

Chapter 3

Select Retellings of Mahabharata - a Critical analysis

3.1 Introduction

The Indian Epic tradition consists of two primary epic works produced in a grand style, Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Veda Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, in Sanskrit, being regarded as the greatest epics ever written. *Ramayana* is a Hindu epic that depicts Rama's life and includes geographical, historical, religious, and mythological themes. *Mahabharata* does not show a single hero because it is a treasure trove of various complicated characters; it is best remembered for the rivalry between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It also includes an historic battle on the plains of Kurukshetra, as well as religious and legendary aspects.

Puranas are defined as "sacred literature of Hinduism, any of a number of popular encyclopedic collections of myth, legend, and genealogy, varying greatly as to date and origin" (Doniger par 1). They differ from epics in that they focus on a single superhero and their lives. In Hindu literature, there are 18 Puranas; these Puranas are primarily dedicated to Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, and a few Goddesses. It is entirely a religious textbook that incorporates popular beliefs and ideals. Both Epic and Puranas have oral traditions and narratives; therefore, they go a long way from generation to generation.

The old epic has recently been rewritten to differ from the traditional composition. The form, style, language and theme of the rewritten epics largely differ from those of the originals. The modern reworking of epics is initiated as a response to the needs of the postmodern readers. A great majority of the books critically examine ancient literature, and some even question cultural practices and events that happened in a society. Ideologies differs depending on the author's view of society

and his relationship with the epic. The scenario in which the contemporary writers of the retellings of Indian epics are brought up also hold a major part in the ideology portrayed by them in his/her novel. They used various characters' perspectives to bring in a new form to the ancient text.

One another significant reason for rewriting the epics is to make it compatible for the contemporary society and the readers. Agarwal, in her doctoral thesis, quotes Rohit Sharma's words for the reason behind rewriting the epic "the idea behind the practice of rewriting ought to be a perpetual re-interrogation and re-evaluation of certain Cultural norms/values/ principles- existed and proposed in the original epics or in the later rewritings of the same to make them compatible for the present social structure" (Agarwal 4)

The retellings of epics are written from different perspectives – that of a feminist, a defeated party's or a minor character. Through the retellings of Indian epics the writers addresses the current social issues. Some authors employ epic to address a various cultural traditions, gender, race, and caste issues. Women's rights and gender equality are emphasized in modern texts, usually written from a female perspective. The authors speak through the retelling of epics, purposefully including a few questions and their goals and perceptions about the epic's incidents. Most retellings include an epilogue and a prologue, and their composition expresses the author's aim.

One of the main features of retelling of epics is their deviation from the original text. The writer's intent determines whether the character is shown as a villain or a hero. If the author wants to make a point about gender, he or she will choose a female character as the narrator. There are numerous retellings of the

Mahabharata from the perspective of female characters, such as *The Curse of Gandhari* (2019) from Gandhari's perspective written by Aditi Banerjee, *The Fisher Queen's Dynasty* (2017) from Satyawati's perspective written by Kavita Kane, and *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) from Draupadi's perspective written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. If the author desires to address any societal issues, he does so through the characters. The retellings of the *Mahabharata* that deal with such issues include *Shakuni: Master of the Game* (2019) written by Ashutosh Nadkar, which shows the domination of a powerful kingdom over a powerless kingdom from Shakuni's perspective, and *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* (2013) and *Ajaya: Rise of Kali* (2015) which deal with caste-based discrimination in society.

There are few other novels which are written to show the epic characters as the tragic heroes; two such novels are *I, Duryodhana...* (2019) written by Pradeep Govind, which justifies Duryodhana's acts and glorifies him, another novel *Karna the Great Warrior* (2019) by Ranjit Desai, which portrays Karna as a Tragic Hero. Thus, the rewritings of epic takes various forms to meet the reading choices of the modern readers and also help the author to interpret the characters from various notions to give them a new dimension. In that manner the retellings have made the readers to see the evil characters as a most righteous one and the most celebrated character with lots of imperfections. By rewriting the epic over and over again the author explores and brings in several faces for the same character and several interpretations for the same incident; nevertheless, modern writers are loyal to the actual story line and they do not deviate from it.

This chapter discusses four modern writers and their retellings of *Mahabharata*, and this serves as the basis for this study. The retellings of *Mahabharata* selected for study are: *Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of the*

Mahabharata by Devdutt Pattanaik (2010), *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* by Anand Neelakantan (2013), *Karna's Wife: the OutCast's Queen* by Kavita Kane (2014) and *Shakuni: Master of the Game* by Ashutosh Nadkar (2019). These retellings are critically analysed with the help of Neo-Marxist Literary theory, for a better understanding of the narratives as they are aimed at the modern readers.

3.2 Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*

Devdutt Pattanaik is a contemporary Indian writer, and his writings are based on Indian mythology, religion, and management. He is known for his writings about the Hindu Religion, Gods, and Culture and for his illustrative work. Some of his well-known books are *Myth = Mithya* (2006), *Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010), *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramayana* (2013), *My Gita* (2015), *Olympus: An Indian Retelling of the Greek Myths* (2016) and *Culture: 50 Insights from Mythology* (2017). He hosts a radio show for Radio Mirchi called the Devdutt Pattanaik Show. He holds a website, "devdut", where he writes various articles on Applied Methodology, Indian Mythology, Modern Myth-Making, Myth Theory, and World Mythologies. He also writes books for children and has done a few translations.

In an interview with the Indian Express, Devdutt Pattanaik stated that people can connect with mythology because it is timeless and also helps us connect with our ancestors and give our lives meaning. In this way, re-reading the mythology is critical because it connects with the personal and emotional level of a person and themes found in Indian mythology. This characteristic establishes a bond between the author and his or her audience. He also states that he rewrites *Mahabharata* with a fresh approach for each audience. He has also authored a children's rendition of the *Mahabharata* titled "The Boys Who Fought" and a television presentation titled

“Suno *Mahabharata* Devdutt Pattanaik ke sath” in which he focuses exclusively on the major themes for six lengthy hours, omitting the more detailed descriptions.

The main motto of Devdutt Pattanaik is to make modern readers know the importance of Ancient mythology, which he feels helps in the area of management and leadership. Though trained in medicine, he is widely known for his works on Indian mythology. Through his writing, he has made the modern readers know clearly about the epics. His way of writing is straightforward and understandable. He writes unbiased, without giving any perspective study or addressing particular issues like gender, caste, or race.

Epic rewritings take numerous shapes to satisfy the current readers’ needs and tastes and assist the author in interpreting the characters from diverse perspectives to give them a new dimension. In this way, the retellings have influenced readers to consider the villains as the noblest and most beloved individuals, despite their flaws. Rewriting the epic allows the author to offer the same character multiple faces and multiple meanings for the same incident; despite the multiple faces and interpretations, modern writers retain the tale the same.

Retelling of *Mahabharata* without giving any interpretation or character analysis can be considered as an abridged version to the original text. Devdutt Pattanaik’s *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* aids the modern reader in grasping the meaning, ideals, and ethics of the original text. The author has simplified the reading by comprehending the original material. This retelling has two notes: one in the beginning and one in the end. It contains practically all of *Mahabharata*’s significant events covered.

The author has explained every culture, the meaning of the characters’ names, and the reason for a curse; additionally, the author has filled it with knowledge,

archetypes from Greek mythology, and the variations that other regional writers have made, as well as the concept of other regional people and writers around the world. In this retelling, the author has emphasized the epic's ancestral note. The Kuru Clan's forebears have not been adequately shown in most television shows or literature. Pattanaik, on the other hand, has emphasized and noted the origin and rationale for each person's actions. The recurrent features discovered in the Kuru lineage can be understood through this book.

The book (*Jaya*) is divided into 18 parts by the author (Pattanaik), corresponding to the 18 Parvas found in the original text (*Mahabharata*). The author's language is commendable, and he employs basic language throughout the narrative. Each chapter includes illustrative diagrams to help the reader grasp the concept and storyline. The image gets stuck in one's head longer than the words that are encountered while reading the text. Pattanaik has depicted the story in its entirety, including the old culture of the epic period, without expressing any personal views on cultural customs. The key premise in this rendition is the fight between the sons of Pandu (Pandavas) and the sons of Dhritarashtra (Kauravas) over the Throne of Hastinapur.

