. King is willing to do anything; *Brahmins* wield such power by manipulating the king or indirectly threatening the king through the use of *Shastras*. With the rule book in mind, make the ruling caste people dance to their song in an indirect manner. Most significantly, the ruling class fears God and the sages because they are unwilling to bear any curse from them. Because these *Brahmins* are regarded as equivalent to God, the ruling class often accepts anything a *Brahmin* requests. "... the King spoke in a soft voice. "I agree to

the penance. I will do whatever the *Brahmin* asks. Let the truth come out. If my son has indeed committed murder, I will not spare him.” (Neelakantan 156)

The upper caste wants lower caste people to work for them, but once that is accomplished, they abandon them and refuse to allow them to be with them. Once the work is done immediately the ‘idea of pollution’ enters into the mind of a ruling caste. Until then, the same lower caste people worked and built homes for these individuals. The lower caste people are talented enough to build a lovely city for the ruling caste, and they were skilled at sculpting, as seen in this episode, in which Mayasura constructs a gorgeous city for the Pandavas that is brimming with magical elements. However, he was banished from that location. His final request, to let the sculpture he created be seen, was denied by the Pandavas. Until Mayasura built the city, he was not regarded as a lower caste member, and the concept of pollution was unimportant. Once the job was completed, the ruling caste began to berate him and removed him from the location even before he opened the Goddess’s eyes. ““Let me open their eyes... Please let me open their eyes...” Mayasura cried . . . they dragged the struggling and pleading Mayasura from the temple he had toiled three years to build.” (Neelakantan 380)

Mayasura was permitted to construct the goddess idol, but the right of opening the eyes was reserved for someone else. Despite Mayasura’s entreaties, he was expelled. He was even threatened with death if he refused to follow their regulations. While the idol he created was deemed fortunate, allowing him to open the statue’s eyes will contaminate the whole area and bring disaster to the realm. This type of injustice occurred in the ancient world. The ruling elite used the lower castes extensively, but their abilities and treatment were not recognised. “He is an untouchable. Stop him before he defiles everything that is holy,’ someone cried. The

crowd parted in horror as if *Asura* architect carried a contagious disease.”

(Neelakantan 379)

It is very apparent that the ruling elite had no qualms about murdering the lower caste. If a lower-caste man speaks out against them, they punish him severely or sometimes even murder him. When Mayasura desired to open the idol’s eyes, he was restrained and had he battled anymore the ruling caste would have murdered him; nevertheless, they spared his life because he is the one who made the idol. “Arjuna, once you grow wiser , you will understand that temples are not required for enlightened men . . . Do not worry about that *Asura*. You spared his life in exchange for his skills. You have both done your duty and acted as per *Dharma*.” (Neelakantan 381)

5.3 Two Extremists

Bhishma also possesses an elite personality and a better philosophy, which enabled him to let his stepson Vidura into the palace and appoint him prime minister of Hastinapur. It is self-evident that the ruling elite have complete authority to amend the rules to their liking. According to Bhishma, everything changes with time, except that things will never be the same as they were previously. In a talk with Vidura he reveals his ideas on caste, stating that lower caste individuals become terrorists when their demands are not met by the kingdom to which they belong. When Vidura refers to Naga King Takshaka as a terrorist, Bhishma corrects him, stating that they employ terrors, not terrorists. He became a rebel as a result of our failure to treat the poor and oppressed. It is a Kingdom’s responsibility to protect all of its citizens. When officials fail to meet everyone’s requirements, it is but natural for them to revolt against them in order to get those demands fulfilled.

“They used terror, but they are not terrorists. The rebellion led by Nagas is a reaction to our failure to protect the weak and downtrodden. Takshaka is a creation of that failure. The state’s duty is to protect the weak from being oppressed by the strong. When the state fails to do so, the weak will rebel. In a way, the truce I made with Parashurama led inevitably to the rise of Takshaka. He is the mirror opposite of Parashurama.” (Neelakantan 84)

Through this discourse, Neelakantan has demonstrated that it is not just the lower caste forest dwellers and his clan that desire to become the power centre among the other kingdoms, but also Parashurama (a *Brahmin*). Takshaka’s and Parashurama’s desires are identical. Takshaka, the Naga chieftain, desires a country that prioritises Nagas and Parashurama’s goal for the entire kingdom to become *Brahmins*. Bhishma also claims Parashurama as having converted practically all of the southern states to *Brahmins* by his abilities and preachings, eradicating other caste people and relegating the remainder to the periphery.

. . . What does Parashurama want? Complete Brahman hegemony and his interpretation of our holy scripture to prevail. He wants to be the absolute power centre. Parashurama’s clan has been waging war against all other castes, and the *Kshatriyas* in particular, for a thousand years, to establish a perfect kingdom for the *Brahmins*. All of South India resented the evil of caste. (Neelakantan 84)

Parashurama’s actions may show the strength and value of caste superiority. He is higher in caste, which enabled him to satisfy his ambition faster than the lower caste member, Takshaka. Takshaka is still attempting to break free from his circle; only after doing so can he wage war against the ruling caste *Kshatriya*. Another advantage of being an upper caste member is that a *Kshatriya* is fearful of attacking a

Brahmin. Nagas are never permitted to express their ideas, manipulating the ruling class is a nightmare for them.

The two distinct castes, one the highest and other the lowest, share the same desire. They wish for their caste members to amass all money and knowledge on their own. They wish for their society to perish everything that is available in the world, which clearly demonstrates that one group of individuals, has all the controlling authority and enjoys all the available riches; they are known as the *Kshatriyas*. The governing authority of *Kshatriya* category members may be deduced from their other caste members' desires and rebellious natures. Even though they are the highest caste, the *Brahmins* are incapable of dominating. Through their repeated protests and wars against a large number of Kings, they establish themselves as the centre of power and acquire ruling authorities. Simultaneously, lower caste members struggle to extract authority away from the governing *Kshatriyas*. More than power, the lower caste people are fighting for their independence.

Neelakantan attempts to convey the message that it is elites' ideology about a downtrodden person, that, if a lower caste man obtains power, he will not control a society where equality becomes a priority. He also begins governing others according to his desires, demonstrating indirectly that this ruling philosophy and tactics of individuals are based on their desires.

Takshaka is nothing but a Naga Parashurama. He too, wants a perfect world where the oppressed becomes the oppressor. All his talk about equality is mere eyewash. If he wins, he will be just another tyrant, like Parashurama. Then the hunted will be the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas*, and even other *Shudras*, who the Naga think are not downtrodden enough.(Neelakantan 84-85)

The author (Neelakantan) attempts to demonstrate that *Brahmins* possess a capacity for thought that transcends the beliefs given by a single individual. They are not like other people who just obey a single man's command. They share their concerns, clarify their doubts, and then act appropriately. "In fact, it will be far worse than Parashurama taking over, since not all *Brahmins* accept his narrow ideology. The likes of Kripa and Carvaka among the *Brahmins*, may rebel and die as martyrs if Parashurama succeeds." (Neelakantan 85)

Such talent and power are non-existent among the poor *Nishadas*. They had already gone without food and shelter for so many days that they would accept anything in exchange for food and shelter. Additionally, Neelakantan states that a *Brahmin's* thinking power is a result of the lessons he learned, but impoverished people lack such capability due to their restriction to get education. *Nishadas* lack thinking ability, due to their lack of education making them inferior to that of a *Brahmin*, when a lower caste man becomes a leader, he subjugates his troop even farther than they are today. A *Nishada* leader employs his community members as a tool and easily threatens them. They lack the foresight to resist or challenge the directives, and they merely follow the commands and carry out their responsibilities as they do today.

