

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Myth plays a vital function in the dynamics of a society. “Myth normally refers to the ancient tales, mostly of heroism, romance and war, which different races have cherished over the ages.” (Malik and Batra 71) Myth may be found in a wide variety of subjects, including philosophy, psychology, and literature. Mythology is a bag that carries myths to the world. There are parallels among the mythologies of many civilizations. Myths may be thought of as belief systems constructed by a civilization and systematized in order to preserve the community ethics and culture.

Myths are collective and communal production, which serve the purpose of binding a tribe or a nation together . . . Every culture has its own distinctive mythology which is reflected in legends, anecdotes and even the thinking of the group. Myths take their specific form from the cultural environments in which they grow. (Malik and Batra 71)

When a society and its culture begin to embrace change, as they evolve, the myths connected with that culture and civilization evolve as well, and are recreated to reflect the prevailing changes. Thus, myths around the globe are constantly reviewed and adjusted in order for them to continue to exist, without compromising the original intent of their creation. Abrams and Harpham define myth as;

In classical Greek, “mythos” signified any story or plot, whether true or invented. In its central modern significance, however, a myth is one story in a mythology- a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain . . . why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a

rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the rules by which people conduct their lives. (*Glossary of Literary Terms* 230)

Myths have been used to account for historical events, “*Myths are prose narrative which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past*” (Bascom 4). Indian mythology, for example, contributes to the teaching of life’s moral values. The structured sciences of history, geography, medicine, architecture, and literature, as well as several art forms such as music, dance, and painting, all contain elements of mythology. Indeed, several artistic forms have their origins in mythology. “Myth accounts for the origin of the world, of mankind, of death, or for characteristics of birds, animals, geographical features, and the phenomena of nature.” (Bascom 4) Mythology thus serves as a guide for developing human ethics, which are expressed in a variety of art forms.

Natural disasters of the primordial past have been immortalized in tales. Robert A. Segal has provided various examples of how mythology has accounted for natural tragedies; for example, the narrative of Noah recounts a flood that spared no one on earth, despite the fairly unbelievable description of how Noah saved all living beings in a huge Arch he constructed. Segal claims myth as a religion, and that myth adds meaning and value to religion. He also states that the technological growth has brought down fall to both religion and myth.

Myth is here part of religion. Where religion apart from myth provides the sheer belief in Gods, myth fills in the details of how gods cause events. Because myth is part of religion, the rise of science as the reigning modern explanation of physical events has consequently spelled the fall of not only religion but also myth. (13)

It is doubtlessly through stories that humanity acquired pictures of Gods and Goddesses. “Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual” (Bascom 4). Each and every God and Goddess in every culture was essentially brought to life through mythology. It is Indian mythology that details the Gods worshipped in a particular society and culture. For instance, Indian mythology introduces the world to heavenly weapons and their abilities.

Three distinct approaches to mythology from a religious standpoint are possible. The first is Religious myth, which incorporates both conventional and classical mythology. These myths are entirely centered on a single religion and are hence static. The second is Secular myth; modernization cleared the door for secular myths, which obliterated religious myths. Secular myths are widespread in society and can vary according to regional cultural differences. The third type is converting secular myth into religious myth. These types of myths are used to persuade individuals to follow a specific viewpoint. To compel everyone to follow those beliefs, myths are created in every religion, so that people will follow such ideologies out of fear of God. Devdutt Pattanaik says, “Myth is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. This understanding may be religious or secular” (*Myth=Mythya Decoding Hindu Mythology* xvi).

Pattanaik states that “Ancient Greek philosophers knew myth as mythos. From mythos came intuitive narrations, from logos reasonable deliberation. Mythos gives rise to oracles and the arts. From logos came science and mathematics. . . . (*Myth =Mithya Decoding Hindu Mythology* xv) they viewed myth as a narrative that gave rise to oracles and religious belief, whereas Logos was viewed as science. While

logos may explain science, myth explains why things happen the way they do. Myths assist Logos in drawing meaning and providing a rational explanation for the entirety of natural phenomena.

Myth gave birth to mythology, which in turn gave birth to cultural customs. Pattanaik says, “If myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea. Mythology constitutes of stories, symbols and rituals that makes a myth tangible . . . together they construct truths of a culture.” (*Myth=Mithya Decoding Hindu Mythology* xvi). While many customs, such as *Sati*, are no longer practiced, others survive in a modified form from the Vedic period. The majority of customs and ceremonies are carried out in the same manner as in ancient times; for example, marriage rites and religious rituals such as *Yagnas* remain unchanged. According to the *Handbook of Mythology*, “Mythology is a collection of tales, or legends, relating to the gods, heroes, demons, or other beings whose names have been preserved in popular belief” (Edward 9). Pattanaik claims myth as a special way to communicate and create a bond between the universe, society and human. It is communicated through narratives, symbols, and rituals. “Myth is all about communication; it is special kind of communication that establishes a relationship between the macrocosm (universe), mesocosm (society) and microcosm (humans)” (*Indian Mythology* 14).

In literature, myth serves a variety of purposes for various commentators. Myth criticism sought to illuminate the connection between myth and literature. Each critic has interpreted myth in a unique way. Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1941) is well known for his *Archetypal* criticism, the term Archetypal is derived from Greek meaning “. . . ‘arche’ stand for beginning and ‘typos’ for image or impression. So, these are the primordial or primary impressions carried by humans in the unconscious selves. In simple words Archetypes are universal symbols” (Malik and Batra 72) Carl

Jung asserts that some symbols, rituals, and myths are manifestations of our collective psyche that have recurred throughout history and throughout nations.

Northrop Frye (1912–91) in his work *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) compares literary genres with seasons “. . . comedy is linked to spring season, Romance to summer, Tragedy to autumn, and Satire to winter. Thus, Frye identifies myth with literature, asserting that an archetype is basically an element of literary experience.”