The novel begins with the prologue, which depicts Janamejaya, the ruler of Hastinapur, performing a snake sacrifice by summoning all the Brahmins to avenge the snakes for killing his father Parikshit, son of Abhimanyu. At that time, the son of Naga commander Astika tells Janamejaya's inheritance narrative; hence, *Jaya* begins with the narration to Janamejaya, Arjuna's great-grandson.

The novel's central theme is to bring *Dharma* to the land, for which Bhishma, the son of King Shantanu, works tirelessly to find an appropriate King to rule the country that follows the path of *Dharma*. His father entrusts him with the

responsibility of deciding who should rule Hastinapur. Pandavas, according to Bhishma, are *Dharma*-followers, “By “Dharma” the Hindu mean ‘right, duty, law’ and also ‘religious custom and usage’” (Pandey 43), while Kauravas are *Adharma*-committees (those who fail to follow the path of Dharma). As a result, he wants Yudhistira, the eldest of the Pandavas, to rule Hastinapur.

Nonetheless, because his father is the King of Hastinapur, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, battles for his rights; they divided the kingdom into two halves to keep the family together. One belongs to the Pandavas, and the other to the Kauravas. Duryodhana, the greedy King, is not satisfied. He wants to rule the entire kingdom, so he enlists Shakuni’s support and invites Yudhistira to the board game. Yudhistira accepts the invitation. Shakuni possesses special dice created from his father’s thigh bone to follow his commands. The Kauravas won the Dice Game with the help of those supernatural dice.

Yudhistira stakes his wife after betting on his entire kingdom, wealth, siblings, and himself. After losing the game, the Kauravas humiliated Draupadi by stripping her naked in front of a crowd of men. They are later sentenced to twelve years in the jungle and one year in hiding. Pandavas and their wife are humiliated and spend 13 years in exile. They came back to avenge the Kauravas and reclaim their empire. The eighteen-day fight amongst their family members takes place in the region of Kurukshetra.

The Pandavas vanquish the Kauravas and reclaim their realm with the help of Krishna, who broke all the norms of battle. Dhritarashtra, Kunti, and Gandhari leave their palace to live in the jungle, as the author Pattanaik concludes. They die in a forest fire, followed by the Yadu clan’s collapse and Krishna’s death. After making Parikshit the King of Hastinapur, the Pandavas decide to depart the palace to allow

the younger generation to rule. Except for Yudhistira and the dog *Dharma*, all of the Pandavas fall on their way to *Swarga*, and only Yudhistira reaches *Swarga*. When Yudhistira inquires about his brother and wife's whereabouts, he discovers they are all in hell, suffering for various causes.

All of the Kauravas will be in *Swarga* because they all died in the battle of Kurukshetra. If a warrior dies on the battlefield, he or she is granted *Swarga*. All of the Pandavas and Draupadi return to *Swarga* after realising their mistakes. Pattanaik has also added God's song in this work, in which Krishna advises Arjuna on the *Dharma* he must follow in order to begin a new *Yuga* with the end of the conflict.

There are two types of characters in the novel: those who follow the path of *Dharma* and those who follow the path of *Adharma*. There are a lot of complex characters in *Jaya*, and these two categories help the readers to figure out who they are, through their actions. In a nutshell, Pandavas are those who follow the path of *Dharma*, and even if they appear to make mistakes or break regulations, they will be excused with a mythical story. Kauravas, on the other hand, pursue the path of *Adharma*. Shakuni's argument for pursuing the road of *Adharma* is clear. Karna's *Dharma* is to be loyal to his friend Duryodhana, for which he takes the path of *Adharma*.

The female protagonists in this tale are victims of a patriarchal society and inflexible cultural traditions dominated by men. Each female character is distinct, and the narrative depicts their anguish. The author shows ancient cultural customs and the prevalent patriarchal culture maintained through the characters. The female characters are described in various ways, including sacrifice, obstinacy, forgiveness, and revenge, to name a few adjectives. The author has conveyed solid morals and ethics through the female characters.

Draupadi is a strong female who is also attractive. She will not compromise or forgive the Kauravas for their actions, which is why the great battle fought. As a result, she never considered withdrawing from the fight. Draupadi is cruel to the Kauravas and does not show mercy to them. Pandavas are God's sons; thus, gods will finally be on their side. Their deeds are as if they are God's actions. Pandavas will succeed in bringing *Dharma* into the world. They (Pandavas) have extinguished *Adharma* from the earth by conquering the Kauravas, and are always considered to do the right thing and commit no fault when Krishna is on their side.

Pattanaik has gathered all of *Mahabharata's* small stories in *Jaya*. He has inserted tales in an appropriate place to emphasize cultural values and ethics in such a way that it does not detract from the primary subject. These stories are not seen in other *Mahabharata* retellings since they are told from a single person's perspective. Tales are a critical component as they provide context for the main narrative. These tales are included to emphasize a moral ideal, a political concept, or to provide a solution to a character's inquiry. Tales woven within the storyline serve as a complement to the primary plot's characters.

Pandavas listen to the stories of Rama, Satyavan and Savitri, Nala and Damayanti in various time periods during their exile in order to help the key characters comprehend their goal and how to spend their thirteenth year in concealment. Each story holds life principles and ethics throughout the work, and this story is dedicated wholly to Rishis' narrated tales.

The Ramayana is narrated by Rishi Markendeya as a response to Yudhistira's despondent lament about his tragedy. Yudhistira laments his family's demise, claiming that no one else in the universe would have grieved as much as he has "One day, feeling sorry for being the cause of his family's downfall, he wailed, 'Surely

there has never been a man who has suffered as much as me.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 164) upon hearing this, Rishi Markendeya relates the story of Ram to demonstrate that there is always someone worse off than us in this cosmos.

Ram is a metaphor for an ideal son who endures pain to meet his stepmother Kaikeyi's request and his father's command. Ram's experience demonstrates that even without making a mistake, one is destined to suffer. Suffering is a universal experience. To uphold *Dharma*, Ram spends fourteen years in the jungle and has to confront the king of Rakshaasa, Ravana, for abducting his wife during the last year of their exile.

Here, Lakshman volunteers to serve Ram, while Sita volunteers to be a dutiful wife. Narrating this serves as a metaphor for teaching the Pandavas about the established bond between the brothers. Unlike the Pandavas and Draupadi, who lament and blame their misfortunes on others, Sita and Lakshman suffered alongside Ram as a result of their reverence and love for him “. . . his wife, Sita and his younger brother, Lakshman, followed him because they are committed to sharing his burden of misfortunes”(Pattanaik, *Jaya* 164). They are demonstrating the importance of sharing one's pain. Rather than self-blame or self-pity, the Pandavas must work with vigour and intelligence in order to reclaim what they have lost. These stories are recounted by the Sages and Rishis during their exile in order to keep the Pandavas' mental health intact in the face of their impending doom. Draupadi is distraught by her ordeal, but after listening to the stories, she regains her bravery and willpower to face the difficulties in forest.

Following that, during their exile, Draupadi interrogates a sage to see if anybody altered their fate “Tired of her terrible situation, Draupadi one day asked the

sages, ‘Is man fettered to his destiny? Can one change one’s fate?’” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 185) Sage responds by narrating the story of Satyavan and Savitri. This narrative is told to demonstrate that women have a strong will and are capable of changing their destiny through their desire. This narrative is replete with ethical implications, a symbolic manner of imploring Draupadi to have a strong determination to overcome the horrible circumstances that have occurred and continue to occur around her.

Savitri serves as a role model for selfless women. When Yama bestowed three boons on her, not one of them is one she wished for herself. She wished boons for her birthplace, her post-marriage residence, and her adored spouse “. . . Savitri bowed her head respectfully and for her first boon asked that her father-in-law should regain his lost kingdom. As her second boon she asked that her father be blessed with a son. As her third boon she asked that she be the mother of Satyavan’s sons.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 186) This narrative serves as a metaphor for how a married woman should act with determination, wisdom, and perseverance in order to maintain family peace.