In the case of Takshaka, no such position exists, except for the might of Hastinapur. It is easier to fool and brainwash a poor *Nishada* or Naga, who has barely anything to eat and almost nothing to lose, by offering a brave new world. It is easy to get such people to die for his cause, because the people Takshaka has chosen as his tools, are those we abandoned to starve long ago. We have appropriated their farmlands, driven them away from their forests, and chased them out of our royal footpaths, so now they have nowhere to go

but into the embrace of the Naga leader. Since none of our *Brahmin* teachers is prepared to instruct anyone other than *Brahmins* or *Kshatriyas*; we are creating legions of illiterate and ignorant folk who will be ready to die for Takshaka's cause. When our school fails to teach our children what they should know, other schools take their place and teach different lessons, which we may not like. We are building our own funeral pyre (Neelakantan 85).

One distinction is that when they obey *Nishada* leaders, their famine ceases. It is normal for a person to succumb to famine. When provided with adequate food and housing, everyone will naturally strive to avoid losing the opportunity to lead a substandard lifestyle that will damage his family members. Thus, lower caste people live in poverty now, while *Kshatriyas* rule them. They have allowed them to die of hunger for days and have prevented them from entering the palace or learning any art or Vedas. *Kshatriyas* have maintained the *Nishadas*/Nagas as fools and enslaved them in this manner in order to force them to live as a poor person. They did not wish for them to develop and cast doubt on their ruling structure. Neelakantan conveyed his views on *Kshatriya* governance during the ancient time and also on the situation of the *Nishadas* through Bhishma's conversation.

The concept of rebellion of Nagas and *Brahmins* stems from the *Kshatriyas*' inability to feed and care for them. Both *Brahman* and *Nishada* revolt against the Kingdoms in an attempt to become the power centre and achieve controlling authority. One significant distinction between a *Brahmin* and a *Nishada* is that if a *Brahmin* subjugates another *Brahmin* or pushes any ideology on a group of *Brahmin* community members, they will not accept it as an order or behave mindlessly in accordance with it. They cast doubt on that ideology, study its influence and

implications, and attempt to define the ideology's intrinsic value before adopting and acting on it.

However, if a *Nishada* becomes a leader and issues an order, the *Nishada* and other inferior communities will mindlessly follow the command without any analysis or explication. This knowledge gap exists because they are born into their group and are prohibited from learning any skills or acquiring any knowledge that may prompt them to question their leaders' directives. Their prolonged deprivation prevents them from questioning their leaders; rather, they obey and work in exchange for food and a better living.

Both *Brahmin* and *Nishada*, regardless of their group, dominate the other to live a better life. The distinction is that the latter has little trouble oppressing the others, whilst the former has little problem subjugating the other. Through the characters the author of *Ajaya* has addressed the education level received by each category of people, their lifestyles, and the manner in which the *Kshatriya* category people have maintained control over the other categories of people.

While education, *Brahmins* educate in such a way that a prince develops a caste consciousness. During the Epic period, schooling was structured in such a way that it taught a prince how to act properly and also how to behave with the other caste members under all the rules and regulations of caste. *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* were taught that touching or playing with a *Shudra* boy pollutes the environment and is thus forbidden for a prince to do. This concept is passed down from generation to generation in perpetuity, instilling a caste-aware mindset in every upper-caste person.

5.4 Duryodhana as Casteless

Neelakantan depicts Duryodhana as a casteless individual who feels sorry for the lower castes. Duryodhana's vision of establishing an egalitarian society dates all

the way back to his youth. From his youth, he has been questioning the authorities about the poverty in his kingdom. He is perplexed by the officials' inaction in response to the hardship experienced by lower caste people and the rationale for their apathetic treatment of untouchables. Later in life, this concept matured and prepared the road for him to accept Karna as a friend and treat him equally to the other members of his category.

. . . Suyodhana said, "The condition of these tribes in our kingdom is so sad. It is a shame that so many people have nothing to eat. The way the untouchables live, is pathetic. Why is there so much injustice in the world? Why does uncle Bhishma do nothing about it? I hate that stupid taboos and caste rules" (Neelakantan 96).

Duryodhana was constantly adamant about establishing a society free of caste divisions. Neelakantan has used him to communicate his idea about the ancient caste-based governing and also about the people's poverty. By depicting Duryodhana as a casteless individual, Neelakantan hopes to influence the modern generation to develop a similar ideology like Duryodhana, who defies the caste system and lives according to his own thoughts. While developing, the younger generation must instil a casteless attitude in them, which will result in a caste-free society that treats everyone equally.

Caste becomes a large barrier that isolates the low-caste individuals inside their group and prevents them from acquiring further skills and maturing intellectually. While growing up, the younger generation should not be taught about caste, even if they have been taught about its norms and regulations. To build a society that serves all equitably, one must act like Duryodhana and oppose the caste system from an early age.

5.5 Status versus Power

Caste determines a person's status, but power is not determined by caste.

There is a relative distinction between a person's position and power. A person with significant political and economic influence does not have to be from an upper caste. At the same time, a person from an upper caste is not necessarily wealthy, nor does his upper caste standing always make him wealthy. This distinction is seen in the retellings of *Mahabharata*. The authors (Neelakantan and Pattanaik) have provided sufficient space in the retellings to assess such treatment.

“Suyodhana does poverty knock at the door and ask for your caste before entering your home? Can you imagine how poor we were, before my father got this job? I had never seen milk in my life before we came here. . . True, the condition of the lower caste is bad, but there is great poverty in every caste. A few people have wealth, power and privilege. The majority suffers.”
(Neelakantan 97)

This specific dialogue between Ashwathama and Duryodhana demonstrates that poverty does not exist just for *Shudras* and *Nishadas*; it also exists among *Brahmins* other than those belonging to the *Kshatriya* category, the remainder must face poverty in some form. *Kshatriyas* are supposed to look after the livelihoods of members of other castes; nevertheless, the majority of the ruling class members are preoccupied with expanding the kingdom, while some are preoccupied with their own family's wellbeing.