(Malik and Batra 75) Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) enumerates five qualities of myth in his work *Myth and Reality* (1963). He says myth

. . . (1) constitutes the History of the acts of the supernatural; (2) that this History is considered to be absolutely *true* (because it is concerned with realities) and *sacred* (because it is the work of the supernatural; (3) that myth is always related to a “creation,” it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established; this is why myths constitute the paradigms for all significant human acts; (4) that by knowing the myth one knows the “origin” of things and hence can control and manipulate them at will; this is not an “external,” “abstract” knowledge but a knowledge that one “experiences” ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the ritual for which it is the justification; (5) that is one way or another one “lives” the myth, in the sense one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted. (18-19)

According to Roland Barthes (1915-1980) “myth is a Language” (*Mythologies* 10) that interacts with the masses. He has attacked contemporary mass culture using Saussure's notion of signs and demonstrates that every action contains an underlying myth that is transmitted through their actions even when they do not explicitly state it.

The Structural Study of Myths by structural anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss is widely regarded as the first handbook to studying mythology. He discusses how to approach a myth in his work and also claims that the framework of myths remains the same regardless of their substance.

Myth has its root in cultural practices of different community people.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, culture is defined as “the customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. It is the characteristic feature of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time.”

According to James Clifford, “Culture was constructed as an ensemble of characteristic behaviors, ceremonies, and gestures susceptible to recording and explanation by a trained onlooker” (*The Predicament of Culture* 31).

Raymond Williams in his essay “The Analysis of Culture” (1961) establishes three elements for describing culture. The first category, ‘Ideal’ in this sense “Culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal value” according to this notion culture preserves universal human ideals. The second category is ‘Documentary’ in this sense “Culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded” according to this definition Culture is similar to documentation; it should convey intellectual ideas and human experiences that may be evaluated and tied to a certain civilization. The third one is ‘Social’, “Culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior.” (Storey, *Culture Theory and Popular Culture* 48) According to this definition culture is the manifestation of a certain civilization; it provides meaning for art, education, institutions, and human behaviors.

Language, customs, clothes, attitude, culinary habits, and religion all contribute to the formation of a group's culture. Culture manifests itself through the art forms of the civilization. Individuals convey parts of their culture through the arts and literature. Religion and culture are inextricably linked in that, religion is born out of culture, and thus religious worship is established. Additionally, culture becomes a factor in determining an individual's way of thinking and living.

Culture provides an individual with an identity outside of his society. Individuals inherit culture. Perhaps cultures are occasionally established or modified by a group in order to be unique and distinct from the rest. This is generally conveyed from generation to generation by means of artistic forms like dancing, painting, sculpture, and literature. Our forefathers' and mothers' lives and the environment in which they lived are reflected through literature and religious activities that articulate their ideologies and belief systems. Thus, culture is a collective memory of the ancestors. Culture may be defined as a cyclical process that adapts to the changing circumstances. As Dr. Binod Bihari Satpathy in his work "Indian Culture and Heritage" (2015) correctly states, "It is culture that brings us closer to truth, through philosophy and religion; it brings beauty in our lives through the Arts and makes us aesthetic beings; and it is culture that makes us ethical beings by bringing us closer to other human beings and teaching us the values of love, tolerance and peace" (6).

The caste system is a defining feature of Indian society. Around 400 BCE from the historical evidence it is clear that ". . . the *Rig Vedic* period, the *Varnashrama* (*Varna* system) was signifying an embryonic class division and labour division . . . at the time of origin, *Varna* division represented the embryonic class division of the latter part of the early – Vedic society. . ." (Sinha 11) Thus caste

system was split into four broad divisions based on a person's occupation: According to the *Handbook of Mythology*

Caste were established by Aryans. I. The Brahmins, or priests, who had the right of interpreting the sacred book, and possessed a monopoly of knowledge. II. The Kshatriyas, or soldiers. III. The Vaisyas, or traders and farmers. IV. The Sudras, or laborers, who consisted of the conquered people, and were slaves. (Edward 220)

G.S. Ghurye's book *Caste and Race in India* (1932) provides an overview of the caste system that existed in India during the British Raj. It was not until then that people in India gained some measure of liberty from the severe caste system. Numerous Legislative Acts have been passed to benefit the depressed class in areas such as education, marriage, occupation, and the use of routes, tanks, and so on. The casteless society began to form, and the so-called untouchables began to leave their circle and integrate with the rest of the city inhabitants. The oppressed classes obtained the right to equal education, to marry regardless of caste or faith, to choose their own vocation, and so forth. These rights came forth as a result of British control in India and also as a result of certain prominent Indian academics. Individuals had the freedom to alter their faith and caste. Numerous limitations based on caste were abolished or altered during British control in India. Jyothirao Phule began his fight against India's caste system in 1873. He made his claims against caste through his writings and was first denied permission. Montague and Chelmsford later endorsed his desire for an end to *Brahmin* dominance and longed for the liberty of all Hindus to work and participate in all public activities and institutions (150-151).

Caste mobility was permitted for high caste members but not for lower caste members. In India, the caste system laid the groundwork for other hierarchical

systems inside each caste. Numerous limitations were imposed on the basis of the caste system. Inter-caste marriages, education, career, dietary habits, and even clothes were all prohibited. Individuals who fell into the fifth category of the *Varna Dharma* were classified as untouchables and forced to relocate to the outside of the city in which they lived. The majority of fifth-category individuals were forest inhabitants, tribes, and mountain dwellers.

The caste system was first established on the basis of occupation, but over time, the one at the top started to dominate the rest, thereby limiting social mobility. The occupation taken up by a few members of a family eventually became their family occupation, and they were prohibited from engaging in or taking up any other occupation. A son was compelled to take up his father's profession regardless of what the son actually wanted to do.

