

Chapter 4

To Unite or To Untie - Cultural Hegemony

4.1 Introduction

The human world is ruled by several myths. In certain ways, a myth becomes a guide for living. It varies according to location, culture, historical period, and individual. Each individual has his or her own collection of myths that govern his or her thinking and behaviour. However, cultural myths and secular myths are universal; they vary according to location. A myth is created when one person/ community want to accomplish their selfish desire. Numerous myths are formulated in order to maintain control over the populace. It is evident that the upper caste *Brahmin* individuals ruled the whole population through their laws and regulations. “The *Brahmanas*, who were the custodians of literature, utilized the epics, as they became popular, for propagation of their culture and religion. So, many religious and ceremonial elements which did not originally belong to it, entered the huge body of the Mahabharata and it became a reference book for the Hindu religion.” (Pandey 9)

Conflict between humans began when human kind started living in groups and their needs grew more than what is essential for survival.

The Powerful rules the Powerless, either through force or manipulation. Domination has always occurred in India under the guise of caste. Originally, there are four major castes depending on the occupation. All other castes are considered subordinate to these four groups. Within this division, the *Kshatriya* people are the most powerful. They ran the country based on their beliefs. The *Brahmins* are the highest rank in the group, yet they have no ruling authority. *Brahmins* served as counselors to the king. When viewed from Gramscian perspective, the *Brahmins* are

acting as Organic Intellectuals assisting the monarch in propagating their views to the rural inhabitants. Additionally, they became the first to raise concerns about anything that happened in the country. They are free to provide ideas and observations to the King.

This chapter inquires into the various forms of culture-based dominance over men and women. The importance of caste and its influence in defining a person's life is also discussed. Women are subjugated by cultural traditions such as marriage and *Niyoga*. Madhavi, Shakuntala, Satyawati, Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, Gandhari's maid, Uruvi, are the female characters who are the dominated by men who are powerful in some aspect. King Yayati, King Dushyanta, King Shantanu, Bhishma, Pandavas, and King Dhirtarashtra are the characters who are dominant in nature. This chapter also presents Karna and Ekalavya as ones dominated by the *Brahmins* Guru Drona and Guru Kripacharya in the name of caste. The aim of this chapter is to unravel the practices handled by each character to dominate over the other and how the religious customs, traditions and rules are employed for the benefit of the ruling caste *Kshatriyas*' and upper caste *Brahmins*'.

Caste-based humiliation and dominance has always happened with the help of the *Shastras*. People follow *Dharma Shastra* and they believe it to be a rule book as it is passed down from their forefathers. This is referred to as '*Dharma*'. Whoever lives contrary to the *Shastra* is considered as committing '*Adharma*' and is bound to hell; this is the idea that is prevalent in Ancient India. Sir H. Risely describes caste as follows:

“A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific

occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community.” (qtd. in. Ambedkar 4)

According to Gramsci, the ruling class propagates ‘common sense’ through religion. For the people, common sense becomes truth. He is referring to the Catholic Church in Italy when he said this. When seen in the context of India, a great majority of Indians are Hindus, and Hinduism has become the religious foundation. The ruling class employs the Hindu Vedic literature and regulations to exert control over the mass.

In fact the belief is religious origin, even if man who shares it is indifferent to religion. Since all religions have taught and do teach that the world, nature, the universe are created by god before the creation of man, and therefore man found the world already made, catalogued and defined once and for all, this belief has become an iron fact of “common sense” and survive with same solidity even if religious feeling is dead or asleep. (Gramsci 441)

There are several similar belief systems based on the Hindu religion in India, all of which is referred to as Indian Culture. This mosaic culture is characteristically dominated by caste, though practices and norms vary according to each caste. This chapter studies the caste domination as it is portrayed in the retellings of *Mahabharata* chosen for this study. The ancient Indian cultural traditions may be tracked in the retellings of *Mahabharata*, which provide insight into the underlying dominance through the lens of culture.

4.2 Marriage as tool:

Devdutt Pattanaik, an acclaimed Indian script writer, wrote *Jaya: an illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata*. Pattanaik has a strong interest in Indian mythology, and thus he has written on the Indian epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*; he has also collaborated on a retelling of Greek mythology. The central concept is to deconstruct mythology and educate the modern readers about the depths of Indian mythology.

In *Jaya*, Pattanaik discusses the Vedic principles that govern the relationship between man and woman. Relationships are established in accordance with this categorization, which helps to understand how women marry and form relationships with men; this also depicts the patriarchal system that is prevailing then. Only one of these classifications appears to be favourable to women; all the others appear to be inappropriate or unsuitable. A woman is given away, kidnapped, raped, and made available for charity. The way women are treated is critical when studying cultural domination. Nevertheless, the rationale for enacting such restrictions has never been addressed. Individuals blindly follow it. These beliefs have proved to be an excellent tool for the upper caste to seize control over the others. With women as a weakness, they have conquered several countries, and the *Brahmins* have attempted to rise beyond poverty. However, the lower caste has always suffered as a result of these inflexible arrangements.

Vedic Literature classifies eight different ways in which man and woman can come together. They are as follows:

1. If a woman is given away as Charity to help a needy man, as Gandhari is, it is the way of *Prajapati*, Father of all Creatures.

2. If a bride is accepted more for her dowry than for herself, it is the way of *Brahma*, the creator who is entrapped by his own creation.
3. If a daughter is given as a fee for service rendered to the father, it is the way of the *Deva*, the sky-gods.
4. If a daughter is given for ritual purposes along with the cow and a bull, it is the way of the *Rishi*.
5. If a woman chooses her husband freely, as Shakuntala and Kunti do, it is the way of *Gandharva*, the celestial musicians.
6. If a woman is purchased, as Madri is, it is the way of *Asura*, the subterranean hoarders of wealth.
7. If a woman is abducted, as Ambika and Ambalika are, it is the way of the *Rakshasa*, the forest-dwelling barbarians.
8. If a woman is raped, it is the way of *Pisachas* or vampires (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 44-45).

Domination can be observed in two forms in the selected primary texts:

Domination over women of upper caste and domination over women of lower caste.

Though women are subjected to dominance, the resulting pain is unique in each situation. The latter sustained more losses than the former. The control of lower caste women is so severe that they are relegated to the role of temporary pleasure; their sons received little recognition. Additionally, few are required to sacrifice their life.

The retellings of *Mahabharata* chosen for this study clearly demonstrate the cultural dominance over women. The patriarchy of the epic age is understood through these retellings. The twentieth-century authors of these retellings have uncovered details concerning the culture and activities of the epic age. Just like the ancient

Mahabharata took on a new form, ancient cultural traditions have taken on a new form in the modern day with certain modifications. The cultural practices of the old civilizations have been preserved in a modified form. In many places of India, majority of the traditional customs continue to be practised under particular conditions. Today, the concept of a second marriage is prevalent in many homes, and without exception, the guilt rests squarely on the shoulders of women. This philosophy has remained constant throughout history. Similarly, polyandry, opposition to inter-caste marriages, and forceful marriages continue to occur in and around India. This type of philosophy began much before the epic period and continues to exist now.

This chapter discusses women's cultural dominance and how, by utilizing culture as a tool, the ruling caste has exploited the other group of people. It focuses on the injustices committed against both upper and lower caste citizens in the name of marriage. With power, the ruling caste people threaten the neighbouring countries indirectly, in the hope that they would be compelled to do whatever the ruling caste wishes. This chapter also emphasizes on the importance of caste in the old educational system.

Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* is an illustrated rendition of the original epic *Mahabharata*. Unlike other modern authors, Pattanaik does not place a premium on caste or gender concerns, but makes observations at the conclusion of each chapter. Indeed, he has provided explanations for every character and occurrence in the original *Mahabharata*. He has also drawn attention to the parallel archetypes found in Greek mythology. Among the other modern retellings, only *Jaya* includes an ancestral remark. This allows the reader to examine male domination, hierarchy, and women's

treatment in ancient times. Men regarded women as though they are objects. Women are targeted in the epic to teach about the ethical values.

Women are denied the right to refuse or to protest against injustices committed against them. This is because women have been trained to think that they exist to benefit their family and kingdom regardless of what they accomplish. They are born to fulfill their father's, husband's, or son's wishes without ever being asked for consent by any male. The primary reason women are portrayed in this manner is to dissuade them from revolting against their father, spouse, or son.