Yagnavalkya states in the Upanishaves that life’s chariot has two wheels: desire and destiny. One can rely on either or both. Savitri alters her fate through her passionate yearning. Hindu women do *Vrata* in order to obtain their desires. They express their wish and affect the fates of their houses by fasting and offerings (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 186).

Yudhistira is told the narrative of Vibhandaka to teach him the significance of balancing spiritual pursuits. The narrative of Rishi Agastya is told to emphasize the necessity of having children; the story of Kahoda and King Sala is told to demonstrate the virtue of keeping a pledge. King Kaushika’s story teaches them about worldly obligations.

The story of King Somaka teaches them (Pandavas and Draupadi) the virtue of asceticism, and the story of Rishi Raibhya teaches them (Pandavas and Draupadi) to be forgiving in their lives. Sages also tell the Pandavas a story about Indradyumna in order to instill in them the importance of leaving a legacy as proof of their kindness. After all, they (Pandavas) have suffered for years because of their cousins (Kauravas) in Hastinapur's court. Pattanaik's inclusion of these stories has helped current readers comprehend the importance of marriage, having children, being responsible, balancing one's life, forgiving, and being generous.

Rishi Vrihaveashwa relates the narrative of Nala and Damayanti to Yudhistira during their twelfth year of exile. This narrative might be viewed as the most significant addition in the story since it contains important information for the Pandavas. Damayanti marries a Nishada king named Nala, who is renowned for his beauty, culinary prowess, and obsessive dice playing. “. . . Nala's cousin, Pushkara, paid them a visit and invited Nala to a game of dice. During the game, just like Yudhistira, Nala wagered all that he possessed and lost it all” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 195) Like Yudhistira, Nala loses everything in a dice game with his cousin Pushkara and is sent out into the wilderness. Like Draupadi, Damayanti accompanied Nala to the forest to share the anguish. Nala and Damayanti are in a worse predicament than the Pandavas. They are not permitted to carry anything other than their clothing.

Without a weapon, Nala is powerless to search for food. The Rishi adds that while Nala's predicament is far worse than Yudhistira's, he overcomes it due to his wife's tenacity. Nala abandons Damayanti in the wilderness, believing that she would return to her father's house. However, poor Damayanti wanders from place to place in quest of her spouse “When Damayanti woke up and discovered Nala is not by her

side, her first thought is not to run to her father; it is to find her husband” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 197).

On the one hand, Damayanti is in perilous situations alone in the jungle. She confronts it with courage. Finally, she assists the Queen of Chedi as a maid before returning to her father. On the other hand, Nala meets a dreadful Naga, Karkotaka, and collaborates with the ruler of Ayodhya. He works for the King as a chef and charioteer. Later, with the assistance of her father, Damayanti discovers her spouse in a wonderful manner. Nala confronts his cousin to another dice game and defeats him using the methods he learned from Rituparna. ““So it shall be with you, Yudhistira,’ said the sage Vrihaveashwa, blessing the eldest Pandava (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 200).” The tale, Rishi Virhaveashwa assists Yudhistira in overcoming his remorse over the Pandavas’ misery. Yudhistira is relieved at the end of the narrative. While the present may seem painful, the future will not be the same. Whatever is lost will finally be gained, is the Rishi’s admonition to Yudhistira. As with Nala, he will reclaim what he has lost—family and money.

The narrative of Nala and Damayanti serves as a guide for the Pandavas in their thirteenth year of exile in concealment. Like Nala, Bhima works as a chef, Nakula as a stable-keeper, and like Damayanti, Draupadi disguises as the queen’s maid in Virata kingdom. The narrative of Ram is a symbolic reflection of the fact that someone in the cosmos has endured more than we have. The narrative of Satyavan-Savitri serves as a metaphor for how a great desire may alter the course of a family’s fate. The narrative of Nala-Damayanti assisted Yudhistira in feeling vindicated for his actions, and their story served as a guide for their last year in hiding.

Savitri, Damayanti, and Sita are all female characters that represent strong-willed woman, tenacity, and faithful wives. Their devotion to their husbands and their willingness to share in his suffering exemplify the ideal woman position during the Vedic period. Due to their unwavering devotion to their spouses, they are still regarded as remarkable woman of the Vedic age. Panadavas must be together and help one another in order to reclaim their realm. Change is the only constant thing, because the Pandavas' current situation will not persist indefinitely, the Sages and Rishis present narratives to convince the Pandavas to accept their suffering and go forward courageously. What is lost will eventually find its way back to them.

Yudhistira, like Nala, will reclaim his kingdom. Those who pursue the path of *Dharma* like Ram will never be destined to eternal suffering. The path to *Dharma* is the way to wealth. Two anecdotes are given to Yudhistira by Rishi Vrihadashwa and Rishi Markandeya to help him comprehend that pain is universal and that everyone is destined to suffer at some point in their lives due to the cyclical nature of the process. These anecdotes are told to demonstrate that one should not believe that their problem is the only one that matters in this world.

The Rishis' told the brothers a couple more stories to help them grasp their mission and stay united during the conflict. Krishna told Arjuna and Yudhistira the story of Valaka to demonstrate his point “. . . ‘sometimes an action we think is wrong turns out to be right’” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 271). Furthermore, Kaushika's experience demonstrates that “. . . ‘sometimes an action we think is right turns out to be wrong’” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 272). Krishna tells them the narrative in order to persuade them and reach an agreement among their brothers. He claims that one should have faith in one's friends and family and not allow someone to break the trust link with harsh comments.

These tales not only guide the characters in the novel, but also the modern readers. Pattanaik tries to teach values to the modern readers by including the tales which is knit with moral value in *Jaya*. Another interesting method handled by him in *Jaya* to convey the story in easy manner is his illustrations in every chapter. Along with the oral narratives the ancient people used to convey the message through cave paintings, drawings and symbols. Similarly, Devdutt Pattanaik depicted the events of the epic using illustrative drawings in his novel. The new kind of presentation is more appealing than words, and it is the image that catches our attention. Few extracts from *Jaya* book are as follows:

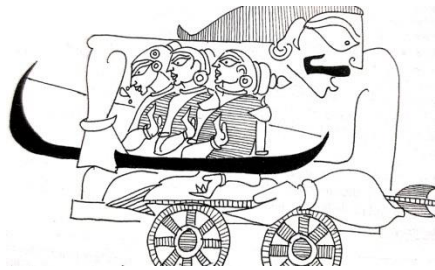


Fig. 1 - Abduction of Kashi Princesses



Fig. 2 – Ekalavya’s Guru Dakshin

The Abduction incident is depicted in Figure 1. Bhishma kidnaps Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, the Kashi princesses. Bhishma is shown with a massive body to convey to the reader that he is a powerful individual. Figure 2 depicts Ekalavya severing his thumb as Guru dakshin for Drona, after Drona discovered that Ekalavya is learning archery secretly from him.



Fig. 3 – Disrobing Draupadi



Fig. 4 – Karna’s Kavach

Draupadi is dragged to court in Figure 3 after Yudhistira loses in the gambling game. Karna handing over his Kavach and Kundal to Indra Deva is seen in Figure 4. The sun in this picture represents Karna's father Surya Deva being enraged by his actions.



Fig.5 – Blood Bath at War



Fig. 6 – Gandhari's Curse

The Battlefield Blood Bath Scene is depicted in Figure 5. Bhima tears Dussashana in order to obtain blood and washes Draupadi's hair in order to fulfill her Vow. Figure 6 depicts Gandhari's curse on Krishna as a result of the loss of all her sons.

3.3 Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*

Anand Neelakantan, a contemporary Indian novelist, screenwriter, and columnist lives in Kerala. His first novel, *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished* (2012) is a retelling of Ramayana from the perspective of Ravana, depicting him as the epic's hero. His other works *Ajaya: Role of the Dice* (2014) and *Ajaya: Rise of Kali* (2015) are based on the epic *Mahabharata* and recounted from the perspective of the defeated party. The novel has been retold from Duryodhana's perspective, which has changed the way we think about Duryodhana.