Generally a caste or a group of allied castes considered some of the callings as its hereditary occupation, to abandon which in pursuit of another, though it might be more lucrative, was though not to be right . . . it was not only the moral restraint and the social check of one's caste-fellows that acted as a restraint on the choice of one's occupation, but also the restriction put by the other castes, which did not allow members other than those of their own castes to follow their callings. (Ghurye 8-9)

In India, the eight methods of marriage prescribed by *Smrtis* they are “. . . *Brahma, Daiva, Arsa, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Raksasa and Paischa*” (Pandey 158). The norm for choosing a life partner was established in order to preserve a specific group's identity in Indian society. The higher caste never formed relationships with other caste members and established a system of norms and

regulations governing partner selection. For marriage, these rules were founded on two principles: endogamous marriage and exogamous marriage. Endogamous marriage occurs when two members of the same caste marry. Exogamy is the act of marrying someone who is not a member of one's own group. The other two types of marriage are *Anuloma* or hypergamy, in which an upper caste man marries a lower caste woman, and *Pratiloma* or hypogamy, in which an upper caste woman marries a lower caste man. (Satpathy 53)

Myths serve as a lens through which a society's culture is viewed. Myths are believed to have originated in prehistoric times, and it is through myth that cultural practices have spread to the present day. According to Bronislaw Manilowski,

Myth as it exists in a savage community, that is, in its living primitive form, is not merely a story told but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies." (*Myth in Primitive Psychology* 177)

According to Mircea Eliade, ". . . myth reveals that the world, man, and life have a supernatural origin and history and that this history is significant, precious, and exemplary" (*Myth and Reality*, 19). Thus, it is through myth the life of primitive people are known to the world and it is important to know our myth.

Indian mythologies and mythological characters are connected to everyday persons and their lives. Culture is transmitted from generation to generation through myths. While retelling the same narrative over and over again, the storytellers incorporate values and messages to enhance the culture and also to preserve the Indian culture. Individuals are given culture in such a way that they automatically

embrace it as their own. “The Indian story teller celebrates a cyclic construct of life - with many beginnings, many endings, and many lives in between. Thus, stories reflect the culture they emerge from, while reinforcing the culture at the same time”

(Pattanaik, *Culture* 5-6)

Traditionally, Hindu texts are classified into two categories: *Shruthi*, or “what is heard”, and *Smriti*, or “what is remembered”. The *Shruthi* scriptures are passed down orally from generation to generation. These manuscripts date all the way back to 1500 BCE and include India's four Vedas: the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, and the *Atharvana Veda*. Additionally, the Upanishads were regarded as *Shruthi* texts. The *Smriti* text evolved from the *Shruthi* text, providing an explanation for the concepts and derivatives found in the *Shruthi* text. *Smriti* texts are recorded and transmitted by a variety of writers. *Smriti* texts include the two famous Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, often known as “*Itihasa*” (meaning “as it occurred”). The *Puranas*, *Dharmashastra*, *Arthashastra*, and *Sutras*, *Bhasyas*, and *Nibandhas* are further *Smriti* works. These writings delve into a variety of issues, including culture, art, politics, society, legends and tales, and ethics.

Even after extensive investigation by historians and archaeologists, it is impossible to pinpoint the origins of the *Mahabharata* and the events contained inside. Recent research indicates that the *Mahabharata* was penned in the eighth and ninth centuries BCE and achieved its ultimate form in the fourth century BCE, during the early Gupta dynasty. When the origin of *Mahabharata* is traced back to Hindu time conceptions, it is thought to have occurred at the end of the *Dwapara Yuga* and the beginning of the *Kali Yuga*. *The Mahabharata*’s events took place in *Bharatavarsha*, which is named after the land’s ruler, King Bharata. According to the epic, ‘Bharatavarsha’ refers to the Indian Subcontinent, which includes modern-day

Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. (*The Illustrated Mahabharata*, 22-23)

Mahabharata is considered to have been penned by Krishna Dwaipayana Veda Vyasa, who committed the epic's writing to Lord Ganesha. When Vyasa composed it, it was originally called *Jaya*. The epic's original edition comprised 24,000 poems. Vysampayana was the first to repeat the epic in Janemejaya's court, when it was composed of 50,000 lines and was referred to as *Bharata*. Sauti later recounted it to a gathering of sages in the forest. Numerous narrators included additional adventures, ethical principles, and anecdotes into the story. It was renamed *Mahabharata* around 400 A.D., with 'maha' denoting magnificence. At this stage, the epic was 100,000 verses long, split into eighteen *Parvas*, eight times the length of the Greek epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* combined. The *Mahabharata* is the world's longest known epic

Vyasa accorded equal weight to the four facets of human existence, namely social behavior, economic activities, pleasant pursuits, and spiritual activities, in order to create a complete epic. The epic *Mahabharata* is centered on the account of the Pandavas and Kauravas' feud.

The Sanskrit *Mahabharata* is one of the most important texts to emerge from the Indian Cultural Tradition. At almost 75,000 verses it is the longest poem in the world, and throughout Indian history it has been hugely influential in shaping gender and social norms. In the context of ancient India, it is the definitive cultural narrative in the construction of masculine, feminine and alternative gender roles. (*Gender and Narrative in the Mahabharata* Brodbeck and Brian)

The epic *Mahabharata* is considered the greatest of all epics because of its complex characters and also because Vyasa addressed numerous topics in it, including medicine, disease, ethics, philosophy, laws and creation. These were the topics addressed by Vyasa, and as a result of these distinguishing characteristics, *Mahabharata* is considered the great epic enumerated by Gokak.