A King's liberty is shown in an ancestral record when King Yayati purposefully left his daughter Madhavi in the hands of a Sage Galava. "Not wanting to turn the sage away empty-handed, he offered the sage his daughter, Madhavi. 'Offer her to four men who want to be the father of a King and ask them for two hundred such horses in exchange,' said Yayati." (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 24).

Since Yayati is unable to grant Sage Galava's desire, he offers his daughter Madhavi simply because he could not send a Sage empty-handed. In this case, a woman is viewed as a thing or an exchange property due to their incapacity. Sage Galava traded Madhavi to the Earth's rulers in return for a horse; in this case, Madhavi is merely used as a commodity. ". . . 'Here are six hundred of the eight hundred horses that you wanted. You can beget a son on this maiden, Madhavi, daughter of Yayati, and that will be equal to the remaining two hundred horses'" (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 25).

Male dominance is well seen through these mythological characters, as the purpose of depicting such women is to teach virtues. Indeed, Madhavi is not portrayed as a rebellious woman; she is portrayed as a soft and forgiving kind. To demonstrate the benefits of forgiveness, men have utilized women as a tool. It is viewed as a

monumental event that taught readers and ancient people to forgive others regardless of their mistakes, whether large or small; forgiveness is one of those acts that cannot be given by everyone. Through Madhavi, it is evident that women must learn to forgive and forget regardless of their state of being.

Madhavi faces oppression twice: first for being born to a mother from a different caste, and then for being a woman. She is subjugated and not consulted before to being offered to the Sage Galava. A narrative is constructed to justify the actions: the idea that Madhavi is an *Apsara* endowed with the ability to reclaim her virginity upon childbirth. By exchanging gifts, a woman is exploited by three kings, by sage Vishwamitra, and also by her own father. This specific character exemplifies cultural domination more than others due to the excuse provided for this heinous conduct. She is purposefully sold to several kings in order to obtain an animal, which explains that a woman is dragged down/equalized to an animal. They controlled women for their own profit, utilizing culture as a weapon.

This ideology of asking a woman to sacrifice herself for the goodness of the kingdom can also be seen in the latter half, where it has developed into a recurring trait or imbibed ideology within the brains of women. These beliefs are present inside a woman's mind from the moment they are born. The ruling class justifies each and every step they do to dominate a woman by inserting a value or rationale for their actions in the instance of Madhavi; they attempted to depict her as the pinnacle of forgiveness despite her father's mistreatment of her.

4.2.1 *Pratiloma* and *Anuloma*:

Pratiloma refers to the marriage of an upper caste woman to a lower caste man, whereas *Anuloma* refers to the marriage of an upper caste man to a lower caste

woman. *Pratiloma* is regarded an improper marriage in Vedic times, but *Anuloma* is considered a more fitting marriage. The culture carefully scrutinizes and rejects such ‘improper’ marriages for several reasons. This idea continues to spread and has become a great issue of controversy in today’s India, where inter-caste marriages are still not permitted. Thus, the upper castes continue to rule the lower castes. The *Mahabharata*’s characters and incidents are used to illustrate *Pratiloma* and *Anuloma* weddings and how society reacted to them.

Rishi Kanva nurtures Shakuntala, an abandoned girl. During Kanva’s trip, Dushyanta, a descendant of Pururava, visits Kanva’s hermitage and falls in love with Shakuntala, marrying her in front of a tree and spending a few days with her. Years later, when Shakuntala visits Dushyanta, he refuses to recognise her as his wife and Bharata as his son. “ ‘Are there any witnesses of our alleged marriage?’ he asks caustically.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 18) Fearful about the society’s disapproval to *Pratiloma* marriage, Dushyanta is adamant about not marrying Shakuntala. This demonstrates the King’s liberty toward his Kingdom’s subjects. A king is a powerful individual who possesses absolute authority over anybody who is a subject of his kingdom.

Devdutt Pattanaik makes it quite evident that Dushyanta rejects Shakuntala to safeguard his reputation. This demonstrates the king’s dominance and consciousness, since he is unwilling to forfeit his social rank but is willing to sacrifice his own wife and kid. According to Pattanaik, Vyasa’s epic is distinct from Kalidasa’s Sanskrit drama *Shakuntala*. Shakuntala finds her husband in Kalidasa’s play even before his son is born, whereas in Vyasa *Mahabharata*, Shakuntala seeks her spouse only after her son inquires for his father. This particular development in detail demonstrates how the social order has evolved alongside human evolution. According to Pattanaik, “Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* is very conscious of social stigma while *Mahabharata*’s

Shakuntala is indifferent to it. This perhaps is a reflection of change in social values over time.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 19).

Vyasa’s *Mahabharata* is composed in the fourth or fifth centuries BC, and Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* is composed around 500 BCE. Although the treatment of women has changed throughout millennia, whether in Vyasa or Kalidasa or in Pattanaik’s modern retelling of the *Mahabharata*, the one who suffers as a result of cultural dominance is a woman. To protect his reputation, the monarch Dushyanta declines to accept Shakuntala.

Shakuntala and Madhavi are used by the kings Dushyanta and Yayati respectively, because they did not like to face mockery. King Dushyanta’s worry is that he would be embarrassed in front of his country’s people by admitting that a forest dweller as his wife and king Yayati does not wish to send a Sage empty-handed. Yayati has fallen to the extent of donating his own daughter in order to demonstrate his philanthropic attitude. Dr. Madhavi Lata describes King Yayati as a flattering king who valued fame more than his own daughter in an essay. The courageous ladies of ancient India wore a sad life tale on their sleeve. Females are more susceptible to these types of therapies than males. The happiness of the superior male characters is prioritized over the sentiments of a woman.

King Yayati exemplifies supremacy at its pinnacle. His wife Devayani is the daughter of Shukracharya, an *Asura* priest. In an unspoken fashion, both sons and daughters of Devayani are denied authoritative power. King Yayati provides justifications for not making their son the future heir. Puru, Sarmistha’s son, is chosen as the next successor since Sarmistha is the daughter of King Vishaparva. The Vedic period’s inhabitants are acutely conscious of marital laws. *Pratiloma* is deemed

unacceptable, whereas *Anuloma* is allowed. This is frequently uttered when a woman of the *Kshatriya* caste desired to marry a *Shudra* man. However, the same community welcomes the marriage of a *Brahmin* woman to a *Kshatriya* man.

When it comes to a *Brahmin* and a *Kshatriya*, the norms are frequently disregarded; such is the influence of the upper caste people. They act as they pleased, but a *Shudra* is not permitted to do the same. The marriage of Devayani and King Yayati is one example of the society's character. Simultaneously, the ruling caste remains a governing caste. While they disregard the norms when it comes to marriage, they adhere to them when it comes to dominating authority. In the case of King Yayati, he picks Sarmistha's sons over Devayani's son since she is a born *Kshatriya*.

A king is powerful enough to marry any woman regardless of her rank. This is allowed in the ancient time, but the opposite procedure is not. For example, Shantanu, King of Hastinapur married Satyawati, a Fisher woman. Eventually, she became the queen of Hastinapur and then queen mother of Hastinapur; it is an *Anuloma* marriage. "Shantanu had fallen in love again . . . Satyawati, a fisherwoman, who ferried men across the Ganga. He longed to make her his wife." (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 32) However, in the ancient time, if a Queen or Princess sought to marry a low caste man, she would be condemned. This is due to the upper caste's dominance over the lower caste, as well as gender prejudice.

A male is strong, whereas a woman, despite her status as a princess, is not permitted to marry a man from a lower caste. Kavita Kane exemplified this philosophy in her work *Karna's wife* with the fictional character Uruvi. Uruvi, as the Princess, is longing to marry Karna but is prevented from doing so. Nonetheless,

being a powerful woman, she stood up to everyone and married Karna to demonstrate her casteless philosophy. In Kavita Kane's novel *Karna's wife* the character Uruvi discusses her feelings regarding masculine dominance and also cultural dominance that occurred throughout the ancient time. By including this hypothetical figure, the author demonstrates that control occurs in a different way not just in the ancient time, but also in the present age; just as the retelling of *Mahabharata* gains a new viewpoint; cultural domination gains a new perspective.