Anand Neelakantan stated in an interview that Suyodhana (Duryodhana) is abandoned by his companions because he placed too much confidence in them and because Duryodhana did not conceal his errors behind the *Dharma* code. In another interview with *New Ancient Writing*, he emphasizes the need of “imagination and logical deduction” in rewriting the ages-old epics.

The author has highlighted themes such as gender, caste, and race. He has used a variety of phrases to describe a person’s caste and has given a detailed narration of each incident, including the caste issue. Anand Neelakantan’s other works include *The Rise of Sivagami* (2017), *Chaturanga* (2020) and *Queen of Mahishmathi* (2020).

Until the publication of the novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* by Anand Neelakantan, Duryodhana is always remembered for his ferocious nature and his fierce attitude towards Draupadi. Neelakantan tries to excuse Duryodhana’s every behavior by pointing out the events and deeds of the Pandavas and Draupadi that caused Duryodhana to act the way he did. The author has attempted to portray how the Kauravas’ childhood experiences caused them to behave as if they are animals. Throughout the narrative, Duryodhana and Kaurava’s behavior is primarily blamed on the teacher and family members. He (Neelakantan) also portrays Duryodhana as a person without caste baggage that treats all humans equal without prejudice.

Simultaneously, Neelakantan has emphasized the other character’s attitudes toward the caste structure and the dominant culture. His characters convey their feelings about the caste system without prejudice. He emphasizes the reality of a caste-based society and the ruling class’s authority. Neelakantan speaks about the hardships that the lower caste (*Shudra* and *Nishadas*) and Brahmin caste encounter. Even a Brahmin, for example, is poor, but he can improve his life by using his

intellect. Shudra and Nishada, on the other hand, are working hard to change their fate. The novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* explores the caste-based treatment and attitudes of people in the Kshatriya category through the characters. Neelakantan has discussed the harsh realities of epic age culture and each individual's acceptance of their birth.

The novel centers on Duryodhana's incidents, which are told from Duryodhana's point of view; the tale begins with Kunti and her five boys returning home following Pandu's death. King Dhritarashtra and the lovely Queen Gandhari have a son named Duryodhana. Ninety-nine brothers and one sister are born alongside him. Duryodhana is a generous man unconcerned with caste and aspires to transform society. Guru Dronacharya is appointed to teach the Vedas to the Pandavas and Kauravas in place of Kripacharya. Kunti appoints Dronacharya as his advisor, and Arjuna, Kunti's third son, becomes his favorite student.

Dronacharya gives Arjuna individual lessons that he have previously reserved for his son Ashwathama; this partial attitude of Drona causing hatred between Ashwathama and the Pandavas and also between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The Kauravas are enraged at Dronacharya's partial teaching style and, at times, humiliation. They (Pandavas and Kauravas) return to Hastinapur after finishing their schooling. Bhishma chooses to send the Pandavas to *Varanavata* in order to avoid a conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Meanwhile, Shakuni plots to assassinate the Pandavas at *Varanavata* and blames Duryodhana so that people believe he plotted to assassinate the Pandavas, fueling further animosity against them. Karna is the son of Athiratha, a charioteer who wants to learn archery. Initially, he requests Kripacharya to instruct him, and they are unable to pay for it because he demanded a large sum. When Karna intends to commit

suicide, Kripacharya provides him a way to accomplish his purpose. Karna is taught how to act like a *Brahmin* by Kripacharya. As a result, Karna disguises himself as a Brahmin, learns the Vedas from Parashurama, and returns to Hastinapur during the Kauravas and Pandavas' graduation ceremony. Karna is ridiculed by the crowd at the moment, and Duryodhana is the only one who stuck by his side and exalted his life by breaking all the norms. Karna becomes his best friend and eventually the King of Anga

Ekalavya, a Nishada and Hiranyadhanu's son, wanted to learn archery as well, but Guru Drona ruined his plans. Guru Drona ended his ambition to master archery by asking for his thumb finger as a *Guru Dakshin*. Krishna and Balarama, on the other hand, wish to develop a stable society and prosper through agriculture, cultivation, and the establishment of new trade in order to build a city along the coast. It is far from the northern plains, where Magadha Jarasanda, the ruler of Magadha, resides. King Jarasandha treats people according to their merits. When the Pandavas capture King Drupada, Duryodhana is misunderstood once more by Dhritadyumna. Subhadra's elopement with Arjuna on their wedding day upsets Duryodhana. Later, he marries Prince Bhanumathi, the daughter of King Chaitrangan of Kalinga, and they have a son, Lakshmana Kumara, and Lakshmana Kumari, Karna marries Vrushali.

To prevent the cousins from fighting each other, Bhishma divides the realm and gives the Khandavaprastha to Pandavas; they established a *Maya Sabha* there. Duryodhana falls into the fountain during a visit to the Pandavas palace due to the *Maya*; he is unaware of it. Those in *Sabha* burst out laughing, insulted and humiliated. Duryodhana plans to exact vengeance on the Pandavas by inviting them to a dice game. Yudhistira accepts the invitation, stakes each of his assets, and loses all he owns, including his brother and wife. Finally, Duryodhana sent Dussashana to bring

Draupadi to the *Sabha*. The novel ends abruptly, and continues in the second part, *Ajaya: Rise of Kali*.

The Kauravas and Pandavas' childhood are depicted in *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*, followed by their schooling and marriage till the Dice game. Duryodhana's pleasant demeanour and attitude are depicted in the novel by Neelakantan. This novel has helped the modern readers to think about Duryodhana in a new light. It also emphasizes a person's mentality, which has been subjected to a great deal of humiliation and suppressed emotions that have unleashed in an awful manner. From a psychological standpoint, Duryodhana became a rude man as a result of his childhood experiences and the teacher's partial behavior. Shakuni's malevolent mind annihilates the Kuru clan, and he exploits Duryodhana as a piece in his game to destroy the land. Shakuni has manipulated Duryodhana on several occasions. He sows discord among the cousins and instills hate in their hearts, leading to the horrific crime and the Kuru Clan's annihilation.

Neelakantan has given a voice to the silent and minor characters in the novel. Few characters in the story accept their low birth position; Athiratha and Vidura, accept their poor birth status and mourns for their children's future. Both of them are poor; Vidura, the Prime Minister of Hastinapur and Dhirtarashtra's stepbrother, has lived his entire life in poverty. However, he is granted certain privileges, such as studying the Vedas. Neelakantan refers to Kripacharya and Carvaka as maverick Brahmins since they do not strictly follow their caste's standards and convey their understanding of society and the caste system. Duryodhana is the protagonist of this tale; unlike other stories in which Duryodhana is portrayed as a villain, here he is a kind, soft-hearted, gentle, and casteless individual who respects all humans equally.

Duryodhana treats everyone with respect, and his surroundings make him appear to be the bad person.

Karna is another main character in the narrative, and he is known as *Dharmaveer*, a title he is given while studying under Parashurama. He is well-known for his kind heart and unwavering loyalty to his friend Duryodhana. Karna and Duryodhana's bond is the best example of friendship; the same may be said of Ashwathama and Duryodhana's friendship. Neelakantan has addressed the caste issue that has persisted in Indian society, patriarchy, and untouchability, which is a unique characteristic in India. He has depicted the harsh state of the lower caste people, their humiliations and sufferings under the Brahmin and Kshatriya caste people, using characters and events as symbols. He has raised questions like "*Why doesn't the Government demolish the slums? They are an affront to the eyes . . .*" (Neelakantan 120) He claims that eliminating slums causes unemployment in the country since they house many low-wage workers.