Vyasa, with his inner vision, unravels the mystery of animal creation, of the Veda which is wisdom itself, of yoga with all its metaphysical background, of wealth, Desire, and Duty which are three of the four values, and of the *sastras* or lores devised by the sages- the sciences of *Ayurveda*, *Dhanurveda* or the science of bow, *Sthapatyaveda* or the science of architecture and engineering, the science of music, and many other sciences, all of which are conducive to man's well-being and all-round progress . . . (Dandekar 8)

Gokak further states *Mahabharata* as an encyclopedia of ancient Indian religion and culture, "*The Mahabharata* is said to be greater than all other epics precisely because it is not just an epic but an epic which has, commingled with it, an encyclopedia of ancient Indian religion and culture. This is a unique and distinctive blend" (Dandekar 9). He discusses the similes made by Ugrasravas in front of the Naimisaranya audience, in which the epic is likened to the sun, tree, and moon to convey its splendor, which has a profound effect on life;

Like the sun who dispels the darkness in the universe, the Bharata-sun is able to dispel ignorance which is mental darkness . . . even as a moon with his captivating moonlight makes blossom the blue lotus. The *Mahabharata* is like a lamp gloriously burning . . . The grand tree, called the *Mahabharata*, extends its shelter to all. On its branches grow and ripen tasty, holy, juicy, and

immortal flowers and fruits. Even the gods dare not discriminate against this tress. (Dandekar 10)

Oral retellings of folklore and myths are critical in shaping an individual's attitude in Indian civilization. Humanity is compelled to live in harmony with these folktales and mythology as the most critical life lessons are imparted through mythology. On the other hand, the epic tales are retold to suit the present generation's demands. Thus, though the plot in a retelling evolves in response to changes in lifestyles, the values stay constant. "Oral retellings are big part of Indian culture, just like the parables in other culture. Stories are seen as profound truth that shape a person understands of world. A story may seem non- religious, but is rooted in religious values" (Pattanaik and Bibek *Illustrated Mahabharata* 173). The *Mahabharata* has endured for a long period of time through retellings, and hence has endured the changing Indian customs, traditions, ethics and values, rituals, beliefs, and practices. Even after centuries, The *Mahabharata* remains the most realistic and beloved epic of all.

The most significant and famous literatures are translated from their native languages into diverse regional dialects to make them more accessible to all local readers. The primary objective of translation is therefore to interpret the many cultures, beliefs, rituals, and values represented in a book. The process of translating a work entails reworking the source text. The translator's cultural background has an effect on how he or she translates a work. Occasionally, translation is necessary for a specific cause, and certain instructions are established for the translators.

. . . translation as a means of cultural enrichment, the choice of the works to be translated, and the guidelines and goals of the translation activity are set by certain forces. Therefore, translation takes the forms of rewriting, since it is

performed under certain constraints and for certain purposes. The original text is chosen for a certain purpose and the guidelines of translation are defined to serve this purpose by the translator and/or by those who initiate translation activity. Therefore in order to fit the purpose, rewriting is bound to happen during the process of translation (Shuping 56)

Andre Lefevere in his book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, 1992 firmly asserts that translation is a process of rewriting and that it plays a significant role in imparting a certain set of beliefs. Additionally, translation not only involves reworking the original text, but also creates space for new ideas, viewpoints, and notions.

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of literature and a society. Rewriting can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another . . . (vii)

Likewise Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are initially retold in the same language by various authors and later it was translated in different regional languages. Retelling the epic *Mahabharata* started much earlier, when, Jamini, a student of Vyasa, retold the *Mahabharata* by adding some moral values from the original source. *Urubhanga* or *Urubhangam* was a drama composed in 100 CE by Bhasa. It elevates the figure Duryodhana and introduces Durjaya as his son. *Mahabharata* inspired several other legendary dramas, including Kalidasa's

Abhijnana Shakuntalam, which centers on Shakuntala and King Dushyant penned approximately around fourth century CE. The *Mahabharata* was originally written in Sanskrit, and Kisari Mohan Ganguli was the first to translate it into English. *Chitra* (1913) is a one-act play written by Rabindranath Tagore, which centers on Chitrangada, the princess of Manipur. Ramdhari Singh wrote the epic poem *Kurukshetra* in 1946, he also wrote the first literary work featuring Karna *Rashmirathi* (1954). *Mrityunjaya*, a literary retelling of the *Mahabharata*, was written by Shivaji Sawant in 1967. This novel centers on Karna's narrative which was originally published in Marathi, has now been translated into a number of other regional languages. M. T. Vasudeva Nair's *Randamozham* (1984) is a Malayalam retelling of the *Mahabharata*. It was translated into English as *Bhima: the Lone Warrior* (2013).

Retelling Indian epics and folktales has emerged as a new literary genre in Indian literature. The authors not only retell the narrative, but also reinvent it by including cultural values and underlining its relevance in contemporary India. Thus, retelling old stories, particularly epics, serves not just to conserve culture but also to repeat the decision-making process. Stories, in fact, serve as a firm foundation for history; they are a primary producer of cultural time.

Indian mythologies serve as an excellent guide for Indians, elucidating socio-cultural and political ideals “versions of *Mahabharata* story recur throughout India in a wide variety of literary, performative, ritual, and political context” (Brodbeck and Brain 1). By dispersing the epic and emphasizing a single character, the whole epic might be viewed as something different from the original. On the other hand, reading the same narrative through the eyes of another character reveals a different interpretation of the story.

A Story is basically a plot but narration is the process by which a story is told. The same story sounds different when the storyteller is different. And every storyteller changes his narration depending on the audience. All this makes storytelling rather complex, which is why our views of the world and our truths are also complex. (Pattanaik, *Culture* 6)

According to Kavita Kane (b. 1966), the rationale for rewriting or recreating an epic is that it would not exist if it had not been written several times. In her opinion, it portrays South Asia's sociopolitical and geographical realities. She feels that the locations and individuals depicted in the epic were accurate, as were their ideals.

Indian writers have rewritten the *Mahabharata* from various points of view. The objective of demystifying *Mahabharata* was to humanize and credible the epic. Indian mythology has long been the traditional means through which a person is supposed to acquire perfection and understand the worth of life. The endeavour to demystify the Indian Epic has been a success due to the accessible and straightforward language employed by current Indian authors. The writers have not only repeated the story but also reinterpreted it through the eyes of many characters, providing new insights for old and young, orthodox and modern readers.