Women and low caste people are being dominated in a new fashion in the twenty-first century. To emphasize the current cultural dominance on women, Kane uses the fictitious figure Uruvi to give the epic *Mahabharata* a new depth. The author has expressed her views on modern cultural domination and also modern male domination through her character Uruvi. Uruvi is portrayed in this novel as a strong woman who fights against caste-based ideology. When she expresses her desire to marry Karna, a *Suta putra*, she is denied by her father because “. . . you can't marry a half-caste . . . you are a *Kshatriya* girl- you *cannot* marry a sutaputra! . . .” (Kane 18)

Uruvi's father states that if she marries Karna, she would commit crimes throughout her life, demonstrating that a girl can never marry a *Sutaputra* and live a happy life. He asserts that while *Anuloma*, the practice of marrying a man of the higher caste, is permissible, *Pratiloma*, the practice of marrying a man of a lower caste, is banned by *Shastras*. “. . . scriptures are against the marriage of a low-caste man with the girl of a higher caste.” (Pandey 178) Thus, women are barred from expressing their love for a bold man or their desire to marry the man they love by restrictions. A princess who marries a *Sutaputra* must endure humiliation, demonstrating unequivocally that lower caste people are mistreated by the upper caste

people. He is fearful of the shame his daughter would endure as a result of marrying Karna due to the social stratification prevailing in ancient times.

When Uruvi intends to marry Karna, the assembly gets enraged and refuses to recognize her decision. They claim that while a princess has complete freedom to choose her husband, she is required to marry within her social caste. If she rejects, she must either stay virgin or enter the pyre. *Pratiloma* is forbidden by *Shastras*, and all the kings expressed their displeasure in the assembly by invoking *Shashtra* laws. They thus made inter-caste marriage illegal.

The assembly broke into pandemonium. ‘A *Swayamvara* means choosing a bridegroom from the same social class - a *Kshatriya* bride cannot marry beneath her!’ the princes raged. ‘She has to choose one amongst us, a *Kshatriya*,’ Arjuna interjected pointedly. ‘If she does not care to marry a prince, she should either remain a virgin or jump into a prey.’ (Kane 34)

This demonstrates the *Kshatriya* category’s apprehension about members of other castes infiltrating their social caste. They attempt to oppress members of lower castes by denying them opportunities to thrive, but Uruvi, as a casteless individual, is certain in her resolve. Additionally, women dread the consequences of marrying lower caste men, because after marrying a lower caste man, a woman, whether a princess or a queen loses the prerogative of being a princess. She will be considered as a woman of a lower caste. Kane has illustrated, through the character Uruvi, how a woman will be treated after marrying a lower caste man. Uruvi is raised as a princess; she is emotionally disturbed when her relatives ignore her after her marriage to Karna.

At a family lunch that her mother hosted, Uruvi noticed many relatives did not attend and the few who are present, stared at her, giving her the cold shoulder.

Not able to bear the embarrassment on her mother's face, Uruvi rushed home quickly, promising herself she would never make her mother suffer such ignominy again. But she could not run away from the humiliation of such a life and each snub forced her to recall her mother's word of caution, warning her of how people would treat her after her marriage to Karna. She felt a strange stirring in her heart. It is bruised pride. (Kane 59)

All of Uruvi's relatives and countrymen began to disregard her, and they even refused to attend the feast organized in celebration of Uruvi's marriage. This demonstrates the people's attitude toward the lower caste man. Here, emotions, sentiments, and familial ties have no place. All that matters to them is their caste. After marrying a lower caste man, she becomes a lower caste woman, and her relatives and the other inhabitants of her kingdom shun her.

Uruvi decides to stop visiting her palace after witnessing her mother and father being disrespected by all of her relatives. This is why the lower caste people refrain from expressing their emotions. As with Uruvi, many lower caste individuals are excluded from mainstream society. They are required to remain apart from the general populace and have no privilege to visit the palace; they are unable to enjoy the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the palace occupants.

Uruvi must endure all forms of repression and rejection from the mainstream population. This is one of the primary reasons why no upper caste woman ever questions or expresses her desire to marry a lower caste man, fearing rejection by the society and family members. This demonstrates male dominance, as an upper caste man is permitted to marry a lower caste woman who has been recognized by the people and the *Shastra*, but the reverse is not permitted or acceptable.

If a lower caste woman marries an upper caste man, she is granted all the privileges of a queen, princess, or queen mother; yet, if a lower caste man marries an upper caste princess, he is not granted the status of king or prince. This clearly demonstrates the ruling caste cultural domination. The ruling caste takes on the role of deciding and enforcing rules. They repressed the lower caste people and denied them any possibility of emergence from their domain by employing *Shastras* as a weapon.

4.2.2 Abduction of Princesses:

Bhishma kidnaps the Kashi princesses Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika in order to marry them to his half-brother Vichitravirya. The whole neighbourhood is aware of Vichitravirya's illness, and he is not invited to any *Swayamvara*. Bhishma visits the *Swayamvara* at Kashi in order to address this issue. He snatches the three princesses in a matter of seconds and escapes in his chariot. No one is courageous enough to oppose Bhishma, whose valour and might are unmatched, as recognized by all the kings. As a result, he kidnaps the princesses on behalf of his half-brother. "Bhishma took the absence of an invitation as an affront to the dignity of his household. He rode into Kashi and abducted the three princesses. The assembled guests tried but failed to stop him. Bhishma then gave the three princesses to his younger brother." (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 36)

In the twentieth-century retellings of *Mahabharata*, the authors write in such a way that one begins to doubt Bhishma's actions. In Ashutosh Nadkars *Shakuni Master of the Game*, the author writes in such a way that modern readers are forced to consider the other side of Bhishma's actions. Domination is evident in the author's portrayal of situations. Bhishma is a member of a mighty country, and other nations do not dare to wage war against him owing to his strength. Bhishma attains his desire

by this strength. He is a family man who scrutinizes everything that occurs in Hastinapur.

The novel *Shakuni: Master of the Game* is told from the perspective of Shakuni, the prince of Gandhara. The author expresses the domination that existed in ancient times through this character and also speaks about the justice behind Shakuni's actions. Bhishma travels to the kingdom of Gandhara in order to solicit Gandhari's hand in marriage to his blind grandson Dhritarashtra. Bhishma arrives at Gandhara with a large army "Hastinapur was one of the strongest kingdoms in *Aryavarta*, . . . From the description the commander of our eastern troops had given it was clear that the army from Hastinapura was being led by the unparalleled Bhishma, son of Goddess Ganga."(Nadkar 12)

Fighting a battle against such a great country is unthinkable. The Gandharas are fearful about the reason for Bhishma's visit. They are determined to carry out the wishes of the mighty Hastinapur Kingdom. Rather than terror of the troops, it is fear of Bhishma that causes Gandhara king to stumble. "It was said that no warrior on earth was strong enough to defeat Bhishma. In fact, Bhishma had also overpowered his teacher, Lord Parashurama, in a fight." (Nadkar 13) The Gandharas lack both a powerful army and a powerful warrior capable of defeating Bhishma. It is the incapacity of a specific group of people to oppose the powerful. The only way forward is to submit and acquiesce to their demand.

'Firstly, Gandhara does not have an army that can face Bhishma's Soldiers; and secondly, if it were Bhishma's intention to conquer our kingdom then he would not have set up tents outside our borders and given us time to prepare

ourselves for war. He would have attacked us directly and reached our capital by now (Nadkar 14)

Bhishma uses his fruitful words to persuade the Gandhara King. He makes a false promise to their daughter that Gandhari would become the future queen of Hastinapur. Though it occurs later in their lives, neither Dhritarashtra nor Gandhari are made king and queen initially, after their marriage. Bhishma dupes King Subala by announcing that his daughter will be Hastinapur's queen. “. . . I have come here with the proposal of a matrimonial alliance between the next king of Hastinapura, Dhritarashtra, and your daughter, Gandhari.” (Nadkar 21) Shakuni sarcastically inquires of Bhishma about his arrival with the vast army, to which Bhishma does not respond. “. . . ‘Sir, is it customary in Hastinapur to meet people, even if for personal reason such a matrimonial alliance, accompanied by such a large entourage of armed soldiers?’ . . .” (Nadkar 21) Bhishma's tone is haughty and impolite. He carefully avoids responding to Shakuni's questions.