At times the king is above the Brahman, as for example in the royal consecration ceremony. At other times the Brahman appears to be superior to the king, as for example in the Manu *Dharmasastra*, and in the passages from the *Mahabharata*. This conundrum is often addressed in terms of the

postulation of two levels of truth, a higher level at which the Brahman is clearly pre-eminent, the source of everything else, and a lower level at which kings must protect and sponsor *Brahmins* in order for them to exist, as gods, on earth. (Dirks 25)

Especially in the retellings of *Mahabharata*, Bhishma, for example, seems to have had the most authoritative power. He was aware of the poverty of Hastinapur but chose to ignore it, claiming that this caste-based separation was not his fault and that he lacked the authority to halt it or to improve their lot in a single day. It existed before his birth and continues to exist today, as does he. Kings must look after the sages and Rishis who are a part of their kingdom and provide them with the necessities of life. The majority of Kings hire *Brahmins* as advisors and instructors for their children, and they are compensated, which allows them to enjoy a better life than the *Nishadas*. Both *Brahmins* and *Nishadas* dwell in the woodlands, but a *Brahmin* has a better life than a *Nishada*. A King is not afraid of *Nishadas* but afraid of *Brahmins* because “The Brahmin has been regarded as the most important subject, needing protection from the king, so much so that the king is styled the protector of the Brahmins and the cows, other subjects being regarded as too insignificant to be mentioned.” (Ghurye 8) This demonstrates how *Brahmins* have lived intelligently through as well as *Nishada*’s failure to be an intellectual on a par with the rest. Myth has a significant influence on everyone’s life; *Brahmins* indirectly govern kings by the creation of myths. This demonstrates status based domination happened indirectly with the aid of myth and traditions “In historical epochs before capitalism, in particular, and in the underdeveloped capitalist world, status- based inequalities (between ethnic and cultural communities, for example) are much more widespread than pure class struggle.” (Worsley 105)

The *Kshatriyas* have no fear of anybody higher in caste; *Brahmins* are not treated equally with *Shudras*; similarly to *Shudras*, *Brahmins* have been humiliated for their condition. A *Brahmin* must endure humiliation under the reign of a *Kshatriya*, as is seen in the instance of Drona. When he approaches King Drupada for assistance, instead of assisting Drona, he humiliates him and states that he would assist him in the name of charity, not friendship. “Friendship exists among equals. We were friends then. Now I am a rich king and you are a poor priest. We cannot be friends. Do not claim a cow in the name of friendship; ask for alms and I shall give you a cow in charity” (Pattanaik 58). This demonstrates that once a person attains the status of king, his superior nature naturally enters his thinking and subjugates others.

A King’s humiliation instilled enmity in the psyche of a *Brahmin* Drona. As a result, he became King Drupada’s rebel. An individual or a group of people becomes a rebel against the ruling class as a result of a King’s arrogance and abuse of his fellow creatures. “Hurt and humiliated by Drupada’s words, Drona stormed out of Panchala, determined to one day become Drupada’s equal” (Pattanaik 58).

Pattanaik is attempting to represent an epic-era ruler who is obligated to care for the rishi either through charity or by paying for their teaching. Thus, King Drupada saw Drona as a Rishi and bestowed money on him in the name of charity. However, Drona, who did not regard him as a king but rather as a friend, who was on an equal footing with him, sought to be treated equally. This demonstrates that King Drupada is a devout follower of *Dharma* and that he handled Drona properly in the name of *Dharma*, without regard for the many forms that exist among themselves.

Additionally, Pattanaik has drawn parallels between this episode and a story about Krishna and Sudama, who, like Drupada and Drona, were close friends. Krishna made a vow to Sudama that he would bestow wealth on his companion. In contrast to

Drupada, Krishna was unconcerned with *Dharma*. For him, love, friendship, and generosity toward other beings were more important than rules and regulations; he states that “Without genuine love, laws and rules are worthless” (Pattanaik 59). The underlying ideology is that the majority of Kings humiliates the poor and claims to strictly follow *Dharma*. By drawing principles from the *Shastras*, they achieved this level of escapism mostly because they desired to be remembered as a follower of *Dharma* rather than a benevolent King.

Neelakantan depicts the ruling *Kshatriyas*' treatment of *Brahmins*. The *Brahmins* or *Shudras* are expected to revere and obey the ruling *Kshatriya*. Additionally, the ruling caste expected them to carry out their given duties. If they attempt to do more, they are respectfully advised to focus on their own task. Bhishma instructs Drona to look into his own task and refrain from demonstrating his heroism; they are not given the opportunity to demonstrate their swordsmanship. Instead, they were asked to do their duties as a teacher.

Bhishma looked the Guru squarely in the face. Drona looked away. Finally, the Grand Regent spoke. “It will be more prudent for you to stick to training the princes. Leave the security of the palace to the professionals. I admire your swordsmanship but not your eagerness to prove your heroism. Vidura, show the Guru to his chamber. He needs to rest” (Neelakantan 45).

Humiliation existed in both groups (*Brahmins* and *Shudras*); only *Kshatriyas* had absolute authority and utilised both types of people as they pleased. They employed *Brahmins* to teach and impart intellectual concepts to them but did not want them to be involved in any other decision-making processes. Later on, they were also used in wars due to their combat abilities. One significant distinction is that a *Brahmin* is given the option to transcend his category and train to be a warrior,

Nishadas are not given even that little opportunity to study or prove that they are worthy of learning such abilities and participating in war.

In the instance of Drona and King Drupada, this is absolute. When Drona seeks vengeance on Drupada, he enlists the aid of the Hastinapur warriors. He imparts knowledge to the Pandavas and Kauravas and takes them to Panchala. Drona reveals his superior nature and treats Drupada as a slave shortly after gaining the throne “. . . now who is at whose feet, you arrogant *Kshatriya*? Who is the supplicant and who the benefactor? You rogue...remember the day I came to you for help and how you treated me? This kick is for your arrogance and this one is for your Pride...”

(Neelakantan 281-282) Neelakantan attempts to convey the idea that a *Brahmin* is so cunning that he can manipulate the populace of a great kingdom and use them to exact revenge on King Drupada. Drona desired that the Hastinapur Princes wage war against Panchala as a Guru *Dakshin* (fee) after instructing them.

The upper caste exploits the governing caste (*Kshatriya*) for their selfish ends. To begin, Drona commands the princes (Pandavas and Kauravas) to wage war on his neighbouring country, adding that no one from Hastinapur will tolerate anybody insulting a *Brahmin*. However, his statements are only rhetorical, designed to entice the princes to work for him. “This is a proud moment in the history of Hastinapur. Today, our boys have proved to the world that our Kingdom will not tolerate any insult to *Brahmins*.” (Neelakantan 281)

Drona does not intend to conquer the entire kingdom and establish himself as the centre of power here; rather, he wishes exact vengeance on Drupada for his haughty attitude toward him. Drona has no desire to become the centre of power, but he wishes to give half of his kingdom to his son Ashwathama, a *Brahmin* instructor who wishes to raise his son in the manner of a *Kshatriya*. The incident’s implicit

philosophy is that the poor *Brahmins* desired to enhance their lifestyle and create a better life for their descendants. The practice of granting land in the name of gift enhanced the life of a *Brahmin*. “ This practice of land grants transformed the *Brahmins*, who were earlier priests only, into landlords also. This brought in the significant change in the status of the Brahmins.” (Sinha 85)

Caste mobility is one strategy for improving a lot of the poor people. A *Brahmin* who mobilises his society and lives like a *Kshatriya* develops his next generation into a *Brahmin* monarch and spreads the *Brahmin* culture across the land. During ancient times, this caste mobilisation of a *Brahmin* to become a monarch was permitted. The reason for this was his upper-caste identification, which enabled him to mobilise readily, whereas a *Shudra* or *Nishada* could not.”