The Brahmins have had the right to question and voice their opinions in the King's court. Women could offer their political ideas if a King decide to have them in his court. However, a small number of orthodox Brahmins who completely adhere to laws and oppress women in the name of *Shastras*. ". . . Dhaumya angrily remarked that it is unprecedented for women to be present in the *Sabha*. The orthodox Brahmin quoted various *Smritis* regarding widows not being permitted to be seen in public, let alone holding positions of power" (Neelakantan 25)

Neelakantan has also addressed the issue of Untouchability, (the practice of polluting the higher castes by touching them) in ancient India until 1948, when it is prohibited. On the other hand, the author has incorporated it in his book to demonstrate its rigidity in ancient times. Over time, the rules became increasingly

rigorous. The epic has been rewritten by the author, who has included important societal themes. The author chooses to write a story from the perspective of a ‘loser’. Duryodhana is worshipped in Puravara, a village in Kerala. He is regarded as the Protector of the helpless. The locals think that he responds to those who pray for relief from sickness, poverty, and persecution. The village people relate a different version of the narrative in which Duryodhana visited that village during his search for the Pandavas during their exile and was provided water by a kurava lady to quench his thirst. It is reported that he treated her without regard for her caste; the people are happy to see a Kshatriya Prince be so courteous to them, as they have previously seen only roughness from Kshatriyas. Hundreds of people have therefore gathered throughout the decades to worship Duryodhana as their deity.

The author Neelakantan is prompted, to study *Mahabharata* and identify Duryodhana as the hero, by a simple query posed by the peasants. The peasants questioned why great heroes like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and the entire army of Krishna fought on favour of Duryodhana “*If our lord Duryodhana is an evil man, why did great men like Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, and the entire army of Krishna, fight the war on his side?*” (Neelakantan 8)

3.4 Ashutosh Nadkar’s *Shakuni: Master of the Game*

Ashutosh Nadkar is a journalist from Madhya Pradesh who is presently employed for the Network 18 group as an associate editor. *Shakuni: Master of the Game* (2019), his first novel, is a tale told from the perspective of a villain (Shakuni). Shakuni is regarded as the greatest trickster, and he is cited as the basis for Duryodhana’s conduct, but no one considered the justice of his every action. The author has attempted to examine the *Mahabharata*’s characters through the eyes of the villain Shakuni. Nadkar asserts that even villains can possess redeeming

characteristics that mitigate their negative connotations and elicit pity. One can travel to the opposite side of Shakuni with this literature, and this novel can be viewed as an explanation for Shakuni's acts.

Shakuni, the Gandhara Prince and son of King Subala, has a lovely sister named Gandhari. Bhishma from Hastinapur arrives one day with a big army and takes up residence on the outskirts of Gandhara. The King and Prince are unsure about the motive for Bhishma's arrival. Bhishma has arrived Gandhara to propose to Gandhari on behalf of his grandson Dhritarashtra. The King of Gandhara initially believes it is a proposal between Gandhari and Prince Pandu, but Bhishma offers that Gandhari marry the blind Prince Dhritarashtra.

Bhishma assures them that he would make Dhritarashtra and Gandhari as King and Queen to the throne of Hastinapur. Gandhari is upset with the marriage proposal and covers her eyes with a piece of cloth; Gandhari's favorite brother Shakuni is not pleased. He makes several attempts to prevent the marriage, but Bhishma threatens them with his armies, and they send Gandhari to Hastinapur. Gandhari, who is helpless, resolves to give her life for her country's cause. "I would rather accept the darkness that awaits me, brother, than push all the people of Gandhara and this kingdom into the dark' . . ." (Nadkar 31). Shakuni is enraged with Bhishma and resolves to get revenge on the Kuru dynasty by staying with Gandhari in Hastinapur. He manipulates Dhritarashtra and does everything possible to make him the acting King of Hastinapur when Pandu departs the land.

Shakuni is overjoyed to meet his nephew prior to Kunti giving birth to her children. Kunti's fortunes turn out to be favorable, and she gives birth to her first son Yudhistira. Even though Gandhari conceives prior to Kunti, fate conspires against her and she remains pregnant for more than nine months, which enraged Dhritarashtra

and resulted in her miscarriage. “. . . I suspected that Dhirtarashtra’s attack on her the night before might have led to this. It is quite possible that Dhirtarashtra have hit harder after I have left the room, leading to Gandhari's miscarriage . . . (Nadkar 62). Veda Vyasa arrives at that point to assist them with the new type of medicine and science necessary to give birth to the blob of flesh. Suyodhana is the name given to the first infant born during the incubation phase. Shakuni is the sweetest uncle and lavishes Gandhari’s son with love and attention.

Kunti returns to Hastinapur with her five sons following Pandu’s death. Duryodhana and his brother are not pleased with their cousins’ homecoming. They (Kauravas) are enraged at fat Bhima’s actions and resolved to murder him. Duryodhana and Dussashana plot to assassinate Bhima by poisoning the sweet pudding. As a result, Bhima drowns in the lake, returns to Hastinapur after so many days. Duryodhana is taken aback to find him alive and confided in Shakuni about his error. Shakuni works tirelessly to protect Duryodhana from these plans; they are eventually educated at Dronacharya’s hermitage. Following his return, a big graduation ceremony is held, during which Karna is viewed as an equal to Arjuna, and Shakuni requests Duryodhana to befriend Karna and keep him by his side, as a consequence of which Karna became the King of Anga.

Yudhistira conducted Rajasuya Yagna and became King of Kings after the whole rift Pandavas are granted individual kingdoms named Indraprastha. Following that, Shakuni invites Yudhistira to a board game where he exacts revenge on Duryodhana for his humiliation in their palace, but Duryodhana is dissatisfied with his gain. He brings Draupadi into the hall and begins disrobing her; suddenly, his brother Dussashana gets paralysed, Gandhari rushes to her rescue. Gandhari calls out every scholar and member of the public sitting in the *Sabha* for their public

misbehaviour toward a woman. She vents her rage upon the monarch and the assembled. She lends assistance to Draupadi and remains on her side. Shakuni is at ease seeing Gandhari assisting Draupadi. Shakuni expresses regret for what has occurred to Draupadi and chastised Duryodhana for his inappropriate behaviour with a woman. “. . . ‘I understand the Pandavas are your slaves now, Duryodhana. And so is Draupadi. But it is not right to ill-treat your servants. Remember that.’” (Nadkar 220) .

The Pandavas are exiled to the forest for thirteen years and return filled with vengeance to wage war against Hastinapur. Shakuni’s lengthy wait thus comes to an end. Shakuni desires the annihilation of the whole Kuru Dynasty in retaliation for the injustice meted out to his sister Gandhari. The long-awaited battle of Kurukshetra is about to begin. Shakuni is overjoyed about the conflict since it means that the whole Kuru dynasty would be annihilated for their arrogance toward minor countries and their hegemony over other nations. This is Shakuni’s first and final war; everyone is dying on their side. Following Karna’s demise, Shakuni is certain that he would die either before or after Duryodhana; it is at that point that Sahadeva struck him with the sword, and blood gushed from his body. The tale concludes with Shakuni’s death.

Since the novel is told from Shakuni’s perspective, the novel’s characterisation is based on how Shakuni’s perception of the other characters is given. Character Vidura, one of the major characters in the novel, is not known for his treachery. He is continuously fighting for the Pandavas, and Vidura’s goal is to tarnish the Kauravas’ reputation. Although the true enemy is himself, Vidura is always careful to portray Shakuni as a villain. Vidura is always voicing ideas in opposition to Shakuni’s. Thus, Vidura is portrayed as someone who despises Shakuni. He speaks up on ethical principles when it is required for him to do so and remains

silent when it is not. He is regarded as the mastermind behind all the grandiose schemes. Vidura changes the name of Suyodhana, “good warrior” to the name Duryodhana, “evil warrior” in favour of Pandavas. “Suyodhana’s name meant ‘good warrior’. But Vidura, full of hate, said Suyodhana deserved to be called by the antonym of his name. According to Vidura, Suyodhana have turned into Duryodhana, ‘an evil warrior’. ” (Nadkar 79)

Vidura guides every move of the Pandavas. He ensures that Suyodhana is remembered as Duryodhana and seeks the whole populace to believe that Duryodhana is a wicked person who is unfit to lead them. Simultaneously, he creates myths that lead people to believe Duryodhana is an avaricious prince who wants to murder his cousins in order to seize the kingdom. Since Vidura proposes Yudhistira as the heir to King Dhirtarashtra, Shakuni is viewed as upset and points out that when the elder brother is still living, it is not proper to appoint the younger brother the King of Hastinapur. He is often seen supporting Yudhistira.