“The underlying political base of any kingdom in the old regime is its military capacity. This capacity is in turn based on structures of alliance and command, which are articulated by gifts, privileges, of varying kinds, and kinship. No little kingdom could survive if it did not have an efficient system of military mobilization.” (Dirks 33)

Through the figure Shakuni, the author inquires as to why Bhishma arrives at Gandhara with such force if he desires to make a marriage proposal. Bhishma is quite certain they would reject the proposition. If they refuse, it is possible that his plan is to conduct war and abduct princess Gandhari for his grandson “. . . ‘Hastinapur is so strong that we can abduct your sister right

away and turn Gandhara into a crematorium. However, we have come here to build relationships, not to break them.” (Nadkar 22) This demonstrates Bhishma’s skepticism and also the disadvantage he possesses. This section has received little attention in the other retellings of *Mahabharata* wherein, the writers have just made a remark about Gandhari’s marriage.

In her work *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* (1967), Irawati Karve asserts that Bhishma is solely responsible for the plight of the high born princesses. “. . . Bhishma is the active leader of the Kuru clan, the one who wielded authority. In his zeal to perpetrate his house, he has humiliated and disgraced these Royal women.” (14) Karve casts doubt on his actions, questioning whether he did it just to protect his family and country. According to Karve, Bhishma’s selflessness benefited no one. His callous behavior toward other kingdoms, particularly toward women, demonstrates his superior attitude. Bhishma frequently demonstrates his superiority and indirectly threatens the low arm powered kingdoms.

The epic era encompasses both caste and class. Caste is determined by *Chatur Varna*, while class can be determined by money and arm power. Acting in accordance with the Vedas is *Dharma*, and hence Bhishma’s actions are *Dharmic* (ethical). In a deeper sense, laymen begin to dispute whether these categories help only one particular group or are originally created to benefit only the ruling caste. There no uprising if the ruling caste individuals disobey or transgress the regulations formulated. The real question is whether they adhered to and lived by these guidelines.

4.2.3 Polyandry:

The Pandavas' marriage to Draupadi is also an example of cultural domination, in which they dominate a woman through their culture. According to the *Shastra* in *Jaya*, five men marrying a single woman has been referred to as *Dharma*. Draupadi marries all five (Pandavas) of them due to Kunti's fear that a woman's beauty would destroy the unity of her sons.

Kunti turned around and found beautiful Draupadi next to Arjuna. She also noticed that all her sons are attracted to her. Fearing that a woman would disrupt the unity of her sons, she said, 'What I have said must be done if you are truly my sons, provided *Dharma* allows it.' *Dharma* did allow it. Yudhishtira narrated the story of Vidula . . . (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 91).

Mostly by narrating a tale to Pandavas justify their actions. Again, using the word *Dharma*, all five of them married her. Draupadi is also duped by the argument that it is *Dharma* and the Pandavas cannot disobey their mother's words. Initially, King Drupada refuses to consent to his daughter's marriage to five men dressed as *Brahmans* (Pandavas). He complies only after learning the actual identities of them as Pandavas'. Drupada's past contact with them causes him to quiver and concur with their conclusion. This marriage is automatically elevated to a state affair. Drupada is afraid that if he objects, he would confront the army of Hastinapur. Hastinapur's power structure is pervasive over the bordering countries. In the novel *Jaya*, the Hastinapur empire is mighty, and they ruled over the neighboring kingdoms without resorting to force. There is no direct expression of control, yet domination occurs in an indirect manner. All of the weddings that occur in *Jaya* are thus politically motivated.

4.3 Niyoga:

Anand Neelakantan describes *Niyoga* as, “. . . a woman whose husband is either incapable of fathering children or has died childless, could appoint a man to be the father of her child- rather similar to the modern concept of sperm donation.” (Neelakantan 434) It is another social norm that is used to discriminate women by the ruling caste. Women are historically viewed as the weaker gender. Ruling class has always used women’s weakness to their advantage. To ensure the continuation of their family, the Kings compelled women to bear children with the man they designated.

Niyoga is performed in a broader sense for political objectives; in *Jaya*, Ambika and Ambalika are coerced into bearing children by Satyawati’s first son Veda Vyasa under the guise of *Niyoga*. Ambika and Ambalika are dominated by cultural norms; it is a practice that when a king dies without an heir, the queen can bear children from another man under the guise of *Niyoga*. This is practised during the ancient period, and no woman is brave enough to disagree; their approval is not required, nor is it requested. They must do as their superiors please ““By the law of *niyoga*, prescribed in the books of *Dharma*, any child they bear belongs to their deceased husband. I request you to do what my son could not do.”” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 38) In *Indian culture and heritage* Dr. Binod Bihari Satpathy discusses the status of women in the ancient period, stating that they are permitted to remarry and are viewed as the nation’s creators. “Women have contributed to the progress of humanity in every age. They are the agents of change. They have contributed significantly towards nation making. (60)

King Pandu married Madri because Kunti is suspected of being sterile. “Second wives were usually purchased when the first wife was suspected of being

infertile.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 43) Here, King Pandu is a frail man who has been cursed by a sage named Kidama, rendering him incapable of having a regular married life with any of his wives. However, society condemns women who are unable to produce children. As a result of the male’s incapacity, a woman is forced to cohabit with another woman. Kunti is forced to live her life with Madri for no reason. It is legalized once more for women to be dominated by using culture. It is common for a King to marry several women, and no one has the right to object.

In *Jaya*, the practice of *Niyoga* is emphasised when Kunti and Madri bore offspring from separate Gods. Pandu’s incompetence reintroduced the practise of *Niyoga*. They invoke Yama *Dharma*, Lord Vayu, and Indra Deva in order for Yudhistira, Bhima, and Arjuna to be born. Madri invites the Ashwini brothers to her home and gives birth to Nakula and Sahadeva. “. . . if their husbands were unable to give them children, they could go to men chosen by their husbands. Children borne by the wife belonged to the husband whether he fathered them or not.” (Pattanaik, *Jaya* 47) Karan Kumar in his article “The Evolution and Basic Concept of *Niyoga*” (2013) says that the primary purpose for practicing *niyoga* is to maintain the husband’s land and money within the family.

A widow that does not have any heir to inherit the land and the property that was once possessed by her husband, needs to be able to produce children for very simple reason that land or wealth that need to be contained within the family and not outside its bounds. (2)

Woman was forced to bear children from several men in the name of *Niyoga* in order to entirely own the fortune. The society accepted this child as the next heir without hesitation. *Niyoga* was thus practiced for the sole purpose of reproduction, not

for pleasure. Dr. Ravi Khangai in his article “‘Niyoga’, Levirate and Sexual Politics in Ancient Indian; Reflection on the Indian Epic *Mahabharata*” (2015) states:

According to the *Niyoga* (Levirate) described in ‘Manu Smriti’ the male who will impregnate the widow has to be ‘a brother-in-law or relative belonging to the same ancestry’. It does not mention that a *Brahmin* can be appointed for ‘*Niyoga*’. But the *Mahabharata* repeatedly gives evidence that the *Brahmins* can be appointed for ‘*Niyoga* . . . Pandu also tells his wife Kunti that we should call some *Brahmins* to produce offspring. (22)

Thus, in the Retellings of *Mahabharata*, a *Brahmin* is also selected to impregnate Satyawati’s daughters-in-law. By doing so, a *Brahmin* asserts first priority and dominance. Fortunately or regrettably, a half *Brahmin* claims the governing power through this method. Though the progeny of this union are regarded as *Kshatriyas*, they have *Brahmin* blood flowing through them. Through the epic, the *Brahmin* category achieves superiority. As the critic stated, the epic emphasizes the importance of a *Brahmin* being called for procreation. The rank of a *Brahmin* is increased through Kunti and Madri’s kid. Kunti and Madri beseech God to deliver their sons. Thus, a *Brahmin* is equivalent to god, and they desired that others consider them (*Brahmin*) as such.

Pattanaik says, “Are the ‘God’ who made Kunti and Madri pregnant actually Devas or simply priests performing a ritual role to compensate for the inadequacies of Pandu? . . .” (*Jaya* 51) Each and every female character in *Jaya* is forced to suffer in some manner. Gandhari originally becomes a sufferer because Bhishma threatens Gandhara King and plans to marry Gandhari to his blind step-son Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra, enraged by Gandhari’s prolonged pregnancy, has an affair with the maid and gives birth to a son, Yuyutsu. “During his wife’s long pregnancy,

Dhritarashtra has taken for his pleasure a maid. She bore him a son called Yuyutsu. Like Vidura, he is an extremely capable man but disqualified from ever sitting on the throne.” (*Jaya* 49) Because he is born for a maid, Yuyutsu is not granted any power or a rich existence at the palace.