In the 20th century, the *Mahabharata* cast its spell on the modern mind. Scholars wrote essays to rationalize its moral ambiguity, while novelists, painters and filmmakers used incidents from the epic to comment on political and social issues. In many cases the wisdom of *Mahabharata* has been overshadowed by its entertainment value, its complexities oversimplified by well-meaning narrators, leading to ruptures in the traditional discourse (Pattanaik and Bibek, *Illustrated Mahabharata* 29)

According to K.Satchidananda, myths are utilized to remark on political concerns. In India, myths were used to build on national pride during the independence movement; presently, myths are utilized to remark on modern India and its Post-Colonial situation “Myths had been employed during the freedom struggle too, but chiefly to arouse national pride and invite people to join the anti-colonial struggle. Now it is used to comment on the new, post-colonial situation with its doubts, despair and dilemmas . . .” (xii-xiii) He continues by stating that mythological people and circumstances are occasionally used as a point of reference and reinterpreted in light of the current situation.

The epic has been employed as a political metaphor by contemporary writers. For instance, *Kichaka Vadha* (1907) is a Marathi drama written by Krushnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar based on the events surrounding Kichaka’s assassination. Kichaka was the brother-in-law of King Virata of Matsya Kingdom, which was where the pandavas spent their final year of exile disguised as slaves. The Maharashtra Natak Mandali presented this play in 1910 as an allegorical attack on British authority in India. Kechaka is a metaphor for the British Raj, whereas Draupadi is a metaphor for India. Yudhishtira is portrayed as a leader, but it is Bhima’s radical ideals, which include violence against oppression, that capture the attention of the revolutionaries and national leaders in attendance. It was prohibited by authorities at the time (Pattanaik and Bibek, *Illustrated Mahabharata* 204). Additionally, the epic has been repeated several ways to meet the needs of the historical period in which it was written. “Stories thus are and have always been a potent tool for political and cultural propaganda.” (Pattanaik, *Culture* 4)

These revolutionary endeavours cleared the door for experimentation with other epic views and points of view, in order to suit or represent the writer’s

contemporary social or political situation. These opinions are undoubtedly impacted by the writer's upbringing and exposure. For example, the majority of people in the South Indian state of Kerala worship the Kauravas, and there are temples dedicated to Duryodhana and Shakuni. Their writings have always supported the losing party, attempting to instill in modern readers a sense of righteousness on their behalf and to justify the Kauravas' otherwise heinous conduct. Thus, there are numerous condensed versions, abridgements, and retellings of the *Mahabharata* available in English, written by a number of authors including Ramesh Menon, William Buck, R.K. Narayan, C.Rajagopalachari, K.M Munshi, Krishna Dharma, Romesh C Dutt, Bhardwaj Sharma, John D Smith, and Sharon Maas.

1.2 Review of Related Literature:

Review of related literature aids the researcher to understand the areas concentrated by various other researchers. It facilitates with the knowledge about the different aspects examined by the scholars in the same field. Numerous experts have researched on the retellings of *Mahabharata*. Many theories, including Feminist theory, Postcolonial theory, and postmodern theory were used to examine various elements and characteristics of retellings. Researchers have also conducted a comparative analysis of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* retellings.

Rakhi K R's Ph.D.doctoral thesis, *Gender, Textual Politics, and Alternative Discourse: A Critical Study of the Select Retellings of Indian Epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Cilappatikaram*, (2015) delves deeply into the social plight of women in these recounted versions of these Indian epics. She concentrates on female characters such as Draupadi, Sita, and Kannaki, as well as lesser characters like Urmila, Hidimbi, and Mandothari, in order to illustrate the societal injustices inflicted

on them in the form of isolation, abandonment, and discrimination on the basis of caste, class, religion, and gender. The thesis also emphasizes the detrimental influence of these variables, which persists in the Indian social structure as a result of the patriarchal system that has existed since ancient times. She also discusses the epic heroines' mental problems and evaluates their positive as well as negative characteristics through the lens of seven female archetypes. She assesses the narrative tactics used in retold versions of Indian epics in order to discuss the fresh views and literary effects addressed by various postcolonial writers, as well as their effective approach to addressing the principles of equality, liberty, and individuality.

The issue of women identity and self assertion is dealt by Suchi Samita Mishra in her Ph.D. Dissertation titled *Women's Identity and Self Assertion: A Study of Two Contemporary Retellings of Mahabharata* (2015). She compares the characters of Draupadi from Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Uruvi from Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife the Outcast's Queen*. She ends by stating that both personas are in opposition to one another. Draupadi is represented as an obedient and passive lady waiting to exact retribution, whereas Uruvi is portrayed as a rebellious woman who struggled to marry her true love, Karna, despite the fact that Karna is of a lower caste, in contrast to Draupadi, who rejected Karna for being born into a lower caste. The researcher emphasizes the author's endeavour to provide a feminist viewpoint on the epoch-making Indian epic. She opines that these writers do it by emphasizing female characters and expressing their viewpoints through these characters. The writers share their views on the Indian tradition that reigned throughout the Vedic period. Kavita Kane's portrayal of a woman's strong attitude is effective, while Chitra Banerjee's Draupadi communicates her pain and her assertive personality in order to avenge the Kauravas.

Beena G's work, *Amidst War and Peace: An Exploration of Female Voices in Revisionist Versions of the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata'*, delves into feminist retellings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. She focuses on the important characters of the epic retellings, Uruvi, Urmila, Sita, Draupadi, Satyawati, and Ganga, by comparing and contrasting their maternal families, education, and marriage, and illustrating how they oppose the patriarchal framework in order to create their own identity. She asserts that they reorganize it in order to accomplish their objective, which creates a separate area defining Indo-Centric Feminism.