5.6 Migration of Nagas

In ancient India, persons who did not fall under the Varna system were referred to as ‘untouchables’ and were not permitted to join the state. They are deemed unclean and are forced to dwell on the fringes. “. . . According to Hindu religious belief, the untouchables are considered to be polluting the other social groups in part because of the occupation carried out by them in the past, and in some cases still today. . .” (5) says Dean Spears and Amit Thorat in their article “Caste, purity, pollution and the puzzle of open defecation in India: Evidence from the novel measure in a nationally-representative survey”. They have further quoted from “Aktor” elaborating on the reason for keeping them away,

“It is important to maintain the purity of the body of a *Brahmin*, male, household head in order for him to worship the gods. Certain actions and interactions - especially with people of lower ranking in the caste hierarchy of purity- cause him to be polluted.” (5)

Thus, the untouchables are compelled to live apart from the mainstream and have their access to the state restricted by the upper caste. *Ajaya* depicts the upper caste people advancing even further, forcibly relocating all Naga community people to move to the peripheries just because they choose to live there. The lower-caste Naga community people thus lacked the ability to possess land or property. As a result, they were forced to leave when the upper caste desired the property.

When Hastinapur's ruler chose to divide the kingdom and give Khandavaprastha to the Pandavas, they decided to wash out all animals, birds, and woodland residents. Everyone was washed out of that location mercilessly. Their arrogance was at an all-time high, and they showed no empathy for these wretched folks. They were instructed to vacate the area and relocate to the periphery where the other untouchables and low caste people reside. These Naga people have been residing in that location for generations. In the same location, their lives were turned upside down, and their fate deteriorated in an instant. "The King's Men have announced they will be demolishing this Colony. They have asked everyone to move to the other side of the Yamuna, to the place reserved for Untouchables and lower castes. They want to create a public park here" (Neelakantan 378).

5.7 Intellectuals:

According to Antonio Gramsci, intellectuals provide moral and physical support for changing the world. These thinkers have the ability to capture the public's attention by presenting their beliefs and charting their growth. Gramsci classified them as Traditional and Organic Intellectuals. Intellectuals in the traditional sense are self-sufficient and maintain their objectivity throughout. They do not advocate for a particular class; rather, they attempt to appeal to a broad audience and reflect their overall ideas. "Traditional Intellectuals are those intellectuals linked to tradition and

past intellectuals; those who are not so directly linked to the economic structure of society and, in fact, conceive of themselves as having no basis in any social class and adhering to no particular class discourse or political discourse” (qtd. in Ramos np). The organic intellectuals propagate about the function of their class and depend on one particular social group. “Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, are more directly related to the economic structure of their society simply because of the fact that every social group that originates in the fulfilment of an essential task of economic production” (qtd. in Ramos np)

5.7.1 Traditional Intellectuals in the Retellings of Mahabharata

Due to their impartial demeanour in retellings of *Mahabharata*, the characters Balarama and Kripacharya might be seen as Traditional Intellectuals. They did not treat individuals with any sense of caste or status; rather, they treated everyone equally. Among the chosen retellings, Neelakantan has placed a premium on their impartial behaviour in *Ajaya*. By portraying them as neutral characters, the author highlights two wonderful personalities who treat others equally and the satisfaction of a lower caste person as a result of their treatment. Karna is overjoyed by Balarama and Kripacharya’s deed. These depictions demonstrate that if the lower-caste individuals are treated with respect and equality, their irritation and misery over their poor birth may be removed.

5.7.1.1 Balarama as a Traditional Intellectual:

In *Ajaya Roll of the Dice*, the author portrays Balarama as a person who is unconcerned about a person’s caste. Balarama considers Karna to be his friend. He values the individuals’ merits over caste, as seen by his treatment towards Karna. Balarama regards Karna as a great archer; he even compares his ability to that of Arjuna, claiming that there is another archer in this world who is more gifted than

Arjuna. When Karna claims to be a fugitive of the Southern confederate (Parashurama's military troop), Balarama nonetheless lets him reside at his palace. "He is Vasusena Karna of Hastinapura, an old friend of mine. You cannot find a better archer in all of India," Balarama replied proudly, while Karna looked bashful at this sudden praise." (Neelakantan 227)

Karna attempts to steal a horse and flee Dwarka. Balarama treats each citizen in his kingdom with respect and care; one example is the chief confronts Karna and accuses him of taking the horse. Balarama intercedes, and states "Steal! Do you know who he is? This horse is my gift to him" (Neelakantan 233). Balarama cautions the chief to be kind to the visitor. He scolds the chief for treating his visitor like a robber, yet he has a very compassionate heart to admit that his failure to notify the chief about the gift he provided to Karna. "Do not worry chief," Balarama said, patting the poor man on the shoulder. "You have done your duty well. It is my fault." (Neelakantan 233)

Additionally, Balarama apologises for yelling at the chief. He has been depicted as a kind individual who respects individuals according to their qualities. He ensures that the Yadava Clan's members have the good heart to treat people as individuals rather than as members of a caste; even with the labourers, Balarama was kind.

In *Ajaya*, Balarama is the only leader who expresses or demonstrates pride at the prospect of a *Shudra* becoming a king. Rather than that, he is pleased that a *Shudra* is rising from his group and attempting to do something substantial in his life without being ensconced inside his circle, believing they are destined to live a subservient existence and waste time in vain. "King of Anga... I am proud of you,

Karna. You have proved that talent knows no barrier. The Yadava leaders clasped Karna by the Shoulders.” (Neelakantan 318)

Balarama is presented as impartial in several places in this story. He always offered his thoughts on an occurrence without adopting them aside. He talks in broad strokes. He has articulated the entire overarching philosophy of a certain episode. Thus, Neelakantan attempts to portray a figure who tells the truth without regard for caste. Balarama is critically examined as a Traditional Intellectual, in this work *Ajaya*, he plays a neutral role. “Your highness, such a fracas is to be deplored. You insulted the King of Anga, a valiant young man, without cause. If you did not wish him to marry your daughter because of his caste, you should not have invited home at all.” (Neelakantan 324)

Balarama is incensed by princess Draupadi’s insult to Karna. In contrast to others, who were unconcerned with *Shudras* sentiments, Balarama demonstrates his support for *Shudra* by treating him as a human being with feelings. He contends that it is improper to welcome someone first if caste is a primary concern. Balarama cannot be regarded as a king or a *Shudra*’s follower. He just states what he believes is correct based on his ideas.

Pattanaik depicts Balarama in a unique way in *Jaya*. Similar to Neelakantan, Pattanaik portrays Balarama as someone who is unfavourable to both the Pandavas and Kauravas, unlike Krishna, who render his help and wealth to both Pandavas and Kauravas, but indirectly helps the Pandavas more to win the battle. When Duryodhana and Bhima ask Balarama to join them in battle, he declines, stating that both are his cousins, and further asks both of them to put aside their hatred and embrace one another. Both were enraged, and Balarama refused to take sides. “Balarama looked at

the two mighty men before him. Both were his cousins . . . Balarama then took a decision. He would fight for neither side.” (Pattanaik 225)

Balarama’s refusal to join both of his relatives demonstrates his neutrality. His desire is to maintain his reputation by articulating his ideals of avoiding conflict among family members. It is a message of value to the modern readers through Balarama to avoid vengeance, fight among family members and regard him as a hero as a result of his activities. Balarama may be described as an Ancient Traditional Intellect who is not eager for a piece of land and possesses no caste baggage, as demonstrated by Pattanaik and Neelakantan portrayals in their works *Jaya* and *Ajaya* respectively.