Pattanaik remarks in his work *Jaya* that, “The laws say that only children of the lawfully wedded wife are the true sons, not the children of concubines.” (*Jaya* 40) as is the case with Vidura, Yuyutsu is not regarded a legitimate son. Here, Gandhari and the maid must endure under the king’s dominance. Gandhari must come to terms with the fact that her husband has an affair with another woman. More than Gandhari, the maid must suffer much since she cannot defy the King’s orders while her son, although being born for the king, must live in a lower caste among others. Due to a single individual’s enjoyment and contentment, the others are forced to make not just compromises, but also suffer. A king’s self-centered desire destroys the life of a woman and her son.

Sexual desire and violence across caste is the consecutive outside the regulatory order of caste and kinship. Thus the sexual economy of caste is complex: it prohibits all men from viewing all women as potential sexual partners, but also gives upper-caste men the right to enjoy Dalit and lower-caste women. Indeed, knowledge of this is a public secret, normalized as privilege by the upper castes and experienced as a shameful secret by its victims. (Rao 188)

It has been a recurring feature, as everyone from King Yayati to Abhimanyu has used others for their own ends. Marriages of Bhima with *Rakshasi* Hidimbi and Arjuna with Chitrangada and Ulupi are all due to their desire for a woman, and later in the war, all of their sons (Ghatotkacha and Irvan) die for Pandavas. This

exemplifies the rule of the aristocrat people that existed in ancient times. The powerful or those belonging to an upper caste ruled the low caste women and their sons born into the lower caste. They stooped to the point of sacrificing their lives for the victory of their upper-caste father. They manipulate the son into sacrificing his life or offering whatever his father requests; this culture of sacrificing for the father, or the ideology of sacrificing for the father, has become a recurrent trait in Indian households.

4.4 Kshatriya Women's Ideology over lower caste people:

Anand Neelakantan depicts upper caste woman oppressing lower caste woman in *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice*. Kunti and her sons, having discovered the truth about the house of Lac, intend to murder *Nishada* woman and her sons in order to deceive Shakuni and Duryodhana. They carry out their plan by inviting the *Nishada* woman and her sons to the palace, serving them a sumptuous meal, and inviting them to remain. Throughout the palace, a *Nishada* woman has reservations about the conduct of high caste individuals. Kunti, without feeling any remorse for their deaths, purposefully murders the *Nishada* woman and her sons.

Let the world think we are dead when they see the unrecognizable bodies of the *Nishada* women and her five children. Think only of your duty and do not worry about the consequences. They will die for a great cause, Arjuna. Be proud to be the torchbearer of *Dharma*. (Neelakantan 301)

Pandavas and Kunti assert that the act of *Dharma*, in which a lower caste person is asked to die for the benefit of an upper caste person, is termed *Dharma* and is performed throughout. Author Neelakantan has given voice to and highlighted this episode in order to demonstrate how the higher caste subjugated the lower caste. The

lives of the lower castes are worthless “Arjuna, these untouchables’ lead miserable lives. We are doing them a great good by allowing them to die for a worthy cause. They will thus be born as *Brahmins* in their next life.” (Neelakantan 300) the birth of a person is significant and this discourse of the Pandavas demonstrates that individuals cared more about their birth in the epic era. They believe that being born as a *Brahmin* is auspicious. Even in this case, the Pandavas desire that they be born as *Brahmins*, despite the fact that they are higher in caste and live for the benefit of the ruling *Kshatriyas*. They even manipulated Arjuna, who is the only one interrogated, into feeling pity for the *Nishada* woman and her dead children.

The *Kshatriyas* is well aware that the *Nishadas* live in misery, but they choose to ignore it in order to effect change in society. The majority of them believed they are destined to live that way and saw no value in bringing about any change that might benefit their lives. This exemplifies the independence enjoyed by the upper caste. The Pandavas are shown in such a way that they are following *Dharma*, even if it means murdering a lower caste person. They are purposefully blind to the fact that they are destroying the lives of low caste people. Additionally, the author emphasized how upper-caste individuals will justify their actions. They felt no remorse for playing a trust game with the impoverished *Nishada* mother and her children. One of the children is a very small child; this demonstrates the callous nature of the upper caste. ““The youngest is barely thirteen. It is cruel to trap these innocent people like animals, with food as bait,” Arjuna retorted.” (Neelakantan 301)

Later, when the troops remove the dead corpse from Varanavata palace, they mistook it for Kunti and her sons Pandavas. However, only Ekalavya is aware of this; it is his aunt and cousin who died in place of Kunti and the Pandavas. Nobody could recognize the true faces of the corpse. Countrymen believe it is Kunti and Pandavas,

despite Ekalavya's assertion that those corpses are his relatives. Rather than that, he is tied to the tree and severely beaten when he protests to obtain the corpse. This act instills rage in his mind, but he is unable to express it. Thus during the ancient period, the caste system was at its worst. Without education, without a sense of worth for their lives, they live in poverty and without shelter.

In *Karna's Wife: an Outcast's Queen*, the author Kane emphasizes the innate ideology of princess Draupadi, who rejects Karna on the grounds that a King's daughter cannot marry a lower caste man and asks Karna to not to participate in her *Swayamvara*. This demonstrates that princesses are educated about Hindu cultural laws and regulations. They grew up with the same mindset that a king's daughter must marry within her own social caste and cannot marry a lowborn man, even if he is a valiant man.

Draupadi's *Swayamvara* is created for the prince who is the world's greatest archer. Despite being the finest Archer, Karna is never given the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities. Even before he entered the contest, he is prohibited by none other than Draupadi herself, who states that he is a low born and has no right to compete. One significant point to make here is that Arjuna disguises him as a Brahman and thereby wins Draupadi's hands. This demonstrates that princesses of the *Kshatriya* category may marry a *Brahmin* or a *Kshatriya* man but not a *Shudra*. They are permitted to marry males of the upper caste but not those of the lower caste. Kane emphasizes the cultural dominance over women through Draupadi in her novel *Karna's Wife*.

4.5 Education:

According to Pattanaik, education is divided into two categories throughout the epic period. The first is the study of *Vedas*, which encompassed religious songs, philosophy, and ceremonial practice. The second is the study of *Upavedas*, which encompassed *Dhanur Veda* (battle), *Ayurveda* (health), *Gandharva Veda* (theatre), *Jyotish Shastra* (time), *Vastu Shastra* (planets), and *ArthaShastra* (polity) (Jaya, 61).

In ancient Hindu civilization in India, education was primarily based on the *Varna* system and the *Ashrama* system, which determined who could be permitted to learn. India being a land of diverse races, each individual has a unique skill that is recognized, and they are classified accordingly.

The Indian *Varna* system classified people into four groups: *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Shudras*; the *Shudras* are further classified into *Sac Shudras* and *Asac Shudras*. *Sac Shudras* are permitted to acquire specific talents and moral values, as well as to conduct certain types of sacrifices. They can engage in various occupations such as agriculture, and fishing, but are confined to learning and reciting Vedas. This knowledge is reserved for *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*. According to *Varna* system, the *Ashrama* plan is developed, which divides a person's life into four stages: *brahmacharya*, *garhasthya*, *vanaprastha*, and *sannyasa* (Pattanaik, Jaya 29). It is also known as *Gurukulam*.

During the ancient time, *Brahmins* became their instructors, and they frequently lived in hermitages in the middle of the forest. *Kshatriyas* must travel to a hermitage where *Brahmins* reside and master the art. They assess each student's capability and tailor their instruction appropriately. *Brahmins* are only permitted to instruct *Kshatriyas* and are not permitted to teach *Shudras*. They assert that they are

not educating them by referencing *Shastras*, which state that a *Shudra* is not permitted to learn Vedas. *Shudra*'s knowledge is never considered.

The authors of the modern retelling of *Mahabharata* did an excellent job of depicting the old *Gurukulam* system and caste-based educational system. Through the modern retelling, readers may gain an understanding of the ancient educational system and how caste played a major role in it. Pattanaik subtly portrays the agony of being suppressed in the name of caste and barred from learning skills even when the person is more deserving, but the author does mention the prevalent educational system and caste-based domination in passing in his retelling of *Mahabharata*.