Sundariselvi J's article *Myth and Reality in Gita Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night* (2018) discusses the protagonist Devi's role in the novel and how she used myths to build her existence. According to her, "The novel brings the idea how despite the generation, background and the education that an Indian woman attains, her fate is to fall back into the century old customs at least to a small extent." (3) Additionally, the author sheds light on three generations of women, each with a unique educational background and social conditions; Mayamma's anguish at her inability to conceive for many years, Sita's mental anguish, and Devi's anguish over her husband's dominant worldview. Finally, she believes that patriarchy has taken on a new shape in the way myths are recounted in order to match the prevailing ideology, but still provides an alternative.

Another researcher Vidhya Vijayan in 2018 has interpreted Kavita Kane's Karna's wife and Sita's sister from a feminist perspective. She explores feminist issues through the characters Uruvi and Urmila in his work "Unveiling the Doubly Marginalized: a Feminist Reading of Kavita Kane's Karna's Wife and Sita's Sister". Uruvi and Urmila are used as examples in this essay to demonstrate their strong mindset in dealing with their difficulties. On the one hand, Uruvi makes the

courageous decision to marry a man of low caste; on the other hand, Urmila stays behind when her husband departs for the wilderness to watch after the kingdom and family. The researcher has underlined Kavita Kane's commitment to feminism and her desire to represent unrecognized individuals in a fresh light, providing a new perspective on the characters and a different perspective on the same occurrence.

The unsung characters found in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been explored by Madhulika Tiwari's in her research on the retellings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, titled *A Voice of Their Own A Study in Selected Contemporary Rewriting of the "Ramayana" and "Mahabharata"* (2018). She emphasizes the fact that the retellings serve as an answer for the subjugated and marginalized characters due to gender and caste. Although these people were given little prominence in the great narratives, retellings have given them a voice and subverted the concept of control in the name of gender and caste by shifting the perspective or providing a prominent part to lesser characters. She has examined the purpose for rewriting the epics and concluded that it is a technique for current authors to show their ideology about the events and overlooked individuals in the two Grand tales.

Richa Mishra's doctoral thesis *Retelling of Indian Myths in Contemporary Indian English Narratives: Arun Kolatkar, Girish Karnad, and Shashi Tharoor - A Critical Study* (2019), gains a new form of writing by combining pre-colonial myth and colonial history, resulting in post-colonial retellings of myths. The characters are analyzed by placing them in a post-colonial setting and experimenting with them in accordance with contemporary society. The commonalities she has discovered are that both these authors and the epics are "obsessed with inconclusiveness of the present day problems of vengeance, hatred, greed and find no way out of it" (196) and that the author attempts to depict "the absurdity of contemporary man through the

mythical retelling” (197). This demonstrates that the authors attempt to represent ancient personalities while still taking into account current world events. She concludes that the authors attempt to retell the epic in their own unique style, and their presence is felt throughout the text. Each author is influenced by their personal experiences and diverse observations about society and politics, which led them to articulate the mythical tale according to their understanding, stating that the retellings are an attempt to portray a traditional modernity through the presence of contemporary issues in traditional tales, as well as a revival of epic, which this modern society must be familiar with.

Reinterpretation of Myth and History to Reconstruct the Past Reality: Shashi Tharoor’s The Great Indian Novel, (2017) an article written by Shahaji Mastud, provides a brief review of the novel and discusses Tharoor’s comparison between mythological figures and Indian political actors. Shahaji asserts that historical events are to blame for the on-and-off troubles plaguing our country now. Thus, reinterpretations of myths and reconstructions of history assist contemporary readers in developing a new worldview regarding Indian leaders and politics. He asserts that in order to create social peace, one must dive deep, review the past, and reinterpret.

Dr. Thammaiah justified Bheema’s conduct and provided him with a voice through his article *Revelation of Bhima’s Sensibility and Sensitivity in M.T. Vasudevan Nair’s Randamoozham*, (2019). He also provides information about other characters and occurrences through Bheema’s voice. Additionally, it informs the reader about how the author has departed from the original epic’s advantages and downsides by demystifying it. The author is free to praise the characters as he wishes and to express his views on the topics raised in the original epic. The researcher evaluated the author’s narrative using instances from the novel to demonstrate Bhima’s sensitivity

and to demonstrate that he is more than a hero despite being born second. He thinks that if Bhima had been born first, a great deal of change may have occurred in *Mahabharata*, and he also challenges his brothers and mother.

S. Jyothi Lakshmi, in her research article titled *A study on the Mahabharata character, Karna in Dalit context in the light of Karna's wife* by Kavita Kane, (2018) addresses Karna's Dalit consciousness and humiliation, which has cleared the road for him to pursue his desire, as well as his noble traits, Karna rejects being a *Kshatriya* after discovering he is one. He demands Kunti, after his death she should inform the world that he is the eldest Pandava. The researcher has proposed inter-caste marriage as a means of dismantling the caste system in this essay, using Karan as an example. The researcher has discussed the low caste people lives and the humiliations they face throughout their lives.

Devdutt Pattanaik claims in "The Power of Myth Explained" (2015) that "Myth is subjective truth: your truth and my truth, not the truth. We communicate our truth through stories, symbols and rituals. We inherit them from our ancestors and pass them on to our children." Mythology is the study of these myths (symbols, rites, and tales). He asserts that Indian mythology explains the endless nature of events and the inevitability of change.

Pattanaik asserts in another article, "There is no escape from myth" (2015) that all societies have myths that are used to understand the human existence that predominated in that society. Certain aspects of the myth are universally identical, while others are distinct; this dissimilarity is what distinguishes a given region's tale from others. He draws/compares Hindu mythology to Buddhist mythology and Muslim mythology in order to highlight the parallels and differences.

Pattanaik refers to it as dynamic changes through time “Just as it informs history and geography, it is informed by history and geography.” This is why beliefs and customs evolve throughout time, with what was formerly stated about individuals being unequal now being expressed about all peoples being equal. Human existence is not rational; emotions such as love, hatred, fear, greed, and ambition cannot be explained. As a result, human beings are incapable of making meaning of existence through scientific or evidence-based discourses. For survival and sanity’s sake, they require a point of reference; they require myth, and myth requires mythology.