Bhishma is represented as a callous individual who is responsible for the princesses Ambika, Ambalika, Amba, and Gandhari’s sorrow and pain. Being in a position of authority, his judgments are largely influenced by Vidura’s ethical tactics. Bhishma is viewed as a powerful individual whom others dare criticize because of his actions and schemes. He betrays King Subala and his daughter by falsely promising that they will succeed. King Dhirtarashtra as Hastinapur’s next ruler.

The characterizations are primarily based on how Shakuni perceives them, and Shakuni describes every character in detail. He believes Arjuna is the fit King for Hastinapur and even proposes his name despite Duryodhana’s maternal uncle. “. . . Prince Arjuna has all the qualifications required to be the monarch of Hastinapur. I propose prince Arjuna’s name as the successor to King Dhirtarashtra” (Nadkar 170).

Shakuni believes Duryodhana is unable to lead the land because he lacks emotional control, and he views Yudhistira as a coward who hides behind his siblings. The author has utilized certain adjectives to emphasize the Pandavas' and Kauravas' traits. Shakuni regards Duryodhana as a skilled warrior and a courageous person who excels at mace, but when it comes to ruling, Duryodhana is described as an overly passionate someone who lacks patience with others, which makes him an unfit king.

Shakuni contrasts Arjuna with the Kauravas and Pandavas to demonstrate why he is the best person for the ruling. He is an excellent archer, a talented individual, and, unlike Bhima and Duryodhana or his brother Yudhistira, he is a staunch fighter who is confident in his ability to be the right warrior to rule the land. According to Shakuni, Yudhistira is a worthless king who has the fortitude to win his own bride and is a gambling addict who has squandered his wife and brothers.

Nadkar makes two assumptions in this tale, the author speaks through the character Shakuni; the first is that after Kunti gives birth to her children, he raises the topic of who her children's legal father is. Kunti has been endowed by sage Durvasa with the ability to ask the Gods to give her a child. Thus, all her sons are born. Similarly to Madri's sons, although the author believes that Kunti did not call the Gods, but rather has a rapport with a few sages who live near their hut. Perhaps they assist her in becoming pregnant as a *Niyoga* practice with her husband's approval; the same might be said about princess Madri. “. . . I do not know if the people of Hastinapura really bought that story. I was convinced that Kunti got impregnated by a man other than Pandu. They decidedly taken recourse to the practice of *niyoga* . . .” (Nadkar 167)

The author then makes the presumption that Yudhistira is the son of Vidura and Kunti. Due to his resemblance to Vidura in look and behavior as a result of

Pandu's infertility, he (Pandu) may have approached his own brother for assistance in conceiving his wife.

. . . I strongly believed that the first person chosen to impregnate Kunti is her husband's half brother, Vidura. Vidura and Yudhistira shared many characteristics, which only further fuelled my suspicions . . . I was convinced that Kunti's firstborn is no miracle. Vidura must have fathered Yudhistira. (Nadkar 168)

Nadkar purposefully writes the assumptions in such a way that the current readers will think differently. This assumption of the story is different from myth and religion which are written in a rational way. The age old epic with a rational mind set by drawing some reasons and assumptions. Rakhi's Ph.D dissertation, titled *Gender, Textual Politics, and Alternative Discourse: A Critical Study of the Select Retellings of Indian Epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Cilappatikaram*, (2015) makes the following observations about the rewritings:

The modern age, which is also known as "The Age of Reason", is especially remarkable for its attitude towards reason and logic. The authority of faith and religion is replaced during this age by the authority of science and reason. This distinguishing feature of the modern age has made ripples in the literary realm and inspired the writers to look at the Epic narratives from a rational point of view . . . (Rakhi 159)

Shakuni: Master of the Game is an apocalyptic tale devoid of superstitions, supernatural aspects, mythology, and religion. Nadkar does not incorporate any magic or mythology into the novel; instead, he presents the events and people logically. Three cases demonstrate that the author attempts to demonstrate a logical reason and the ignoring of myth. The first instance is when the Kauravas poison Bhima; the

author explains that Bhima is poisoned and the poison spreads throughout his body; as he drowns in the lake, the snakes bite him repeatedly, acting as an antidote. He recovers consciousness as a consequence and returns to Hastinapur.

The second one is Shakuni's dice. To this day, everyone believes Shakuni possessed a pair of dice that was made out of his father's thigh bone and favored his winning. However, in Nadkar's version it is not viewed as a supernatural dice, but rather as a regular dice. Nadkar portrays Shakuni as an accomplished board game player; through his mastery of the game, he amasses so many kingdoms without resorting to violence and murder.

The next instance is the disrobing sequence of Draupadi, in which Dussashana attempts to disrobe her (Draupadi) and becomes paralysed, unable to move his hands. "As soon as Dussashana raised a hand to pull the clothes off Panchali's body his arms went cold and limp. He stood there paralyzed . . ." (Nadkar 226)

Similar to the novel *Shakuni: Master of the Game*, there is yet another novel called *I, Duryodhana . . .* (2019) written by Pradeep Govind is written with the same arguments. Like Nadkar, Govind has also provides a rational explanation for each action in his novel by dispelling myths. The identical disrobing scenario is shown in a unique manner. Govind presents the Kauravas in an inebriated state in his tale, which leads them to disrespect Draupadi. "Dussashana inebriated with wine took the cue and grabbed Draupadi's robe in an attempt to disrobe her. Intoxicated, we are completely devoid of our senses . . ." (*I, Duryodhana . . .* 126). Unlike any other novel, this one is seen as the one that provides rationale for the behaviour of mythological characters. The age-old belief system is disrupted and transgressed through contemporary writers' narratives.

By posing multiple questions to the readers, highlighting every possible scenario at various points, Nadkar author hopes to keep them interested while also eliciting new perspectives on the epic in their imaginations. Among these is the author's repeated inquiry into Kunti's secret regarding her son Karna; in doing so, he poses a logical question: what caused Kunti to lose her emotions? Why did Kunti keep Karna's fatherhood a secret, despite the three opportunities she had to discover the truth: in the amphitheatre, Draupadi's Swayamvar, and Yudhistira's Coronation ceremony?

Additionally, Duryodhana would be as happy as the Pandavas at the prospect of Karna becoming the King of Hastinapur and averting the demise of the Kuru dynasty. The author holds Kunti and Shakuni equally accountable for the demise of the Kuru kingdom and the demise of thousands of warriors, including family members. It is possible that she had shared the truth, the conflict might have been avoided, and many wives would not have lost their husbands during the Kurukshetra battle.

Shakuni is presented as a rebellious character in the novel *Shakuni: Master of the Game*; he seeks vengeance against the Kuru dynasty for the wrong they committed upon their kingdom. Bhishma is fully aware that Gandhara is a minor kingdom with limited military might, so he threatens them to handover Gandhari for her marriage with his blind grandson Dhirtarashtra. Shakuni is vengeful, so he uses his evil thoughts to destroy the Kuru clan which is met at Kurukshetra. Whether the Pandavas or the Kauravas win the war; the true victor is Shakuni, who manages to destroy the whole Kuru bloodline. His defiant attitude is reflected in his father King Subala's talk with him. He highlights an important point, that how powerful people treat the weak. "God has created this world. God has bestowed Bhishma abilities. But

does that give Bhishma the liberty to disregard all laws and do what he please with a smaller Kingdom? Bhishma approached Gandhara because he was well aware that we had no military strength. He could have approached Jarasandha, the king of Magadha” (Shakuni, 26). Shakuni resents the fact that he is not a fighter. He laments his incapacity in the face of his country and his sister’s helplessness.