5.7.1.2 Kripacharya as a Traditional Intellectual:

As with Balarama, the character Kripacharya from *Ajaya* is characterised as a person who disobeys the laws and customs of a certain community. He is one another Traditional intellect found in *Ajaya* who is unbiased and follows his instincts. To substantiate this assertion, Neelakantan portrays him as a Maverick *Brahmin* who assists Karna in behaving properly as a *Brahmin* and achieving his objective. Neelakantan has described the nature of caste and the Vedas to the audience through Kripacharya. “Karna, you fool! Listen to me. Do not keep repeating you are low-born and such rubbish. No one is low or high. If you accept you are low-born the world will be happy to concede that to you.” (Neelakantan 68)

Neelakantan speaks through Kripacharya, the consciousness of being low or high is internal, and if we accept and live a low-born existence, the world will be content to subjugate us as well. Kripacharya expresses the secret objective of *Kshatriya* category individuals; it is the false consciousness in the mind of a lower caste person that they would not be respected by anybody and will remain low in

status. This philosophy is ingrained in them, and it is spread by each category's forefathers. "Society has taught fools like you to believe in the chance of birth. The priests have told you that if you are born a *Brahmin*, only then can you *be a Brahmin*. If your parents are Pariah, you will be a slave forever to all other castes. It is all too easy to fool the people of our country." (Neelakantan 69)

Kripacharya holds society accountable for the philosophy ingrained in the minds of the members of each community. It is the notion of upper caste individuals who desire to preserve and retain some individuals as slaves to work for them. This concept has arisen and continues to expand in the minds of all segments of society. Their forefathers and mothers continue to educate their descendants about the community's responsibilities. In this manner, it continues to travel from hand to hand. They designate a specific job as their family employment. They continue to do so but nothing changes. From ancient times through Indian independence, it was not permitted for someone to work in a separate job. It was only after Independence that people began to disperse. They began working in a variety of areas, demonstrating their versatility. In an article "Dialectics of Caste Culture: A Social Crisis in the Indian Nation" written by J. Bheemaiah, he claims that

. . . traditional family occupations which reflect unequal division of society. For example, a tanner's son is always treated as a tanner because of his birth in that family. Even if the person maintains hygiene, the Hindu concept treats him as an Untouchable . . . In other words the close relationship between caste and traditional occupation eventually contributed to the stability of the caste system (455-456).

In addition to Bheemaih's assertion, lower-caste individuals are oppressed from birth. Their birth has determined the course of their lives. In the novel, the

character Kripacharya shares the same sentiment. Kripacharya is acutely aware of the prevailing system and chooses to disregard it. By educating Karna to be a *Brahmin*, he demonstrates his respect for a person's worth regardless of his caste.

5.7.2 Organic Intellectuals in the Select Retellings of Mahabharata:

Three variants of organic intellectuals are discussed under this section. Each of them is a supporter of their own community. Bhishma is depicted as a supporter of his own Kingdom and its people. Takshaka is depicted as a failed intellectual due to his revolutionary ideology. Karna is depicted as a successful organic intellectual of the Shudra community for his tireless aspiration to become one like a *Kshatriya* and prove to be one.

5.7.2.1 Bhishma as *Kshatriya* Organic Intellectual:

Bhishma extols Karna and requests that he be sent to the southern Confederate (Parashuram's Army) in *Ajaya*. Bhishma was adamant about not allowing his country's people to perish or be drawn into the conflict. He was willing to make a single sacrifice rather than wage war against the Southern confederate led by Parashurama. He claims that Karna's main fault is that he was born into a lower caste, and blames his drive to become a warrior.

“I believe it is the same boy. I admire his grit and determination. Alas, we live in a pretty world. We will have to sacrifice him to avoid a bloody war and loss of life. Capture him alive. I do not want his blood on our hands. His only fault was to be born into the wrong caste. Deliver him to the fanatics of the southern confederates and be done with it. I am confident you will find a way to capture him. Just see to it that he does not end up as another Naga Rebel.”

(Neelakantan 238)

The ambition of a *Shudra* to become a warrior was not supported in the first place; the ruling class people then sink to the level of sacrificing a *Shudra*'s life rather than sacrificing the lives of their countrymen. On this point, Bhishma was emphatic that he is unconcerned with *Shudras* death and is more concerned with his own community. Throughout his life, he has been a selfish individual, concerned solely with his family and his kingdom. He is willing to make any sacrifice for his kingdom and family. This self-centred character is a mirror of the ruling caste; they constantly want to keep themselves and their people secure, and they shun anything that can damage their enjoyment or disrupt their lives.

Generally, the ruling caste avoids vexing circumstances and persons. Occasionally, they even resort to murdering or expelling the individual who causes them distress. The majority of the upper caste is self-centred; they want only their community members to flourish and have a better life and are willing to kill a *Shudra* or leave anybody to achieve that goal.

Bhishma acts like a true ruling caste (*Kshatriya*); most of his judgments favoured the ruling class. He ensured that no one other than his community members interfered with the vassal kingdom. As can be seen, Bhishma prioritises Kings and kingdoms over other caste people's concerns. For the second time, Bhishma mocks Drona's arrogance. Bhishma might be viewed as the ideal Aristocrat, who wishes for other categories of people to serve as benefactors only for them and who is incapable of using or abusing his position in the ruling class. The insult or disrespect shown to *Brahmin* category people was taken into account and was not considered as a major issue "Insulted a *Brahmin*? Do you know who this man is? He is the king of Panchala, and you are treating him like a criminal. Who did he insult and when? . . . "

(Neelakantan 282)

When Drona claims that Drupada insulted him seventeen years ago and that he is retaliating, “Your excellency, he insulted me seventeen years ago, when I went to beg for his aid.” (Neelakantan 282) Bhishma expresses his displeasure of this behaviour and inquires as to why Hastinapur waged war against Panchala and on whose orders the Hastinapur princes seized Panchala’s ruler.

“*What!* Guru is this is a joke? He insulted you seventeen years ago and now you capture him using the Hastinapur army and destroy our relationship with a vassal state? Who ordered the attack on a friendly state without my permission? You have many questions to answer, Drona . . . Does the pride of a *Brahmin* have no value in this land? Shame on Hastinapura . . .” (Neelakantan 283)

The *Brahmins* expressed their outrage at the *Kshatriya*’s attitude. A king’s responsibility is to protect the sages and supply them with money. The most critical point is that a king must not permit any adjacent country’s people or kinsmen to insult their country’s people, whether they are *Brahmins* or *Nishada*. They are not to treat the citizens of their nation with contempt. However, in this case, the monarch did not address the injustice committed against a *Brahmin* or a *Shudra*; rather, a *Brahmin* was sacked from his employment, demonstrating the honour of anybody other than *Kshatriya* category persons was not appreciated. More than their sense of being humiliated by various rulers, they valued the bond between the kings.