The authors Pattanaik and Neelakantan in *Jaya* and *Ajaya* respectively, has emphasized about the partial way of teachings by Guru Dronacharya. He instructed his son Ashwathama and Arjuna secret lessons. He withheld some special lessons to be taught for Arjuna. Drona is a strict instructor who follows *Shastras* word by word when it comes to teaching. One thing he does not desire is for anybody other than Arjuna to achieve greatness in archery (a Prince). Apart from Arjuna, two more individuals who possessed exceptional archery abilities are Karna and Ekalavya. Guru Drona skillfully eliminates the possibility Ekalavya has by requesting that he (Ekalavya) chop off his thumb as a *Guru Dakshin*. Drona desired that only those of a higher status shine and do great things among the others. The guru took no risks; even before Ekalavya grew, he chopped down and forbade a forest dweller from emerging from his kingdom and ascending to greatness. Pattanaik did not emphasize Ekalavya's pain following Guru Dronacharya's rejection, but he did highlight Guru Dronacharya's partial teaching style and his stringent cultural standards. Neelakantan has expressed Ekalavya's agony in his novel *Ajaya*.

In contrast to Ekalavya is Karna, who is prepared to demonstrate his archery talent during the graduation ceremony arranged for Pandavas and Kauravas. Karna desires to prove his excellence in archery and also to prove Dronacharya incorrect that only *Kshatriyas* and *Brahmins* can do well in war craft. After being rejected by Dronacharya, Karna learns the technique from Parashurama by disguising to be a *Brahmin*. He returns to Dronacharya after studying to demonstrate that a *Shudra* is no less capable of mastering *Dhanur Veda* than a *Kshatriya* is. In *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*, Irawati Karve portrays Karna as an identity seeker.

According to the rules of those times, he could have attained Kshatriyahood in spite of his illegitimacy under certain conditions, but in his case this door is close to him. He is not fighting on behalf of the Suta class nor is he fighting for the idea that *Kshatriyahood* should be awarded to one who is a valiant warrior. This is not a class war; he is struggling on behalf of his own individual self. (142)

According to Karve, Karna desired to build his own identity by eliminating his identity as a *suta*, which he accomplished with his ability for archery. Except for Duryodhana, none of the others allow Karna to participate. Everyone in the crowd mocks Karna, claiming that a charioteer's son has no right to consider joining a warrior. In this instance, no consideration is given to a person's merit. The author attempted to convey the Pandavas' caste-based thinking. Bhima exclaims that he is the son of a charioteer and hence lacks the authority to face a *Kshatriya* in this event. Bhima and his brothers insult Karna in front of thousands of people in the sake of caste "“what! This man is the son of a charioteer. How dare he challenge *Kshatriyas* in an archery tournament?” shouted Bhima.”(Pattanaik 66)

Duryodhana's act of accepting Karna and elevating him to the throne of Anga is not viewed as a gesture of friendship; rather, Duryodhana believes that having a great archer like Karna by his side would strengthen his forces in the fight against the Pandavas. In this novel, Duryodhana is utilizing Karna to gain the Kingdom. Karna, who has been humiliated since infancy, is overjoyed when he is protected and granted control and acquisition for the first time in his life. Karna's condition demonstrates unequivocally that a lower caste man desires to live on an equal footing with the upper caste; he does not desire a luxurious lifestyle, but rather wishes for his merit to be recognized.

Neelakantan in his novel *Ajaya: Roll of the Dice* has given voice to the voiceless characters by giving minor characters that faced discrimination on the basis of caste. When they are rejected on the basis of caste, they revealed their underlying thoughts. The author has vividly highlighted the rigorous cultural standards and rules through the characters he has created. Dronacharya, according to *Ajaya*, may be viewed as a rigorous caste-based teacher as well as a teacher who exhibits favoritism among their students.

Neelakantan addresses each character by their caste name and also depicts the genuine treatment of a lower caste by a higher caste in this work. During the ancient time, untouchability was at its height. They claim that touching a member of a lower caste is equivalent to contaminating oneself, and they are also denied access to the palace, believing that their presence would pollute the space. When Dronacharya arrived in Hastinapur, a lower caste kid was standing by the gate. He warns against touching the *Nishada* youngster and inquires as to why this *Nishada* is so near to Hastinapur's Fort entrance. With this, he criticizes the blind King's authority and believes that the palace inhabitants do not take *Dharma* seriously.

The lower caste people have ingrained in their minds an attitude that they are lower caste and hence they are denied to learn Vedas or any other skill. Vidhura's talk demonstrates that a lower caste man accepts his way of life and has no objections or grievances. Athiratha accepts that because of his low status no one will teach his son *vedas*. As a result, he is instructing his kid in his own trade. Gramsci argued that these are the “. . . part of the ‘cultural hegemony’ exercised by ruling classes . . . for the poor throughout history have always been taught to accept their poverty.” (Worsley 56) According to ancient Indian tradition, *Shudras* are only permitted to take up the father's professions; they are not permitted to take up any other occupations. It has evolved into a mandatory regulation, which people accept and adhere to generation after generation. They take up a career that is commensurate with their birthright and educate their sons. Thus, a charioteer's son becomes a charioteer; a farmer's son becomes a farmer and so on.

Thus, the upper caste maintained productivity by classifying its members according to their professions. The ruling class individuals entrusted the *Shudras* with their possessions and tasks. They are intended to serve as workers for members of the *Kshatriya* caste. Initially, they are classified according to their talent; nevertheless, it evolved into a hereditary task that is passed down from generation to generation. While this benefitted a few *Shudras*, others who excelled in other areas are forced to leave their society and show their brilliance. They are compelled to follow in their father's footsteps, which infuriated the *Shudras* and turned them into rebels against the higher class.

This mindset is evident in Karna's situation. Athiratha visits Kripacharya and asks for his assistance in instructing his son Karna. Kripacharya demands ten thousand gold coins as a fee, which is significantly more than their earnings. “. . .

Even if he served the Hastinapura government until he is 60 years old, he would not earn 1000 gold coins. “We are poor, swami”” (Neelakantan 55).

This is another reason why a lower caste is marginalized in society. When they attempt to exit their border and discover they have been asked for a large sum of money. Erik Fraser in his work “The Dalits of India: education and development” (2010), traces the history of such caste-based treatment and economic challenges experienced by Dalits and asserts that they continue to exist now.

The lack of incentives to pursue education for the Dalits of Indian can be traced back to a long history of mistreatment and oppression. Still occurring today, caste harassment makes teaching environments unstable for caste children, it places caste homes on the outskirts of towns so that children have greater distances to walk to school, and it economically suppresses the Dalits so that they are unable to pay for their children’s education .(6)

Almost all *Shudras* are impoverished; they cannot afford an expensive education. As a result, a great majority of them dread crossing their limit and end up following in their father’s footsteps. This is one technique employed by *Brahmin* professors to prevent a *Shudra* from becoming an educated person. They intended to present *Kshatriyas* and *Brahmins* to the world as enlightened and informed. Upper castes are not even willing to allow a lower caste person an opportunity to study and gain information and become understandable on an equal footing with them, by demanding such a colossal sum that the instructor already knows they cannot afford and duping them in this manner. “The untouchables also had very little opportunity to enter educational institutions, both because they are unable to afford the expense and because these institutions are usually unwilling to accept untouchable students.”

(Gooptu 110)

After being denied by Kripacharya, Athiratha contacts Guru Dronacharya with the assistance of Vidhura to teach archery for Karna. Dronacharya immediately rejects him, claiming that he is a *Shudra* with no right to study the Vedas. “Drona turned to Vidhura defiantly. “Do not think you can come here and push me into taking a low-caste boy as my student . . . Do whatever you and lord Bhishma wish, but I will not teach a low-caste.” (Neelakantan 60) The Vedas are intended only for the princess and not for anybody else.

Guru Dronacharya insults him in the presence of a large number of others. Karna, unable to bear the humiliation of being born into a lower caste, weeps and contemplates suicide, yet he is miraculously saved by Kripacharya; so many talented individuals perish as a result of humiliation. Neelakantan attempts to illustrate the manner in which a *Shudra* is prohibited from learning Vedas, while simultaneously emphasizing the misery that drives them to avoid living in such an unequal environment. It is true that the majority of persons who are skilled in *Shudra* categories are denied opportunities.

Ekalavya anxiously expresses his wish to be Drona’s pupil, and he is terrified to be present at that location since he is fully aware of and accepting of his condition of being lower caste. “Ekalavya seemed to have lost all power of speech. “Swami, I...I... wish to be your student,” he somehow managed” (Neelakantan 112). A forest dweller has no permission to visit the vicinity of the palace and no right to study the scriptures, yet his desire to transcend his position and become a *Kshatriya* remains. Not because he can live a better life, but because his passion for archery compels him to request instruction from Drona. The novel depicts his acceptance of his poor birth. “Ekalavya just wanted to turn and run. He should not have come. This is no place for untouchables like him” (Neelakantan 113).