Nadkar, in addition to the several questions posed throughout his story, also concludes it with a question. It is an open ended novel that has drawn several examples to establish Shakuni’s innocence and his position as a victim of a tyrannical ruler. After justifying his conduct and demonstrating that Shakuni is not responsible for Duryodhana’s terrible behavior and expressing Vidura’s mastermind and treachery and Krishna as a trickster, the author has let the reader to decide if he is the Vilest of villains. This narrative is receptive to the numerous interpretations that might be extracted from the epic.

3.5 Kavita Kane’s *Karna’s Wife: the Outcast’s Queen*:

Kavita Kane is a contemporary Indian author best known for her mythological fiction. A great majority of her works deals with the issues of caste and feminism. *Karna’s Wife: the Outcast’s Queen* (2013) is her debut novel, written from the perspective of Karna’s second wife Uruvi. By constructing the fictitious character Uruvi, Kane has addressed gender concerns and also brought attention to the caste system. She has also shared her views on the *Mahabharata*. Kane’s other works include *Sita’s Sister* (2014), *Menaka’s Choice* (2015), *Lanka’s Princess* (2016), *The Fisher Queen’s Dynasty* (2017) and *Ahalya’s Awakening* (2019). She has emphasized the underrepresented or unvoiced characters throughout her novels, giving them a voice and depicting their role, commitment, and significance in the respective epics.

Karna's Wife is a novel written from a female perspective that focuses on the gender and caste issues. The author Kane expresses her thoughts on the gender and caste issues via through the characters. The rigidity of the caste system pushes a princess to live the life of a servant, as recounted by the author, about Vrushali who is not envious of her husband Karna even when he marries another woman Uruvi. Karna's marriage to Uruvi is accepted by his first wife Vrushali as a normal thing. In this tale, Vrushali never expresses sadness about her husband's second marriage, demonstrating the fact that, throughout the ancient times, it was considered acceptable for a King to marry more than one woman with his first wife's approval. Through the character Uruvi, the author emphasizes Draupadi's anguish over what has occurred to her; in this tale, we can see Karna as a person who feels bad for disrobing Draupadi. From a feminine perspective, the author conveys Karna's humiliation for being born into a lower caste and marrying someone from a higher caste.

Uruvi, Pukeya's Princess, is the daughter of King Vahusha and Queen Shubra. She is a stunning, clever, and kind-hearted princess who falls in love with Karna, the son of a low-born charioteer. After receiving numerous rejections from her family and friends, she chose Karna over Arjuna and married him at *Swayamvar*. The entire work is centered on Uruvi's intervention and her role in the story. Uruvi appears to be estranged following her marriage since she is regarded as a goddess at Karna's Palace due to her higher caste standing. Uruvi is envious of Karna's relationship with his first wife Vrushali. She is powerless to stop her husband's wrongdoings as a result of his allegiance to his friend Duryodhana. Uruvi is fully aware of Duryodhana's manipulative tendencies, having effectively made Karna his friend and kept him by his side to defeat the Pandavas.

Karna is unaware of Duryodhana's actual motive; he believes that he is the only one who stood alongside him when no one else did. Only Duryodhana appreciated Karna's virtues. Karna is faithful to Duryodhana despite Uruvi's advice to avoid him. Karna is also equally responsible for the barbaric conduct committed against Draupadi at the *Sabha*, for which Uruvi punishes Karna by leaving him alone. She also punishes herself, since she cannot forgive him for what he has done. She begs Draupadi's pardon for the wrongs committed against her by the Kauravas, which happened in her husband's presence. Draupadi forgives him but informs Uruvi that the matter has gotten out of hand and Arjuna has taken it upon himself to assassinate Karna.

During the Pandavas' exile, Kunti visits Uruvi and informs her about her married life and the chasm she faced, which is identical to Uruvi's. Uruvi eventually gives birth to Karna's son Vrishaketu. Until that time, Uruvi and Karna live separately in their residence. Uruvi refuses to join Karna even after Vrishaketu is born. Vrushali informs her about Karna's anguish and loneliness. Vrushali attempts to appease Uruvi and convince her to forgive Karna for his wrongdoing, but Uruvi is obstinate and she refuses to return to Karna.

The Pandavas return from exile, signaling the outbreak of war in the land of Kurukshetra. Uruvi works tirelessly to get Karna to understand and withdraw from the conflict, but his loyalty has blinded him, and he continues to fight. Karna is struck from behind by Arjuna in order to win the war, and he perished as a result of the attack. At this point, Kunti and the Pandavas weep at Karna's death. Krishna conveys Karna's three requests from his final moments in this world. The first is for Kunti to publicly announce that Karna is her firstborn son and no longer a low caste member. The second is his want to share food to others throughout his life, but no one ate from

his house because it is banned for people to eat from lower caste households, and his third request is to burn him in the desolate region of earth so that no one else would face the suffering he did. As a result, Karna is officially referred to as a *Kshatriya*, and he has thus earned his proper seat at his cremation.

The tale concludes with the Pandavas paying a visit to Uruvi and inviting her to return to the Hastinapur palace to remain with them. They also discuss their choice to crown Vrishaketu as crown prince of Hastinapur. Uruvi expresses her disapproval of the Pandavas' action and requests that they refrain from using force in this matter; only then would she allow Vrishaketu to accompany them to Hastinapur. Vrishaketu is nurtured as a great warrior in accordance with the conditions and promise, and in the end, Uruvi forgives Kunti and expresses her regret for what she has lost.

The characters in *Karna's Wife* are described through Uruvi's perspective. She portrays Vrushali as a strong lady who can deal with her husband's mistakes. Vrushali is shown as a loyal wife who never leaves her husband's side. She exemplifies the most devout women, adhering to the age-old practice of not questioning the male's conduct and accepting their way of life. Uruvi, on the other hand, is viewed as an example of a contemporary wife with a rebellious character. She breaches caste laws by marrying Karna. Unlike Vrushali, Uruvi is not viewed as a passive housewife; she constantly criticizes Karna's conduct. Indeed, she is courageous enough to assert that Karna is incorrect and absolves him of responsibility for the disgrace he inflicted on Draupadi. As a sign of protest, she goes to her hometown, leaving Karna behind: "Father, I have left Karna" (Kane 138).

King Vahusha, Uruvi's father, is regarded as the most loving and supportive parent. At first, he encourages his daughter to marry a lower caste member. When she comes home following her separation from Karna, he accepts her as well. King

Vahusha constantly supported his daughter's decisions. He is a loving and caring parent; he used facts to alleviate her grief. Karna is portrayed in this work as both a victim of the caste system and a person seeking vengeance for the humiliations he faced. Karna seeks vengeance on Draupadi for the humiliation she inflicted on him during her *Swayamvara*. Thus, by emphasizing Karna's part from the epic *Mahabharata* using fictional character the author Kane has provided the modern readers with a new perspective to the epic. Also, addressed the caste based domination and women empowerment through her description of the events and characters in the retelling of *Mahabharata Karna's Wife: the Outcast's Queen*.

3.6 Analysis

When the epic narrative is presented from a new perspective the storyline remains consistent but the perception of the event changes. For example the event that happens in Vanaravata palace for Kunti and Pandavas, this event is portrayed in a different way by different authors. Each author justifies their reason for writing by portraying it in a different manner. Firstly, Shakuni's aim in the novel *Ajaya* (2013) is not to murder the Pandavas, but to convince them that their brothers intend to kill them “. . . Shakuni also offered him an additional incentive if he agreed to tell Pandavas that the fire have been part of Suyodhana's conspiracy to get rid of them. . .” (Neelakantan 304).

Shakuni carries out his strategy with the assistance of Purochana. Simultaneously, he ensures that the word reaches Vidura, “. . . Shakuni had leaked hints about the palace of lac to that painfully honest Prime Minister.” (Neelakantan 303) since Vidura would assist the Pandavas in escaping from the lac mansion. Vidura is accountable in Shakuni for fabricating a narrative about the house of wax and distributing it among the populace in order to convince them that the Pandavas are

blameless and Duryodhana, with the assistance of Shakuni, is callous and has murdered the Pandavas.