It is always the ruling caste that has made all decisions; no ideas from the court members are considered. They are willing to justify their actions and act according to their wishes if a suggestion or a question is raised from the ground level; for example, when Vidura is appointed Prime Minister of Hastinapur by Bhishma, a priest from the crowd shouts that a *Shudra* has no right to become the Prime Minister.

Bhishma brings him to a halt by insulting him on the ground and pleading with him to keep his opinions to himself. “Dhaumya, keep your sermons to yourself . . . Vyasa, the son of fisher woman, is the father of Dhritarashtra, Pandu, and Vidura. So which caste does Vidura belong to? Bhishma asked with a mischievous smile on his usually stern face.” (Neelakantan 24)

Additionally, the author conveys a strong attitude regarding their official concerns. Even though a priest is an upper-caste member with no ruling authority, he is permitted to remark on choices made by higher officials. Nonetheless, he lacks the authority to reverse the judgement. The populace must accept the judgments of the ruling class, irrespective of whether it is correct or incorrect, or whether it follows the laws or not. Due to their position of power, they reject the caste system and do things to ensure that no one questions their family. They place a higher premium on family honour than on the *Shastras*.

If Vidura is deemed a *Shudra* and they opt not to make him the prime minister, their entire Kuru bloodline would implode. Contesting Vidura’s birthright is tantamount to contesting his own family heritage, and thus in order to prevent such upheaval, Bhishma chooses to behave prudently and maintain his family dignity. “What right has a *Shudra* to quote the scriptures? Guru, perhaps you empathise with him because of your special relationship to Vidura, Dhaumya said, smirking at his supporters” (Neelakantan 25).

This demonstrates that a *Shudra* (Vidura) has no right to study more about the scriptures and that if a *Shudra* (Vidura) has learned the scriptures, it is as a result of his privileged relationship with the ruling class. Thus, one must have some connection to the governing caste in order to have the privilege of studying Vedas that are

reserved for members of the *Kshatriya* group. Vidura was permitted to learn as a result of his half-*Brahmin* ancestry.

“In response to Dhaumya’s barbed comment, Vyasa chuckled. “Why don’t you say what you mean, young man? I am a *Shudra*. Moreover, I was born out of wedlock. I am the illegitimate child of a dark-skinned fisherwoman and the scholarly *Brahmin*, Parashara, who did not think twice about the cast when imparting knowledge of scriptures to me.” (Neelakantan 26)

The ruling elite seem to have the power to alter the rules, and they despise anybody who questions the impact of their actions on the whole system. While the other castes (*Shudra* and *Nishada*) adhere to the rules scrupulously, the ruling caste *Kshatriya* individuals break the system when they like and overturn it according to their will.

When Karna and Ekalavya desired to break free from their caste and acquire battle skills, they were constrained by the same ruling caste, which followed *Shastra* based regulations. Karna is immediately refused on the grounds that the charioteer’s son is obligated to take up his father’s job and has no right to study the Vedas, but Vidura was permitted. This prejudice exists because Vidura was born for Vyasa, the father of King Dhirtarashtra and Pandu. As a result, a person born into the family of a ruling caste can have all the benefits of the ruling caste while being a *Shudra*. But, that too depends because Yuyutsu was not given any recognition even though his father is King Dhirtarashtra. According to the wish of the governing caste they alter the rules as they please since they hold the authoritative powers.

Thus, Bhishma established himself as a staunch defender of his category members in a number of instances. He may be a person who places little value on caste, but by following the path of *Dharma*, he automatically becomes a person who

acts in favour of his caste as is the case with the prevalent caste system. Bhishma's concern towards the neighbouring Kings was more than his concern towards the other caste member (Drona) of his own country.

Additionally, Bhishma is protective of his family members and family honour. He is constantly supportive of his family members and takes great care to establish cordial relations with the vassal kingdom. By doing so, he protects his country from treaties and conflict as in the cases of asking Karna to surrender to the southern confederates, yelling at Drona for waging war against Panchala and making Vidura the prime minister. Bhishma is a perfect organic Intellectual of the Hastinapur Kingdom. His primary interest is for his family and his community members. He is unconcerned with the life of a *Shudra* (Karna) or the prestige of a *Brahmin* (Drona). More than caste, Bhishma embodies the ruling elite's mindset. His deeds exemplify a devoted warrior who works entirely in the interests of his own people.

5.7.2.2 Takshaka as a Naga Organic Intellectual:

Takshaka is viewed as a rebel from the Naga community in *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*. As the head of the Naga community, he vents his fury on the ruling elite. The previous dialogue between Bhishma and Vidura demonstrates that the officials have failed to meet the demands of the forest dwellers in the Hastinapur kingdom. The ruling elite are well aware of Takshaka's revolution. It is a result of their failure to treat them with respect.

Takshaka, the Naga chieftain, rebels against the kingdom of Hastinapur and vows to murder every single one of them without compassion. He desired to bring about the revolution by rallying his community's members and all other oppressed people and convincing them to act against the ruling caste. He wishes to seize power for the forest inhabitants and manipulate them with his oration. He exposes the truth

that existed from the epic era to the present day in his oration. “Takshaka rose . . . our war is the People’s war, against discrimination in the name of religion, wealth, race, language, skin colour or caste.” (Neelakantan 131)

Neelakantan has spoken about the hidden reality, the dominant culture, and the secret objective of a ruling caste people through this character. All of the amenities enjoyed by the ruling caste are the result of lower-caste labourers’ work. They work tirelessly to generate the goods required by the ruling class. In exchange, the ruling elite disregards the demands of the poor low-caste individuals who work tirelessly to ensure the upper caste has a luxurious, affluent existence. All the works are done by these people but they were not given proper credits for their work, instead they were treated like slaves and kept them as slaves.

“Such Enemies undermine our cause. The education he provided talks about *Varna* and *Jati*; he wants to instil such ideas into the minds of our people so they will always be slaves to men like him. He started hospitals so his labourers would be healthy and work hard to make money for him. He started training centres to have free workers who would feel his coffers by selling to fat merchants . . . *Brahmins* have prohibited sea travel. Yet these men have revived it. They are willing to break the strictest taboos for money. Look at what Balarama is doing. He is building a golden city near the sea. He and his people will live in Ivory tower while people like us, the tillers of the soil and the sons of the forest, will languish in poverty. When they eat Sweet dishes from silver plates, we will be eating the dry roots of trees. When they dress in Silks, our women will have only tatters to cover their shame. They will have opulent palaces and soft beds to sleep in, and we will have stinking caves and hard rocks upon which to rest our tired heads.” (Neelakantan 131)

Takshaka vents his rage at the ruling elite and highlights the accomplishments of his fellow community members. The temple, the garden, and the broadways are all constructed by members of their community, but these people are not granted any privileges to be present in that location. The upper caste people claim that their presence will pollute the entire area.