Pooja Rai has done her doctoral thesis on *Indian Cinema Production of Cultural Hegemony and Gender Subordination*, (2021) explores on the various aspects of Indian Cinema to show Indian Cinemas is the depiction of cultural hegemony and gender subordination. Cinemas being the great influence and create great impact over the mass; through cinemas they portray the Indian Culture and manipulation over the audience and youngsters of India about gender inequality. Using the variables gender, age and marital status she comparatively analyzed to find that “. . . the views of cultural hegemony and gender subordination in Indian cinema had no substantial impact on marital status and ages. The effect of gender on patriarchy and change in cinema were significant, indicating that men’s and women’s perspectives differ greatly in patriarchy and change in cinema.” (Rai 5)

John Thomas in his research work *Globalization of media and cultural hegemony: A critical analysis of the coverage of Iraq war in the Indian media*, (2015) is a survey on the depiction of news relating Iraq war in Indian newspaper. Thomas has found that the national English papers in India projected the content and information about US; he states this as the result of globalization and cultural hegemony of global media. The media depicted about the hegemonic interest rather

than the sufferings of Iraqis, in both regional and national newspapers. “Cultural hegemony of the Iraq war coverage appears to have considerably affected the public discourses on ‘war and terrorism’. Thus Indian media still function as a powerful tool of hegemony, particularly in the age of globalization.” (Thomas 129)

Shivaraju has researched on the eight plays of Vijay Tendulkar on the basis of Gramsci’s Hegemony theory titled *Hegemony in the Plays of Vijay Tendulkar a Gramscian Study* (2018). He has explored on the different types of exploitation using hegemony and power in Indian society in Vijay Tendulkar’s plays, and has also dealt with gender subordination, class and caste issues in Tendulkar’s plays on the basis of Marxist ideologies. Saji Varghese has dealt with the concepts of hegemony, intellectuals and praxis of Gramsci in his doctoral thesis *Political Philosophy of Antonio Gramsci*, (2003).

Rahul Baburao Kendre in his doctoral thesis *Cultural Hegemony: a Study of Select Novels of Ben Okri*, (2015) has examined the establishment of Cultural hegemony in Ben Okri’s novels. He has traced the archetypal journey from innocence to experience, darkness to light and interpolative trauma to millennial love in the novels. He has also examined the problem of Cultural Nationalism, struggle of poor people against the corrupt government officers, and also the activities of rich party against the poor party people as established in Ben Okri’s novel.

Marxist and Neo-Marxist Approach to the Study of Select Novels of Huxley, Orwell and Bradbury is a Doctoral thesis of Ramesh. K, (2021) where he has applied Marxist and Neo-Marxist theory to the novels of Huxley, Orwell and Bradbury explored about the repressive setup aided with the growth of technology. He has explored on the political scenario of twentieth century, suppression and intellectual

deterioration of people and also examined the society which lacks freedom of expression and independent thought as exhibited in the selected novels.

The ecological aspects of *Mahabharata* and retelling of *Mahabharata* has been dealt by many researchers. Anjali Priya (2023) in her article “Ecological Aspect in Indian Epic: An Ecocritical study of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s ‘the Palace of Illusions’” has elaborately dealt about the human relationship with nature and ecofeminism. She highlights Divakaruni’s concern towards nature. She states that man’s ego and greed lead to great destruction of mankind and also nature. “Divakaruni recognizes and represents the interconnectedness of culture and nature in her fiction. Her representation and identification of the female character with nature and mistreatment of the environment as analogous forms of male ascendancy undoubtedly takes a feminist stand.” (182)

1.3 Research Gap

Researchers have concentrated more on the feminist aspects and social issues like gender and caste from the retellings of *Mahabharata*. Articles are written to emphasize on the importance of Indian mythology. The Theory of Cultural Hegemony is employed on Indian Cinemas, Indian Media and Indian Plays. Marxist and Neo-Marxist Approach were given to British and American Novels. The above review of Literature examined about the various approaches to the retellings of Indian Epics and Neo-Marxism, but the collaboration of them is not yet examined which becomes the research gap of the present research undertaken by the researcher.

1.4 Significance of the study:

The importance of this work is no specific work was done on a Neo-Marxist study of the Select Retellings of *Mahabharata* is made, though many writers have critically analyzed the retellings of *Mahabharata* by applying feminist theories, written from different perspectives and also have made comparison study between the characters, comparison between the rewritings of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and so on either in the form of article or Ph.D thesis or book. The scholar has selected this topic as it is relevant in this present scenario to highlight on the cultural hegemony which still exists among the Indians in different forms. The work is significant as it can relate the issues depicted by the authors of the selected retellings of *Mahabharata* with our current society.

The study gains utmost importance as the author of the selected texts come from different back ground and deal with the cultural issue and address the unnoticed characters from the epic *Mahabharata*. The uniqueness of the study is that these retellings of *Mahabharata* are critically analyzed with Gramsci's theory. No research has done yet by applying Gramsci's theory to the retellings of *Mahabharata*.

Considering the insights from various authors and researchers, it is evident that the retellings of *Mahabharata* fascinate the researchers to apply literary theories and experiment it from different point of view. The present study is an attempt to explore on the retellings of *Mahabharata* by Devudtt Pattanaik (*Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*), Anand Neelakantan (*Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*), Kavita Kane (*Karna's Wife: the Outcast's Queen*) and Ashutosh Nadkar (*Shakuni: Master of the Game*) by applying a Neo-Marxian concepts 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony' and 'Role of Intellectuals' by Antonio Gramsci. The researcher has taken both male and

female characters from the chosen primary texts to discuss about the cultural domination prevailed during the ancient time and has also highlighted on the functional solution enumerated by Gramsci with the aid of the characters.