Dhritarashtra's goal in *Jaya* is to burn them out in the lac mansion and install his son Duryodhana as the future King of Hastinapur “. . . Dhritarashtra agreed and ordered a palace to be built for Kunti and her sons in Varanavata. When Vidura visited the palace, he is horrified to discover that the house is made of lac and all kinds of inflammable material” (Pattanaik 76). In *I, Duryodhana*. . . the same scene is described by Duryodhana's inner thinking, that the Pandavas intend to destroy the lac mansion and create a negative image of Duryodhana, so that people would regard Duryodhana as a villain “. . . this is a master plan by the Kaunteyas to portray me as a villain among the people of Hastinapur. They have set fire to the palace themselves. . . .” (Govind 73) Thus, the same event becomes unique when narrated from the perspective of the person who is behind this plot to assassinate the Pandavas. The authors leave the readers in the dark about who is behind the conspiracy, whether it is Shakuni, Vidura, Dhritarashtra, or the Pandavas. When viewed from the eyes of each individual, the rationale they drew appear to be acceptable. These varying views result in a state of ‘hyperreality’, in which the true picture is repeatedly updated, leading to the belief that the current versions are the true ones.

Characterization is another part of the perspective analysis of the retelling of *Mahabharata*; because when the viewpoint shifts, the characters are presented from their perspective. In *Jaya*, the Pandavas are great, and they adhere to *Dharma*, while the Kauravas adhere to *Adharma*. It is identical to the original version. However, the portrayal completely changes when it comes to the villains' perspective. As the narrator in *Ajaya*, Duryodhana discusses his attitude towards the character. Similarly, in *Shakuni Master of the Game*, Shakuni is the narrator and it is presented in the first

person. The novel presents the characters as Shakuni has envisaged them. In *Karna's Wife*, the epic *Mahabharata* is told from a feminine perspective, illustrating how Uruvi thinks about every character.

Arjuna is egotistical of his archery ability, which causes him to be portrayed as an arrogant person in *Jaya*. However, Shakuni believes that Arjuna is the finest candidate to rein Hastinapur in the novel *Shakuni Master of the Game*. Perhaps because the author Nadkar has a personal attachment to the character Arjuna, he portrays him as the ideal candidate to lead the land. Arjuna is portrayed in *Karna's Wife* as arrogant and as someone who does not fight according to *Kshatriya* rules; he hits Karna in the rear and commits *Adharma*.

Language has a vital impact in the retellings of the epics. Each author has approached the language uniquely. Language is a manifestation of our culture and identity; the writers of retellings effectively use this feature of language. The author of *Ajaya* addresses each individual by their caste name; for example, he refers to Ekalavya as a *Nishada* boy. Neelakantan uses strong language to emphasize the humiliation endured by lower caste people.

Additionally, Neelakantan uses certain terms to convey his fury. Kavita Kane has utilized words to conjure up images of the entire place and historical period. Expressions are used to describe the settings, and the settings provide context for the characters' and events' moods. Devdutt Pattanaik did not utilize specific phrases to stress any particular point, although he did use some Indian terms and provided definitions and explanations at the end of each chapter. As the novels are intended for a predominantly Indian audience, it will be simple for them to grasp the meaning; nevertheless, for non-Indians, the author has included explanations for the language and all the events, ceremonies, and customs featured in the story.

The chapter title is critical in any novel since it serves as a tip to the readers about what the chapter will cover. Few current authors utilize it as a symbol, but in retellings of epics, the authors use it to hint at the audience. In *Jaya*, the author splits the work into eighteen chapters by grouping the primary characters' stages of development. Pandavas are the key characters of *Jaya*. Thus, the chapters are separated into sections based on their function. In *Shakuni: Master of the Game*, the author uses basic titles to split his chapters; for example, he uses "Eklavya", "My Gandhara", and so on. This gives the reader a notion of what the chapter deals with.

Anand Neelakantan has split the retelling of *Mahabharata* into two volumes having twenty-seven chapters. The first volume is *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* and the second volume is *Ajaya: Rise of Kali*. As with the other two writers, he has titled each chapter in a way that indicates the crux to the reader; for example, "Rajasuya" discusses Yudhisthira's Rajasuya yagna, "The Teacher Comes" discusses Dronacharya's entry in Hastinapur, and "Revenge of a Brahmin" discusses Dronacharya's struggle against Drupada. In *Karna's Wife* the author has also titled like hinting the readers but what makes this novel different from the others are the elaborated conversations between the characters to name a few titles: "New Horizon: Karna and Uruvi", "Bhishma and Karna", "Karna's Kavach and Kundals", "Karna and Kunti", "The Death of Karna" are some of the chapters labeled centering Karna, indicating that Karna is the primary figure.

The novel's conclusion also plays a significant role in the rewriting process, as each novel's conclusion is unique. The incidents in one novel justify their rewriting, but the writers have not altered the real plotline; instead, they have attempted to demonstrate their argument without affecting the actual story line. Each of the four novels concludes with the Pandavas' victory, but each novel concludes differently.

Jaya concludes with the Pandavas' renunciation at *Swarga*, *Ajaya Roll of the Dice* concludes abruptly with Yudhistira losing in the gambling game, *Shakuni Master of the Game* concludes with the death of Shakuni and a question for the readers, and *Karna's Wife the Outcast's Queen* concludes with the Pandavas taking care of Vrishakethu. Each author's reimagining of the epic from a unique perspective provides new dimensions and possibilities.

The authors have perverted the true essence of the ages-old epic figures through recounting. This subversion of the character and the concept of the events contribute to the deconstruction of traditional ideology; for example, great characters are viewed as poor characters, and the villains' acts are justified. Modern retellings of epics are written in a manner that reflects the author's conception of the epic. Each author's goal for recounting the epic is unique, influencing their writing style. Not every author explains or includes information about the cultural aspects of the epic; this entirely depends on the author's intent. Authors such as Devdutt Pattanaik have written the epic in its entirety, including all cultural practices, ethics, and values, in order to educate modern readers about the depths of Hindu mythology. Similarly, Anand Neelakantan uses Hindu mythology to indirectly address societal concerns, while Kavita Kane has invented a new sort of female characters to examine the epic from a feminist perspective and to demonstrate the consequences of caste prejudice.

3.7 Summation

Retelling ancient epics can serve a variety of purposes. One definitive answer cannot be given, as each retelling of our Indian epics is motivated by a different set of ideals. Several authors have retold the epic in order to preserve and sustain our nation's culture. A few authors emphasize the ancient cultures that triumphed and their significance in the present world to preserve the culture. Another factor might be

the environment in which each author grew up, which led them to view the epics in a new light. Few authors examine feminism through the lens of female characters from Indian epics, and some use epic heroes in general to draw attention to the prevalent and pervasive caste inequalities.

The contemporary retelling of *Mahabharata* has addressed the social issues. Other than the two great epics Ramayana and *Mahabharata*, the regional mythological stories and folk tales are also retold in a new version. Devdutt Pattanaik states that he wishes to liberate the essence of our Indian epics and to ensure that every human being is aware of the depths of Indian mythology. Indian mythology has dealt with Indian culture and science, geography, food habits, ancient life, nuclear weapons, war crafts, arts, and dance. If these epics are not recounted, the world would be unaware of what existed in ancient times. Thus, through the retelling of the epics, India's wealth travels around the world aeons after aeons.

This chapter "Select Retellings of *Mahabharata*-a Critical analysis" has given a brief summary of the primary texts chosen for the study. Also, this chapter has examined the variations found in the four retellings of *Mahabharata* (*Jaya: An Illustrated Retellings of Mahabharata*, *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*, *Shakuni: Master of the Game* and *Karna's Wife: the Outcast's Queen*) by dissecting and analysing the characters, events, language, and title of the chapter and the closure of the novel used by the authors, which are unique and different from the others. This variation in the context of the each retellings of *Mahabharata* has paved way for the researcher to inspect it by applying Antonio Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony'. The following chapter 4 "To Unite or Untie- Culture Hegemony" critically examines how culture becomes a tool for the upper caste people to dominate over the lower caste

people. It also depicts the fact that women and men are interrelated when it comes to culture hegemony in India. It also explores on the role of caste in education.