Nishada category people are fully aware of the regulations and ventured to move outside their circle and interact with the rest of the kingdom's inhabitants. They make no attempt to integrate into society, even if they seek a better life. They are subdued by the upper caste's treatment of them. This is true not just for Ekalavya, but for every *Nishada* who want to live a better life. This demonstrates that not all *Nishadas* are incapable of mastering the trades for which they are classified according to their caste and ability. The *Nishada*'s capability is not recognized; instead, they are humiliated, which left them devastated and instilled hate in their minds toward the higher caste.

Drona, rather than being a good teacher, acts in a circumspect manner: “. . . “I cannot be your teacher. The state employs me to teach Princes. I cannot take a *Nishada* as a student. Go back to the forest, live with your people, and do your *Dharma*. I have nothing to offer you” (Neelakantan 114). Drona is not appreciative of a *Nishada* who aspires to study archery; rather, he advises him to remain with his people and carry out his *Dharma*. This signifies that Ekalavya is not destined to master archery and become a warrior. Each caste is constrained to perform their assigned tasks, which constitutes their caste *Dharma* (*Kula Dharma*).

In Kavita Kane's, *Karna's Wife*, the author uses the character Karna to highlight the caste system; rather than focusing on the enslavement of lower caste people, the author demonstrates the accomplishments of lower caste people and the penalties of violating caste laws. To demonstrate a shift in her attitude toward Karna, she refers to him as Radheya meaning son of Radha. “Lineage matters over merit and Radheya cannot lay claim to it. His lineage is considered ignoble, so his merit has been consistently ignored.” (Kane 75)

Kane emphasizes the importance of caste, which plays a significant part in a person's life “. . . Both Karna and Ekalavya were ruthlessly swept aside to make way for Arjuna as the best archer in the country” (Kane 75). Merit is meaningless in the face of caste. The author addresses the reader through the character Uruvi, expressing her outrage at the rigid caste-based educational system. Drona is presented as a flawed guru who neglected to recognize a person's inherent worth. “How can he be the perfect Guru if he is so blatantly partial? (Kane 75)

Kane discusses a *Brahmin's Dharma* in her novel *Karna's Wife. A Brahmin's* job, according to *Chaturvarna*, is to teach and preach. If he refuses to teach those who are willing to learn in the name of caste, he is a failure. This is a strategy used by the upper caste to keep the lower caste as fools. They believe that if a *Shudra* is given the opportunity to study, a large number of them would seek it and there will be no one to work for them. “. . . What of his *Dharma* as a *Brahmin*? It is imparting education justly. But how fair has he been? He is no devotee of truth . . .” (Kane 76)

In his book *The Eternal Epic in Short Stories Mahabharata*, Vignesh Chandar asserts that Drona failed as a teacher due to his bias and refusal to educate Ekalavya due to his poor position.

One of Drona's greatest failings is said to be his preference towards his personal favourites. His favouritism sometimes borders on being unfair, as seen in the story of him rejecting a young *Nishada*, Ekalavya not once but twice, the first due to his belief in social classes. Ekalavya, who has aspired to be a student of the grandmaster, is rejected with the excuse of him not being of princely stature (Ekalavya being a forest tribe leader's son) (Chandar 41).

4.6 Summing up

Thus, caste, customs and traditions play a major role in the characters of the novel *Jaya, Ajaya, Shakuni Master of the Game and Karna's Wife*. Caste, custom and tradition all come under one category called Culture. Rather than domination it is Hegemony that has taken place in the retellings of *Mahabharata*. Though, Antonio Gramsci has not emphasized on women's involvement in Cultural Hegemony, in a larger sense, women's subjugation becomes a component of the discussion about Cultural Hegemony in India. Male dominance and female supremacy are inextricably linked; male supremacy is a critical component of dominant ideology analysis; without it, the main ruling caste domination over lower caste and on women cannot be fully comprehended. According to Veronica Vazquez Garcia's interpretation of *Women and State*,

The conception of dominant hegemony implies not class domination but also male supremacy. An analysis of dominant hegemony must explore the relationship between, one on the hand, women's Lack of access to resources and economic as well as political power and, on the other hand the social constructions of motherhood and "Women work" (14).

Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya* depicts the diverse civilizations that thrived and culture practiced by the ancient people. Only a few practices have persisted. Antonio Gramsci did not specifically address women's hardships, but he spoke out against the cultural hegemony he perceived in western countries. However, when it comes to India, cultural dominance is inextricably linked to women and men. This cultural hegemony manifested itself in a different ways. The most critical one is caste.

In India, it is not just caste that matters, but also gender, which is central to any debate of cultural dominance. Due to the fact that upper caste woman dominated lower caste woman, upper caste woman dominated lower caste man, upper caste man dominated lower caste man, and upper caste man dominated lower caste woman and, dominated upper caste woman as well. In this way, men and women in India are entangled in a web of cultural dominance. This is demonstrated through the retellings of *Mahabharata* selected for the study (*Jaya, Ajaya, Shakuni Master of the Game, Karna's Wife.*) When ancient epics are retold, they gain a new perspective and dimension, allowing readers to rethink cultural practices. The Retellings of *Mahabharata* aided in the discussion of male patriarchy, women's suffering, and manipulation of upper caste men/women over lower caste men/women for their own advantage. In all of this, culture is a critical instrument in taming.

In *Jaya*, the princess Madhavi, daughter of king Yayati, is the first and major figure discussed in order to examine cultural control. This woman persona is purposefully placed in the hands of several men in order to get horses. She is reduced to the status of an animal and exchanged for horses by several kings. She has borne all of this because her father King Yayati cannot send a Sage empty-handed, as this would ruin his reputation among the vassal nations. The myth behind this narrative is that Madhavi is endowed with the ability to reclaim her virginity following childbirth due to her status as a celestial person.

A myth is created to obscure the injustice meted out to her. Madhavi is portrayed as the embodiment of forgiveness, since she forgives her father following the abuse she underwent. In the epic period, it is the King's responsibility to look after the sages' needs. This is a regulation known as *Dharma*. King Yayati does not wish to

commit *Adharma*, so he gives away his own daughter (Madhavi) to sage Galava who gives her to numerous Kings to gain wealth (horse).

To examine weddings in *Mahabharata*, it is necessary to understand that cultural traditions governed the life and fate of a woman. Shakuntala and Dushyanta's marriage in *Jaya* can be viewed as a model for Gandharva marriages since Shakuntala exercised her free choice in choosing her life spouse. Princess abductions are also featured in *Jaya*. Bhishma kidnaps Kashi's princesses. According to Vedic law, kidnapping is a *Rakshasa* (evil) deed. Bhishma abducts again in part by demonstrating his arm strength, as Nadkar depicts in *Shakuni: Master of the Game*. These two examples demonstrate that a ruling caste people are powerful when they abduct princesses and force them to marry someone they dislike.

Here, women are inextricably linked to a nation's politics. The King of Kashi and the King of Gandhara are fearful of Bhishma's strength and reluctantly give away their daughter. The former is performed with force, whereas the latter is accomplished through indirect partial force. They are ruled by the power without reason or discussion. The ruling caste, or powerful ruling elite, has complete freedom to pursue their goals. It is the injustice that has been committed against the four princesses Ambika, Ambalika, Amba, and Gandhari. Ambika and Ambalika are compelled to marry Vichitravirya, a ill individual. Amba's life has been devastated by kidnapping, since King Salva has rejected her proposal of marriage, because of Bhishma's act. In Gandhari's instance, she is compelled to marry a blind man. She is unable to bear the injustice meted out to her and closes her eyes with a cloth, deciding to remain blind following her marriage. Thus, all four princesses are not only compelled but also destroyed their life by the ruling caste men's power.

The regime is so severe that they used armies to frighten subordinate kingdoms. They are conditioned to live in terror in order to avoid challenging the powerful *Kshatriyas* and denying the powerful *Kshatriya* people's command. It is the powerless people's inability to deny their proposals because the consequences of doing so are far more disastrous than the lives of women. At the same time, to safeguard the kingdom, Gandhari is given away and Ambika and Ambalika are abducted by Bhishma, as no one is willing to offer their daughters for the weak Vichitravirya. Bhishma, a powerful ruling class man, compared the two kingdoms, if one has greater power than the other; they indirectly dominated the vassal kingdom with their arm might.