Bheemaiah makes a comment on the occupational divisions practised by the forefathers. According to the ancient kings, who tightly enforced the divide and compelled the lower caste people to remain within their circle. This was maintained in order to avert a revolutionary uprising by the working class. “The low ranking people like *Shudras* and *Antyajas* were forced to work for the upper castes in order to avoid anticipated resistance from them. This was the technique to subjugate the deprived.” (454)

The upper-caste individuals skilfully retained their lower-caste servants. Additionally, they were compelled to work for the upper caste. They did the washing for the upper caste, but they were not permitted to wear pricy silk garments. The lower caste individuals wore fairly ordinary clothing. The forest dwellers had nothing to cover their shame, indicating their impoverished level. On the one hand, they lack adequate attire, but on the other, a Kingdom enjoys the luxurious clothing created by these lower-caste individuals. They want lower-caste individuals to serve as their servants and remain as their slaves, oblivious to upper-caste difficulties.

Thus, Takshaka aspires to create a society in which everyone is treated equally regardless of religion, caste, or race. Takshaka seeks his constituents’ support in his struggle against the upper class and to put an end to prejudice. He exerts control over his clan members and instils hatred in their hearts towards *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*. He prepares them to fight back without interrogating him. Through his oration,

Takshaka has thoroughly conveyed what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur if they remain in the jungle without fighting back. To arouse their senses about the exploitation, he tells them about Balarama, who is building a golden city for his people to live in, while the Nagas do not even have a proper place to live. He makes comparisons between his community's life and that of Balarama in order to convince his people to support him in his fight against the ruling class.

From a Neo-Marxist perspective he can be seen as a victim of discrimination and the rebel who has experienced the worst in his life and decides to fight for the liberty and equality for his people from the upper class. In Antonio Gramsci's words he is an organic intellectual who tries to be an intellectual like the one present in the ruling class and wishes for a better life for his community and other community people.

Takshaka paused to enjoy the impact he was making on the people around him. They were getting more and more agitated. He continued. "But who made them rich? Who made those palaces and gardens, the chariots, the walkways and broad roads, the exquisitely carved temples? People like us. Our sweat and blood made it luxurious. Remember, every activity you do to strengthen the hands of our enemies. They will use every coin you add to their coffers to exploit you. My fellow Nagas, Vanaras, Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas and *Asuras* - the war has just begun!" (Neelakantan 132)

Takshaka is seen as the perfect organic intellectual acting in a wise way, but he failed in acting as a rebel against the ruling class. Gramsci's philosophy holds true in the instance of Takshaka. His failure demonstrates that assembling a group of supporters in order to spark a revolution is futile; in the end, failure was the only outcome.

5.7.2.3 Karna, as an organic intellectual

Karna from the retellings of *Mahabharata* might be viewed as an organic intellectual who rises from his circle and acts like a *Kshatriya* category man in order to demonstrate that he is deserving of ruling a kingdom. Karna is a good example for that where he becomes king first.

Karna's caste mobility was denied due to his birth as a *Shudra*. However, with the acceptance and assistance of a few people, he demonstrates to the world that he is a great warrior. Even though he was exploited to serve the ruling class, he was economically lifted from his state and given the opportunity to demonstrate that he was not just a brilliant warrior but also a wonderful ruler. He is an example of a *Shudra* person, and while his hard work and drive enabled him to improve his economic situation, he continues to experience humiliation in several locations while being the King of Anga. "And so Karna officially became King of Anga; the first *Shudra* to be thus elevated in many centuries." (Neelakantan 265)

People see Karna as a *Shudra* and continued to treat him as such even after he acquired a kingdom. While humiliation has no end, the chance he earns from this enables him to demonstrate his warrior ability to the world. He dies for the benefit of *Kshatriyas*, although he is regarded as a great fighter who is equal to and more talented than Arjuna. His temperament and attitude are admired and appreciated.

Karna works tirelessly to become whatever he desires in life; unlike other outcasts who believe they are condemned to live a life of discrimination and avoid the land. He emerges from his society and demonstrates that even a *Shudra* has the ability and knowledge to lead the land; he holds power and understanding necessary to rule the people. Through this character the contemporary authors have expressed the

emergence of the lower caste people and the acknowledgement which was received by them.

During the middle of the 18th and 19th centuries in India, the caste system was extremely severe. It is only after independence that the caste system is fading and it is still fading slowly, but in comparison to the ancient Indian people, acceptance of caste mobility and mingling of lower caste people with other caste people has increased dramatically, demonstrating the improvement of Indian ideology. While caste is still a significant factor in the heartland of India, people are working hard to break free from their circle and demonstrate their aptitude in various disciplines.

In India, the process of lifestyle modification is referred to as 'Sanskritization' by M. N. Srinivas in 1952 "It is the process by which lower caste groups attempt to raise their status and position within the overarching caste hierarchy by emulating upper caste social norms." (Sadana 1) According to M. N. Srinivas, the caste system was rigid in ancient and mediaeval times, with imperious restrictions imposed on lower caste people. The socio-economic-political system was based on an individual's caste. Additionally to his remark, caste played a significant role in the lives of the *Shudras* and *Nishadas*, as their lives were controlled by the ruling class. Caste mobility was frowned upon by the upper castes. The primary reason was that they were accustomed to such a system, and a change would leave the upper caste people with no servants.

Acceptance of a lower caste man holding a position of prominence was difficult in the past, and it remains so in the case of Karna. Though he appears to be an upper caste man, he is subjected to humiliation by upper caste members. Only a few members of the ruling caste accept and respect him for his merits. When society disapproves of upward mobility, the process becomes dysfunctional. This was the

situation with Karna. He was economically reared and quickly established himself as a strong fighter. Indeed, he was manoeuvred by the ruling caste to win the war, demonstrating his capability, although he was not free of shame until his death. He dies as a great ruler and warrior, but he dies for the benefit of a *Kshatriya*.

Karna is well aware of the manipulations of the ruling caste (Kauravas) in order to gain wealth. This indicates that he works diligently to become a great warrior. Once he achieves greatness, he is exploited by the ruling elite regardless of his caste. The regulations are ignored when they benefit the ruling elite.

Karna's initial caste mobility as a *Brahmin* aided him in learning the Vedas and *Upavedas*. Acquiring Vedic knowledge enables him to attain the status of a *Kshatriya*. Thus, in order to achieve a better rank, one must move from his caste and act like members of the other castes (*Brahmin* and *Kshatriya*) in order to enhance their state of being. This enables them to demonstrate their worth to the rest of the world. Unlike Takshaka, who rebels against the ruling caste, Karna acts prudently. He gradually embraces the lifestyle of a ruling caste and lives as a *Kshatriya*, demonstrating to the world that a *Shudra* has the same wisdom as a *Kshatriya* and is capable of controlling a kingdom.

5.8 Summation

The conversation between Bhishma and Duryodhana demonstrates the inattentiveness of the ruling class towards the poverty and humiliation suffered by the citizens in the name of caste. Bhishma states that he is not a social reformer seeking to change people's lives, as it had no effect on them. Bhishma's influence is evident throughout the works *Jaya*, *Ajaya*, and *Shakuni: Master of the Game*, where the authors explain his worldview towards the country, family, and people. Anand Neelakantan's deft handling of Bhishma demonstrates his compassion for his family.