1.5 Thesis Statement:

The aim of the study is to unravel the culture based domination established in the select Retellings of Mahabharata in the light of Antonio Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony' and 'Role of Intellectuals'. To substantiate 'men and women are inter-related in the case of Cultural domination in India', 'becoming an Organic Intellectual of one's own community' and 'Inter-caste marriage' can be a solution for Caste based domination.

1.6 Main Objectives of the thesis:

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore the Neo-Marxist modes of analysing literature
- To understand the significance of the need for retellings of myths and the relevance of it.
- To analyse the select retellings of Mahabharata in the light of Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony' and 'Role of Intellectuals'
- To identify the Marxist social hierarchy established through the select retellings
- To discern how retellings of myths can contribute to the making or breaking of a social hierarchy

1.7 Primary Texts:

- *Jaya: an Illustrated Retelling of Mahabharata* by Devdutt Pattanaik (2010)
- *Karna's Wife : an Outcast Queen* by Kavita Kane (2013)
- *Ajaya : Roll of the Dice* by Anand Neelakantan (2015)
- *Shakuni: Master of the Game* by Ashutosh Nadkar (2019)

The study delves into the *Mahabharata* retellings using Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony' and 'Role of Intellectuals'. By critically studying the select texts and elaborating on the cultural components from the select retellings of *Mahabharata* and elucidates on the need for retelling. In accordance with Gramsci, the study also calls attention to the culture-based dominance at various levels and offers a practical remedy. The present research undertaken deviates from Gramsci's thought in one aspect by stating that in Indian context men and women are interlinked in cultural domination and agrees with the practical solution proposed by Gramsci; by highlighting Karna as an Organic Intellectual and also explored on the capitalist ideologies with the aid of the characters from the retellings of Mahabharata.

1.8 Methodology:

The selected primary texts are critically analyzed to get an insight into the need for retelling Mahabharata. Antonio Gramsci's 'Theory of Cultural Hegemony' and 'Role of Intellectuals' act as the theoretical base to explore on the culture-based domination in the selected primary texts. The documentations and citations in the thesis are in accordance with the eighth edition of **MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper**.

1.9 Limitations of the Study:

The study is confined to four Retellings of Mahabharata belonging to 21st century. Among many Neo-Marxist critics, the study is constrained to Antonio Gramsci. Similarly, the analysis uses only certain aspects of Gramsci's theory, with the view to avoiding the most likely multiple interpretations. The thesis also focuses on select characteristics of the retellings for ease of understanding and analysis.

1.10 Thesis Structure:

The thesis is divided into six chapters:

- Chapter 1- Introduction
- Chapter 2- Marxism, Neo-Marxism and Antonio Gramsci- an over view
- Chapter 3- Select Retellings of Mahabharata- a Critical Analysis
- Chapter 4- To Unite or Untie Cultural Hegemony
- Chapter 5- Capitalist Ideologies and Traditional and Organic Intellectuals
- Chapter 6- Conclusion

1.10.1 Chapter 1- Introduction:

This chapter includes an introduction to myth, mythology, epic tradition, *Mahabharata* and its various versions. This chapter gives an overview on the Indian caste system and the need for the retellings of epic. The introductory chapter also covers the review of related literature, research gap, and significance of the present study, main objectives, thesis statement, methodology and limitations of the study.

1.10.2 Chapter 2- Marxism, Neo-Marxism and Antonio Gramsci

This chapter traces the important Marxist and Neo-Marxist critics and their contribution to the Marxist realm. It also elaborates on the prominent Neo-Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci's early life and his works, and emphasizes on his aspects of hegemony, civil society, and intellectuals. This is the theoretical aid for the research undertaken.

1.10.3 Chapter 3- Select Retellings of *Mahabharata*- a Critical Analysis

This chapter critically analyses the selected primary texts and traces the need for a retelling of the *Mahabharata*. It also examines the different characteristics of epic rewriting that are found in the modern retellings of the *Mahabharata* and also examines the various perspectives possible. This chapter also highlights the ideologies of various authors regarding the epic characters and their attempt to reformulate mythical elements by laying out logical reasons.

1.10.4 Chapter 4 - To Unite or Untie - Cultural Hegemony

This chapter delves into the cultural features of the selected primary texts to uncover the dominance exercised in the name of culture. Types of marriages depicted in the novels, as well as the relationship between women and politics are analysed. It also emphasises how powerful kingdoms ruled over weaker kingdoms by controlling and governing them with their might. The second section of this chapter looks at the role of caste in education and how lower caste Ekalavya and Karna are denied education. The chapter substantiates the point that the ruling caste governed the mass using culture as a tool.

1.10.5 Chapter 5- Capitalist Ideologies and Traditional and Organic Intellectuals

This chapter explores the Capitalist ideologies against the lower caste, studying Balarama and Kripacharya as 'Traditional Intellectuals'. Bhishma is regarded as a *Kshatriya* Organic Intellectual, Naga commander Takshaka is regarded as a *Naga* Organic Intellectual, and Karna is regarded as a *Shudra* Organic Intellectual.

1.10.6 Chapter 6- Conclusion

This chapter summarises the views of the study. It explains how the various perspectives in the retellings of *Mahabharata* have paved for analyses with different theories. The cultural aspects established in the retellings of the Mahabharata exhibit the domination and discrimination of women by the ruling caste *Kshatriyas* at various instances in the light of Gramsci's theory of Cultural Hegemony. Through the examination of the cultural aspects it brings to a conclusion that men and women are interrelated in cultural domination in the Indian context. Dominance of caste in education is proved in the case of Karna and Ekalavya. This chapter also summarises the capitalist ideologies that are used to depict the ruling caste domination over the mass. Gramsci's idea of revolution and intellectual is also substantiated with the depiction of Takshaka as a failed organic intellectual for his rebellious ideas and Karna as successful organic intellectuals.