Second marriage is another cultural practice that dates all the way back to ancient times. Women are oppressed by blaming them for not reproducing. The marriage of Pandu with Madri is because Kunti was unable to conceive. This idea has been passed down through generations and may still be observed now. A woman is viewed as a creature created solely for the sake of reproduction, and this becomes the sole purpose of her life. If they fail to accomplish that aim, they are subjected to not just humiliation but also to the consequences of enabling her spouse to marry a second time. Again, marrying several princesses from other countries enables the power centre to organically earn the support of that country, so expanding and becoming more powerful.

Draupadi's marriage with Pandavas, in *Jaya* is viewed as another instance of injustice against a woman and her intervention in political matters. They demonstrate in the narrative that disregarding a mother's words is *adharmā*. The deeper meaning could be Kunti's fear that a woman will destroy the brothers' unity. As a result, she marries off all the Pandavas. From a political standpoint, the Pandavas need King

Panchala; in order to maintain a favorable relationship with the Panchala Kingdom, they all married Draupadi. Marriages are political events throughout the epic period. Thus, one country dominated the other through the use of marriage as a tool and women as a medium.

Niyoga is yet another cultural activity that originated during the epic period and has persisted until the current era. In ancient times, if a man is unable to bear children or dies before giving birth to heir, another man is called to assist a queen in becoming pregnant. This method is known as *Niyoga* in ancient times; in the present day, many women struggle from infertility and have children with the use of medicine and technology. This type of activity dates all the way back to ancient times. It is conducted in order to maintain the family bloodline, and the procedure is dubbed nation creation. In the twenty-first century, women are subjected to shame if they are unable to conceive a child. Giving birth is viewed as a significant accomplishment and the sole objective of a woman.

As represented in *Jaya*, a woman giving birth to children has a relationship to the nation's politics. Ambika and Ambalika give birth to Dhirtarashtra and Pandu in the name of *Niyoga* with the assistance of Veda Vyasa. As they are unable to keep the throne unoccupied and in order to create an heir, women are compelled to establish a connection with the male regardless of their preferences or dislikes. Here, culture has a suffocating effect on women during the nation-building process. Kunti gives birth to the Pandavas while Pandu is under the sage Kidama's curse. Kunti, using the power she obtained from Sage Durvasa, summons Lords and with their assistance bears three children, while Madri bears two. Kunti and Pandu wish to have children before Gandhari and Dhirtarashtra in order to obtain the Kingdom. They must be the first to have children in order to acquire the Kingdom.

Thus, a woman is once again connected to a country's politics, and *Niyoga* is practiced. If the myth is eliminated, the true reason could be that Pandu is born infertile and in order to conceal this, they created a myth that he is cursed by a sage. Kidama and Kunti summoned Gods to give birth to her sons, maybe it is not the Gods who really helped in giving birth but the forest dwelling sages who helped her beget children similar to the case of Ambika and Ambalika.

In the novel *Jaya and Ajaya*, nation-building takes precedence over erasing a woman's emotions and feelings. A woman is culturally dominated and led to believe that reproduction is their ultimate destiny. If they fail, they are compelled to act in accordance with the Kings decisions. These kind of rigorous cultural traditions have been practiced and have evolved into a new form through time. It continues to rule over every woman in India. Both culture and women may be viewed in this light as a means by which the ruling elite maintains and expands its Kingdom. The cultural behaviors stated above are instances of upper caste men controlling upper caste women.

Hegemony is actually a cultural process by which one class dominates the other. Thus the dominators keep on practicing power and the ruled obey them. Simply it means to put something into the ears of the commoners and make them believe it. According to Gramsci, hegemony is one kind of social authority. Dominating people without using power or threatening the use of it. It is acquired through social institutions. People accept that somehow by being forced or willingly. (Al-Amin and Masum Sikdar 2)

The worst case scenario is when men of an upper caste dominate those of a lower caste. A classic example is Dhirtarashtra's relationship with a maid, and her son

Yuyutsu. He is born for a king but was not acknowledged. Due to a King's request, the maid and her son are sentenced to a life of humiliation. The ruling elite are quite within their rights to do what they pleased. Even women of the *Kshatriya* caste dominated the lower caste women. Neelakantan depicts this in his novel *Ajaya*; Kunti manipulates the low-caste woman and conspiracy to murder them in order to deceive the Kauravas. Kunti and her son deject the lower caste woman by treating them well and providing them with delicious foods. This image portrays a woman from a lower caste living in squalor without a home or food. By offering her food and a place to stay, Kunti and her sons manipulate her, gain her trust, and murder them. This is a characteristic of the ruling caste; they attempt to manipulate the lower caste by highlighting the benefits they are offering, but in reality, they manipulate for their own gain.

Gramsci asserts that the proletariats are manipulated by presenting them with positive images but failing to comprehend the underlying reality, which is the state of proletariats. Indeed, the ruling elite are adept at manipulating the lower classes and forcing them to work for them. This event demonstrates how the ruling caste people exploit the lower caste and coerce them into doing things that benefit the ruling class. They concealed their errors in ancient times using myth. The *Dharma* found in this incident is that when the *Nishada* dies for the benefit of the *Kshatriyas*, they are reborn as a *Brahmin*, demonstrating that a *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* are destined to live a better life than a *Shudra* and *Nishada*.

Throughout the epic period, caste plays a significant role in education. Drona rejected Ekalavya because he is a *Nishada*. Drona takes away the opportunity of a forest dweller; this is the intelligence of the upper caste people. They not only

dominated, but also ensured that only people belonging to their category and community are intelligent.

Once again, through the use of rules, a *Nishada* is denied the opportunity to learn *Dhanur veda* and is intelligently advised not to practice at all during his lifetime. A ruling class's trait is to ruin a *Nishada*'s opportunities and knowledge. They are circumspect in ensuring the flourishing of their category and *Kshatriya* category people inside the kingdoms. Ekalavya is depicted here as a youngster who accepts his humble birth and is willing to obey a *Brahmin*. It demonstrates the genuine character of a lower caste and how tough it is to disobey the upper caste. An upper caste member determines a lower caste person's fate. The upper caste people have complete authority over the lower caste people's lives; Ekalavya is one of the clearest examples of this attribute of a ruling class people.

Apart from these characters, two more who do not fall prey to the upper caste are Karna and Uruvi. Karna is described as someone who refuses to accept their fate as outlined in the *Dharma Shastra* and works tirelessly to achieve the life he wish. Karna is presented in all three works as a *Shudra* who acts like a *Kshatriya*. Uruvi is the next character; Kane's portrayal of Uruvi exemplifies how to reject a caste-based thinking in marriage and to eradicate caste in marriage by encouraging inter-caste marriage. Despite her humiliation following her marriage to Karna, she lives a joyful life with the love of her life.

Uruvi, a *Kshatriya* by birth, desires to marry a *Shudra* Karna. Uruvi does not place a higher premium on a person's caste; rather, she places a premium on the qualities he possesses. The society did not approve of their marriage and several objections are raised during her *Swayamvara*, but she overcomes all obstacles and

oppositions and marries him. This is an excellent illustration of how caste defines and determines a person's destiny. Again, men and women are linked in terms of cultural dominance. By forbidding Uruvi from marrying Karna, the male patriarchal culture exerts dominance over her. She is overwhelmed by the assertion that *Pratiloma* weddings are forbidden, but unlike the other princesses described previously, she does not reconsider her decision. She is adamant in her decision and fights back against all those who opposed him, eventually marrying him.

By marrying Karna, Uruvi annihilated an age-old belief and ushered forth a new era. The author (Kane), writing in the twenty-first century, wishes to emphasize the current situation in which inter-caste marriages are still frowned upon and honor murders continue to occur in many regions of India. Kane hoped to inspire and instill bravery in readers to behave intelligently as Uruvi through this novel *Karna's Wife*, protest hard to marry the one she likes. This might be a strategy to eradicate the age-old caste system and teach individuals to respect others equally regardless of their social affiliation. Marriages between castes can be a means to overcome the caste system.

The following chapter 5 titled *Capitalist Ideologies and Traditional and Organic Intellectuals* discusses the portrayal of the governing caste's (*Kshatriyas*) ideology over the state and also elaborately explores on the rifts that arise due to caste system and subjugation in the name of caste. This chapter also depicts Balarama and Kripacharya as the Traditional intellectuals and Bhishma, Takshaka and Karna as Organic Intellectuals of their community.