The author attempted to convey the two extremes that suffer under the ruling caste people through the discourse between Vidura and Bhishma. One is Parashurama, a *Brahmin* from the upper caste, and the other is Takshaka, the Naga leader.

Neelakantan accurately depicts the ruling caste's conception of two categories. The ruling caste expresses its attitude toward them. Both categories will subjugate other people regardless of their caste, but the level of subjugation will be highest under Naga rule, as those who have endured a life of humiliation and hunger will rejoice under Naga rule. As they will be provided with food and place to live so their long-term starvation has come to an end. They will be prepared to accept any orders from Takshaka without hesitation. Under Parashurama's rule, this is not the case, as all *Brahmins* are educated and possess the ability to question their leader's orders before accepting them, which is not the case with the Nagas.

Neelakantan depicted the state of the lower caste people and the ruling elite's ideology regarding these two extreme cases in order to illustrate the various scenarios that exist and the ruling elites' varied ideologies. The conversation was included by the author to emphasise on the fact that education was restricted to the *Nishadas* people and their miserable life. In the twenty-first century, the author has attempted to give voice to the voiceless and to depict their lives in order to educate modern readers about poverty that has prevailed and continues to prevail.

Both *Nishadas* and *Brahmins* rebel against people of the *Kshatriya* category because they failed to address their needs. The ruling class was preoccupied with expanding their kingdom and providing for their own family's needs, oblivious to the needs of other peoples who lived in their country. They believe the country is free and prosperous, but they make no attempt to comprehend the country's reality. The actual truth is the sufferings of the marginalised people are yet to be completely taken into

account and bring about a change in the society where poverty does not exist. Writing the novel in this 21st century draws a parallel between the ancient life of the marginalised people and the present state of the marginalised people and also the *Brahmins*.

By portraying Duryodhana as a casteless person, Neelakantan is trying to manipulate the young readers to cultivate a notion of becoming a casteless person in society and tries to create a society where caste is not the centre of any issue. The author (Neelakantan) addresses the reader through Duryodhana and conveys his desire to establish a kingdom in which an individual's merits are valued more than his or her caste. Duryodhana's decision to make Karna his friend and King of Anga is viewed as an example of how a casteless person should act in society. Karna was accorded the same significance as the other members of his family throughout the story, implying that one should accept disadvantaged people as their own and love them, allowing them to interact with us and be treated as equals. Thus, they will not feel forgotten and will be thrilled by our show of acceptance. Additionally, by addressing their qualities, a man is regarded only on the basis of his merits, regardless of his caste, ethnicity, or religion.

A person's status is based on caste, and power relies on the ruling caste *Kshatriyas*, which means the ruling caste people, despite the fact that they are second in the category, controls all the power. They also have dominated members of other castes, including *Brahmins* and *Shudras*, because *Brahmins* have not had the authoritative power but have been revered, but *Shudras* lacked both authority and privilege. They were humiliated by the ruling caste throughout their lives. They were not even considered citizens of their nation, but as *Brahmins*, they enjoyed a superior standard of living in comparison to *Shudras* due to their upper caste position. This is

seen in Ashwathama's conversation with Duryodhana, when Ashwathama discusses his poverty-stricken existence, and also in Drona's conversation with Drupada, where Drupada humiliates Drona by stating that friendship exists only between equals. This demonstrates that once power is acquired, superior nature seizes their minds.

When an untouchable is admitted to the *Sabha* for their benefit, the ruling caste's treatment of other category members and their philosophy about caste may be tracked. Untouchables are not permitted into the capital, but in order to save the prince, an untouchable was admitted inside the palace, and *Sabha* was summoned to render judgement. Jara was admitted as a witness because the concept of pollution did not exist in the ideas of the ruling caste at that time when the cause favoured them. Despite *Kshatriya*'s unlimited rights to defy the caste system, they did not allow any other category persons to do the same. It is solely their privilege, and they took full advantage of it.

The Naga migration was significant in demonstrating the cruel nature of the *Kshatriya* caste people. They want to create a lake and establish their own nation, so they burn the entire forest, killing all the animals, and the inhabitants are instructed to relocate to the periphery to avoid polluting the area. These people are the indigenous inhabitants of that forest, but when the ruling elite decide to construct a country there, they are abruptly asked to leave. The Naga people likewise flee the area without protesting, such is the situation of the Naga people under the ruling elite.

The traditional intellectual is the objective. The traditional intellectuals in retellings of *Mahabharata* are Balarama and Kripacharya, who saw Karna as an equal. They do not practise caste discrimination. Rather they respect every human being as a human being and evaluate each on their own merits, regardless of their caste. Neelakantan communicates through Kripacharya the realities of society and the

caste system, as well as the notions instilled in each lower caste member from birth. They were raised in such a way that when they grew up, they did not question the norms of the ruling elites. This is highlighted by the author through Kripacharya, and the act of Kripacharya training Karna to behave like a *Brahmin* exemplifies the Sanskritization promoted by M.N.Srinivas, which is “. . . the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, change its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, ‘twice born’.(Srinivas 6)

The organic intellectuals seen thus are Bhishma a *Kshatriya*, Takshaka a Naga, and Karna a *Shudra*. Three distinct categories of individuals who embodied their community; Bhishma is the ideal embodiment of the *Kshatriya* ideology; he is only concerned with his family and country, for which he is willing to do anything. By requesting that Duryodhana send Karna to the southern confederates, he demonstrates that he is unwilling to fight or stand by the side of *Shudra* or *Brahmin*. He is concerned with the welfare of his kingdom. For the sake of Karna, he does not want to wage war with the southern confederates; and in the case of Drona, he does not want to build animosity with the King of Panchala. In both cases, Bhishma supports only his category of people and, in most cases, disregards *Brahmin* suggestions; he appoints Vidura, the son of a maid, as Prime Minister to safeguard the prestige of the Kuru lineage.

Takshaka is an organic intellectual who embodies his *Nishada* identity. Takshaka manipulates his own people and instil a sense of revenge in each of them, inspiring them to revolt against the *Kshatriyas* and destroy each one of them in order to seize the centre of power, so putting an end to their misery and poverty. He wishes for his group to grow alone throughout the country, and as a result of the inability of the ruling class to solve their poverty, these lower caste people become violent and

aim to eliminate the ruling caste people. This hostility was fostered by the actions of the ruling caste.

Karna, as an organic intellectual, exemplifies a *Shudra* who works diligently to elevate his life through his merits. His desire to become a warrior, combined with his determination to achieve his goals, makes him the *Shudra* category's representative. One must behave courageously, like Karna did, in order for someone to accept the virtues accumulated by *Shudra* category individuals. In the modern age, many marginalised persons have begun to emerge from the domain and begin living with other categories of people. There are several examples in the current period in practically every field. They have demonstrated that they too possess the knowledge and ability to thrive in any field. Karna is a representation and role model for discriminated people in the name of caste, but many individuals must emerge from their circle like Karna in order to accomplish their desire of mixing with the mainstream population and living a happy existence free of caste discrimination.

The following chapter brings the thesis to a comprehensive summation of the ideas discussed.